

Makin' Trax If Not Now, When?



The blog of Eileen Prather

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Makin' Trax: Eileen's Blog

Eileen launched her blog in July 2017 as a way to document her travels and to give her friends a way to keep up with her adventure. The URL for her blog is makintrax.com/, but of course this will not last forever.

Following are all the posts from her blog. Her final post was in November 2019, as she soon began dealing with health issues and so moved to her model-park home in Apache Junction, Arizona.

Makin' Trax

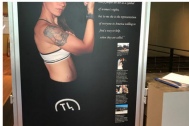
If Not Now, When?

HOME

WHO ARE WE?

WHERE HAVE WE CAMPED?

LATEST POSTS




I Stumbled Upon a Cool Tribute to Veterans in Coos Bay, Oregon

NOV 10 '19

This past summer, while visiting the Oregon coast, I stopped in to the Coos History Museum, in Coos Bay, OR. It was just a small place, holding a collection of displays highlighting the cultural history of the area and the south central Oregon coast. As is my custom, I blew through the museum pretty

quickly until I found a pretty[...]

READ MORE




Goodbye Summer! Part 2

SEP 3 '19

Our travels in the last update post left off in mid-Utah in late May. Our first stop in June was in northern Utah at Bear Lake State Park. That's the place where we last year saw the Eagle family. See the Eagles HERE! They were still here this year, but with just one fledgling, a couple weeks or so older than we encountered[...]

WHERE ARE WE?



We are in Arizona for the winter!!!

MOST RECENT POSTS

- I Stumbled Upon a Cool Tribute to Veterans in Coos Bay, Oregon
- Goodbye Summer! Part 2
- Happy Summer's End!
- Arizona, You are One Big and Beautiful But.
- A Peaceful Return...
- Spending Time with my Inheritance.
- Idaho - It's More than Potatoes.
- I Love Getting Questions....
- The First Sunset of our Second Year!
- The National Parks are indeed "America's Best"

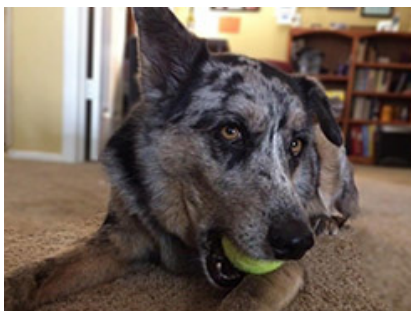
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Who Are We and What's This All About?

I am an early 60'ish woman, born and raised in upstate New York, and have lived in Phoenix Arizona for the majority of my adult life. I was married for 23 amazing years to Charly, the light of my life and the most wonderful, sensitive man I have ever known.

Ten years ago [in 2007], Charly died suddenly. I spent the first few years after his death picking through the fog of learning to live on my own, and the next years as a student of how to live it more fully. Interestingly, in the process, I think I became fairly independent. Perhaps fiercely so.

My two rescue dogs, Trax and Sally, are the joy in my life.

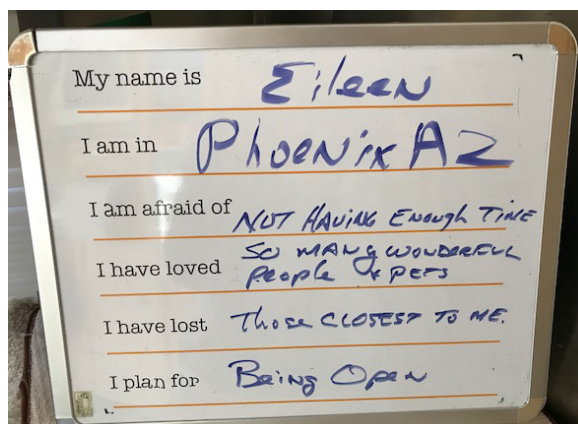


Trax, a soul-mate of a canine.



Sally, the life of any party!

Before I left Phoenix on The Great Escape, I wrote a few thoughts on a dry erase board. Sharing them here, and it will be interesting to see how they change with travel, and how others whose paths cross with mine complete them.



As my dogs and I travel in our little camper van we hope to learn how to work outside of an office, see beautiful places, and meet people unlike ourselves.

You might be thinking, “Oh gosh, in the prior paragraph, she’s referring to herself and the dogs as ‘we’, even when describing human attributes.”

Just bear with me, okay? I sometimes like to write from the perspective of “we.” Maybe it feels less self-absorbed. Or safer. At any rate, start worrying if I refer to myself in the third person a la George Costanza. Until that happens, I look at it this way, “That Eileen, she is doing just fine.”

Meandering to a Different Drummer

July 14, 2017



40 years ago last week, Apple shipped its first Apple II computer, Elvis was in the last month of his life, and Undercover Angel was the top song on Billboard (other than for Apple and me, it wasn't a great week). It was also the week that I started my first job after college. The job was in an office. And fast forward — except for vacations and when I was in-between jobs, I've been going to an office virtually every day for 40 years. None of them were bad offices. In fact, many of those offices offered fulfilling work and gifted me lifelong friends. But nonetheless, they were offices.

This year, for a variety of reasons I decided it was the time to make a change that I had been planning for several years.

On June 19th, I sold my house.

On July 5th, I left my job.

And on July 6th, my two dogs (Sally and Trax), and I took off in our camper van on what has been alternatively called "Our Great Adventure," "The Great Escape" (I like that one), or "Into the Hinterlands."



Headed north.

As this blog develops, I will embellish on the reasons behind the change and the planning steps that went into it. Essentially it boils down to this – if not now, when?

Please join us as we ponder this life and meander through the American West. And if you are only here for the cute doggie pictures, that's great too. There will be lots of them.

If you don't know me well, check out the "Who Are We" section. Even if you DO, check it out anyway. I hope it makes you smile.

The Road North Leads Through Arizona Pines

July 16, 2017 (Describing July 6–10)



Our first three days of living in our camper (full-timing, they call it), were spent in an RV park in Williams Arizona.



It was hot and my campsite was in full sun. Nonetheless, it was productive time. I wanted to spend a few days settling the camper, and preferred to do it near civilization in case I needed to make any purchases. Good thinking – one stop at Camping World and two trips to Ace Hardware were in order. A hook, some magnets, and a riveter. Call me Rosie.



The train to the Grand Canyon runs adjacent to the campground in Williams. I waved each time, morning and night.

On Sunday, July 9, we headed north to Jacob Lake, Arizona. Destination, ponderosa pine trees and cool blue skies. Our first stop on 89 North was at the Cameron Trading Post.



This trading post was established in 1916, shortly after the suspension bridge was erected over the Little Colorado River. The post served as a location where Navajo and Hopi could barter their wares for dry goods. Today, other than being an obvious potty break between Flagstaff and Page, AZ, the Cameron Trading Post also offers thousands of square feet of merchandise – from touristy t-shirts to lovely Native American artworks. There is also lodging and a full-service restaurant. It's quite impressive and I always stop.



The grounds adjacent to the hotel are lovely.



Everyone stops, even the hay hauler.

Jacob Lake National Forest Campground was to be a spot to start to decompose decompress. Lots of cool cloud formations accompanied us all along the way.



We were in the Jacob Lake National Forest Campground for two days. On the first day, I sat in my chair and watched this group of ponderosa pines until it got dark.



On the second day, I turned my chair in the other direction and watched this lone ponderosa pine until it got dark.



Maybe “decompose” was the right word after all.



Who Wants a Cookie?

July 17, 2017 (Describing July 11)

On Tuesday, we packed up our campsite at Jacob Lake to head out. I knew we had some driving to do, which called for (of course), road food. Normally I'm a salt and crunch kind of girl, but not when my campsite is right across the road from the Jacob Lake Inn and its bakery :-).



The Jacob Lake Inn sits at the intersection of Routes 89 and 67. Route 67 is the only paved road into the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. It's open for only about five months of the year – during the winter it's impassable to motor vehicles. (Note: I've been before, so we didn't visit the North Rim this time). The Jacob Lake Inn was started in the early 1920's by a married couple who began selling gasoline to the travelers visiting the Grand Canyon by automobile. Per their web site, they would sell the gas from a 50 gallon barrel in the back of a truck.



Today's Jacob Lake Inn is another one of those must-see stops when traveling in Northern Arizona. It's one of the only places for miles where you can fill the gas tank, get a meal, stay overnight, buy a piece of art, and of course, make a potty. I didn't need to do any of those things, but I instead made a beeline for the pastry counter.



It's right inside the front door, so "beeline" probably is a misnomer. We left with four cookies and a muffin – all for one human person.

Our next stop will be near water – which for a desert girl and two desert dogs is quite a treat.



Hey Mom, quit filling
your face and LET'S GO!.

“Save Them All”

July 17, 2017 (Describing July 11, continued)

After recovering from my temporary status as a cookie monster, I pointed the camper van along Route 89 through Kanab Utah. Kanab is home to the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. Many of you might recognize the name. It's the place that saved many of the dogs dubbed “Vicktory Dogs” that were rescued in 2008 from the property of Michael Vick. Of the 22 Vicktory Dogs that were saved by Best Friends, 20 were adopted with families, and two remained at the sanctuary.

It's a spectacular location. I stopped when I passed through here in September 2014. I added a few photos below from that visit.



In the majestic red rocks of Southern Utah, Best Friends sanctuary occupies about 20,000 acres. 3,700 acres are owned outright and about 17,000 acres are leased.



This very day, July 17, 2017, there are 36 horses available for adoption through the sanctuary.



One of the most moving areas is the Angels Rest pet cemetery.



Hundreds and hundreds of little personalized pet graves. There were wind chimes all about, making it a very peaceful place. I spent quite a bit of time here.



Best Friends Animal Sanctuary is quite special.

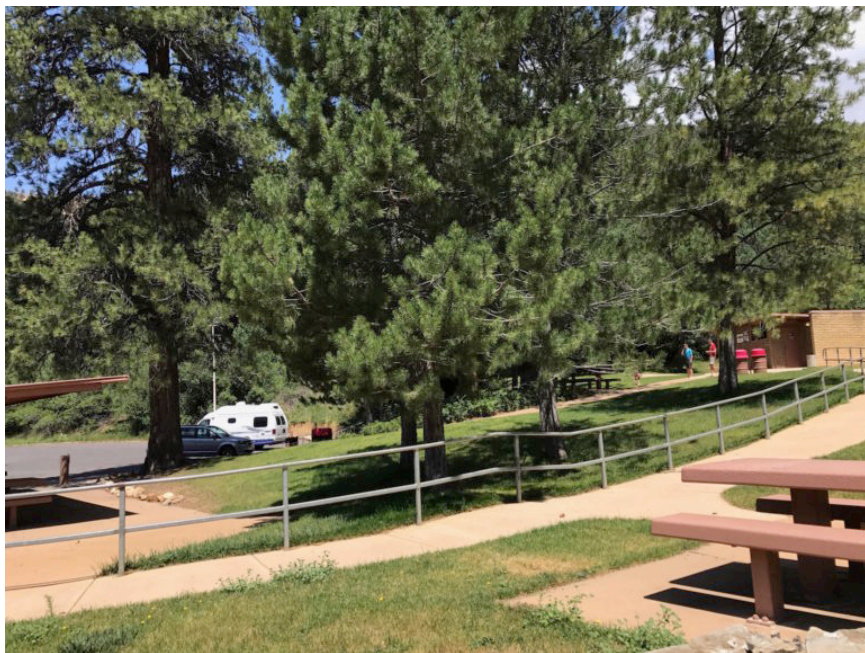
The volunteer program at the Sanctuary is robust and my understanding is that it fills up quickly. It's easy to see why — the location is spectacular and their mission is spot on for any animal lover...their mantra is "Save Them All."

Well, gee. This flashback to my 2014 tour through Best Friends took over this post. Also, I need to compose myself from the bit of tearing up I did while composing it. In the next post, we'll get to that water.

“Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless – like water” — Bruce Lee

July 11–12, 2017

I spend a lot of time referring to potty breaks, and this post is no exception.



That's our camper in the background.

Because I travel in a camper van with two active dogs, potty stops are often top of mind. In southern Utah on Route 89, we stopped at one of the nicest rest areas I've ever seen. Beautifully manicured grounds with roll-around-in-the-grass type grass, family picnic areas, and super clean rest rooms. It's so nice, it could almost be a destination for a family outing. I can just imagine..."Hey, Honey, instead of celebrating our anniversary with a romantic dinner at the steakhouse, let's have a picnic by those bathrooms we like."

Our home for the next two nights was Otter Creek State Park. If you look at a map, it's exactly due north of Phoenix by a bunch of miles.

Situated on Otter Creek Reservoir, the campground had two rows – the front spaces, right on the water, had water and electric hookups. The second row had no hookups, but was \$10 cheaper. I was able to snag a shaded second row spot right across from the day use area. Meaning we had a perfect view of the lake and saved the \$10 per night. Good trade. We stayed two nights at Otter Creek. No cell service or internet. A late afternoon storm that cooled it down each day. It was glorious.

What is it about spending time around water that is so rejuvenating?



Peaceful at dusk.



Early evening storm made for a gorgeous sky.



The people who were fishing (the fisher people), said there was not much fish-catching going on while we were there.

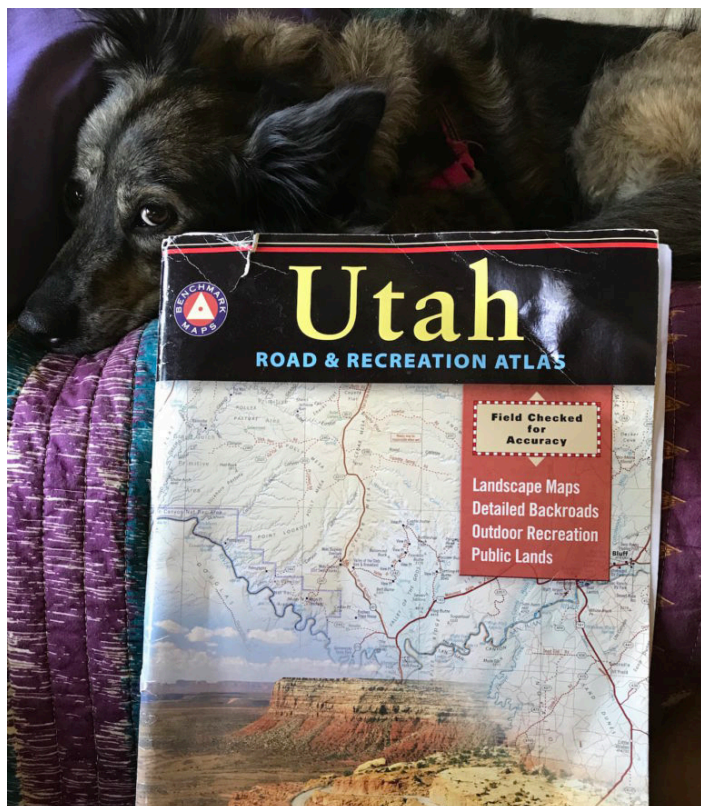


We are all smiling :-)

There is no such thing as a minor detail.

July 13–14, 2017

The day before we left our lakeside oasis at Otter Creek, as is my custom, I scrutinized my Benchmark Atlas to get a sense of the next stop.



Sally peeking around the Atlas.

I have one of these for each of the states we plan to visit. They are great resources, as they focus on public lands and recreation areas. Planning to drive about two hours, I looked at an area about 10 miles north east of Provo Utah, about 5 miles off the main road, but on a paved road the whole way. I also typically consult the internet for any hints about our destination or the route to be taken. Because we were off the grid, I skipped that step this time. It all looked easy-peasy, I thought.



Yikes.

This was the first time we traveled on an interstate since leaving I-17 at Flagstaff. Oh man – the speed limit is 80 here! Not us. We trundle along about 65, which is the max I am comfortable driving the camper van.



All was well as we turned off Interstate 15 at Provo, and headed north east. All was still well as we turned onto the road toward the campground, Mt. Timpanogos. However, what I had failed to discover in my research is that the campground is at an elevation of 7,600 feet. Provo is at 4,500 feet. That's an elevation gain of more than 3,000 feet in just a few miles. Needless to say, we had to take it very slowly, and my transmission was thankful when we reached the spot. My self-talk was stern... "Self, we're in the Mountain West. Details like elevation gain are important. Lesson learned."

A campground in the forest, on a stream, with three bars of Internet. For \$11 a night. Can't get better. At least until we have to go back DOWN the mountain. Without giving away the details, just know that we made it.



As AOL used to say, "You've got mail!"

July 24, 2017

Everyone admit it now...you said the blog title aloud, didn't you? And used the same lilt that the AOL mail voice used. I heard you.



One of the questions I've received as I describe The Great Escape is "So, how will you get your mail?"

Full-time RVers have several options for receiving mail. Many, especially those with relatives near where they formerly lived, just have their mail come to a family member. Periodically the family

member can bundle up the mail and send it to a place where the RVer will be spending a few days. I thought it would be a pain to ask friends to do that, so I opted for a mail forwarding service. Besides, I might not want my friends to see what kind of mail I get. :-).

The best that I found is provided by company that provides a variety of services to RVers. It's called Escapees, and is based in Livingston Texas. I picked their service because they provide three different levels of forwarding. They can forward all mail or just first class mail. And, in their premium tier, they will scan and email you the envelopes and you can pick and choose what you want forwarded. I am using the middle tier – just first class mail. Here's how it works...

On Monday, 7/10, I looked ahead at my travel route, and figured that I would be north of Salt Lake City by the end of the week. I looked at the map, and found a National Forest Service Campground that was near a small town with a Post Office. I called Escapees, gave them the Zip Code of the Post Office, and ordered my mail shipped General Delivery. On Tuesday I received a tracking email for the Priority Mail package, and on Thursday it was delivered. On Saturday I picked it up at the adorable Post Office in Providence Utah. All they need is an ID that matches the addressee.



The process does require some advance planning, and also a tolerance for potential delays. Since Priority Mail is 3-5 days, it would have been possible, but not likely, that I would have had to wait around until Monday for the package. Also, in situations where I can plan to be in a place with a street address, I can arrange for UPS/FedEx expedited service.

So, where have we been since Providence? Here's a couple spots:

We left Utah on Monday, July 17 and crossed into Idaho. I wanted our first stop to be somewhere that sounded relaxing. Missed that one.



A campground in a forest, on a site with three bathrooms and Internet. For the night. Can't go back. At least until we go back to the mountain. We're giving away the details, just kidding we made it.

Thanks for following along.

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We pulled in early, so were able to get a great campsite overlooking the Snake River.

Idaho has many surprises, not least is how hot it is here. Temps in the 90's, but cooled down pretty nicely as soon as the sun got low in the sky.



Idaho has miles and miles of grassland/prairie type terrain. Can't you just see the cast of Little House on the Prairie coming over that ridge?



Slowing down at the end of the day.

The Lure of Roadside Attractions

July 24, 2017



One of my favorite things about road travel is getting to experience the attractions in small towns. It's fun to see and learn about local history or culture. And because these places aren't often busy, the attendant is often eager to chat and is also a great resource for local referrals. The tiny town of Cottonwood, Idaho, population 900, offered two such attractions.



The first was the Monastery of St. Gertrude. I followed the signs up a winding three-mile hill, and perched overlooking a pretty valley was this cool place with a first-rate museum.



Much of it was local history, but there was an entire section devoted to the history of the nuns for whom the convent is home. Like many orders of nuns, their founders arrived from Europe in the late 1880's, and they were heavily involved in education and health care. As nun vocations fell off in the 70'a, the school closed and the nuns turned to working on social justice issues and in the community. Today the Monastery has an active spiritual retreat center, and also sponsors an annual Raspberry Festival.



I was educated by nuns from K-12 and in college. Many in the early years were the stereotypical knuckle rappers. However, the nuns that were on the faculty in college were just a few years older than we were and so much more interesting. I will always have a soft spot in my heart for the sisters.



All creatures are welcome...even these two :-)

As for the woman working the St. Gertrude museum, she and I talked for quite awhile about hopes and dreams and plans for the future. Love that stuff.



Is it a doggie day care? Or is it a dog park?

On the way out of town, I passed a place called Bark Park. I flipped a U-turn, headed back, and walked up with the question, "What is this place?" My first two guesses, a doggie day care or a fenced dog park, were both wrong.

Turns out it's a Bed & Breakfast. Hilarious. I stayed and chatted with the person in charge for a long-time. The room is actually inside the large Beagle. So cute.



Inside is a
porta potty.

True to form, the woman at the Bark Park recommended a great lunch stop in the next tiny town, Craigmont, Idaho. Population 501. It was my first sit-down restaurant meal since we left Phoenix.



This is one of Sally's favorite poses when we travel. Good that someone is keeping an eye on me.

In a Word...Idyllic

July 25, 2017

I have lived in the Desert Southwest for the last 30 years of my life, and I love it there. I expect that I'll return — perhaps not to Phoenix proper, but certainly to Arizona. There are several adjectives that can describe the Southwest's landscape — “rugged,” “breathtaking” (especially when applied to our monsoon skies/sunsets), and “expansive” are three that come to mind.

A word I would probably NOT select to describe my Southwest desert is “idyllic,” defined by Webster as “pleasing or picturesque in natural simplicity.” The desert is a lot of wonderful things, but “idyllic” just doesn't seem fitting.

We stumbled upon “idyllic” this past weekend — at Winchester State Park in Winchester, Idaho.





Spending a couple days at this quiet, slice-of-a-simpler-time location was a delight.





However, in our own campsite, the non-stop silly dog goofiness continued.



Trax says, "There WILL be a treat falling out of the sky soon, I just know it."

"I'm Your Huckleberry"

July 30, 2017

For those of you who have seen the 90's movie "Tombstone," you'll know that Doc Holliday, played (brilliantly in my opinion) by Val Kilmer, repeats the phrase "I'm Your Huckleberry," several times throughout the movie. "Tombstone" is a great shoot 'em up. Lots of fun.

I've researched the phrase "I'm Your Huckleberry" and it's reputed to mean something like, "I'm the best person for the job". Or, "I'm your wingman".

That movie line, before this week, was the extent of my experience and knowledge of "huckleberry". Good that I'm getting out more.

As I've driven across Idaho and Montana, I see signs referencing "Huckleberry shakes," and "Fresh Hucks Here." Turns out, huckleberries are a thing.



By VersicolorA – Own work (Original text: self-made), CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25286727>

Here's some info about them, courtesy of my pal Wikipedia:

In North America the name was applied to numerous plant variations all bearing small berries with colors that may be red, blue or black.

The berries are small and round, 5–10 mm in diameter, and look like large dark blueberries. In taste, they may be tart, with a flavor similar to that of a blueberry, especially in blue- and purple-colored varieties, and some have noticeably larger, bitter seeds.

Huckleberry was one of the few plant species to survive on the slopes of Mt. St. Helens when it erupted in 1980, and exists as a prominent mountain-slope bush in 2017.

The huckleberry is the state fruit of Idaho.

In the wild, huckleberries are consumed by bears, birds, coyotes and deer.

All of the above is secondary research, yes? I did my own primary research this week.



Conclusion: Huckleberry pie, with huckleberry ice cream a la mode, is un-fricking-believably delicious.

On a related note...when I return from this great adventure, if I decide that I need to get another real job, I am going to make my resume a one-liner:

Resume of Eileen Prather:

Qualifications: I'm Your Huckleberry

From Out-of-the-Blue Into-the-Blue

August 1, 2017



Glacier National Park was not originally on my radar for this trip. However, on the very first night of my adventure, my late husband's best friend called me out of the blue for our "about once a year catch-up call." Serendipitously, he and his wife would be visiting Glacier around the same time I would be in northern Idaho. And even serendipitouslier, Glacier is about 40 minutes from Whitefish Lake, Montana. Some of my former neighbors are volunteering at Whitefish Lake this summer, and I had considered stopping by to see them. Adding the Glacier stop was the a la mode on my huckleberry pie, so off we went for Montana.

Each stop was a quick overnight. And after traveling for three weeks, it was good to see familiar faces that were other than those of my two canine companions.

Other than the great company, the highlight of Whitefish Lake was the freight trains. They went by all day and all night. 50 feet from our camper. I am not exaggerating. It was hilarious, and was only a problem for the un-prepared.



I slept great, thanks to my new friend Mack.

One of the highlights of Glacier National Park is the Going-to-the-Sun road. It is a 50 mile drive from one side of the park to the other. It is reputed to be one of the most beautiful drives in the country. Unfortunately, my little camper exceeds the length limitation by about a foot, so we were only able to drive up about halfway. It was still breath-taking, especially the amazingly clear, blue water of Lake McDonald.



Lake McDonald is an oligotrophic lake, meaning it is low in plant nutrients and high in oxygen content. It is typical of the first phase of a lake's life cycle, and typical of the kind of lake that's created after a glacier disappears.

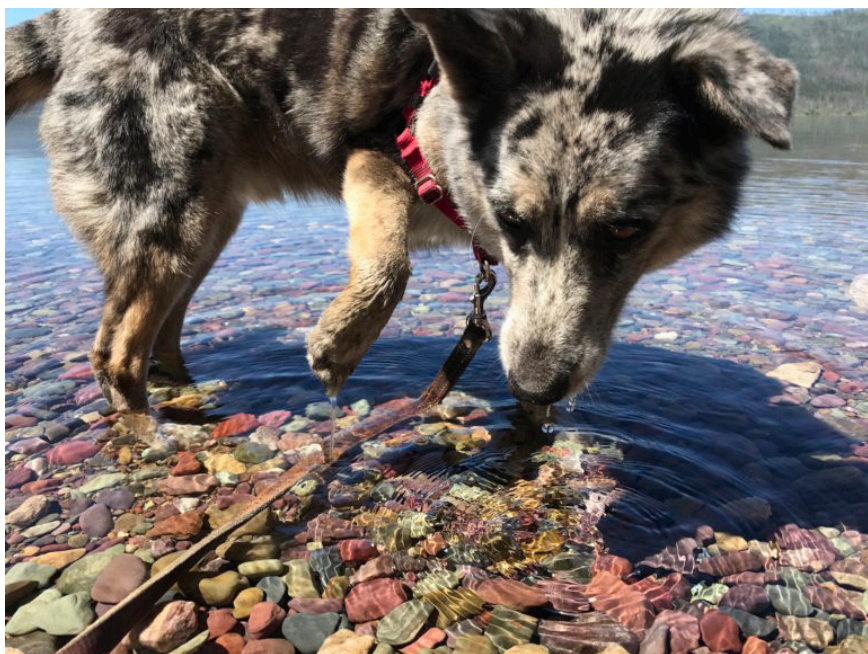
Remember that word, my trivia pals. "Oligotrophic."



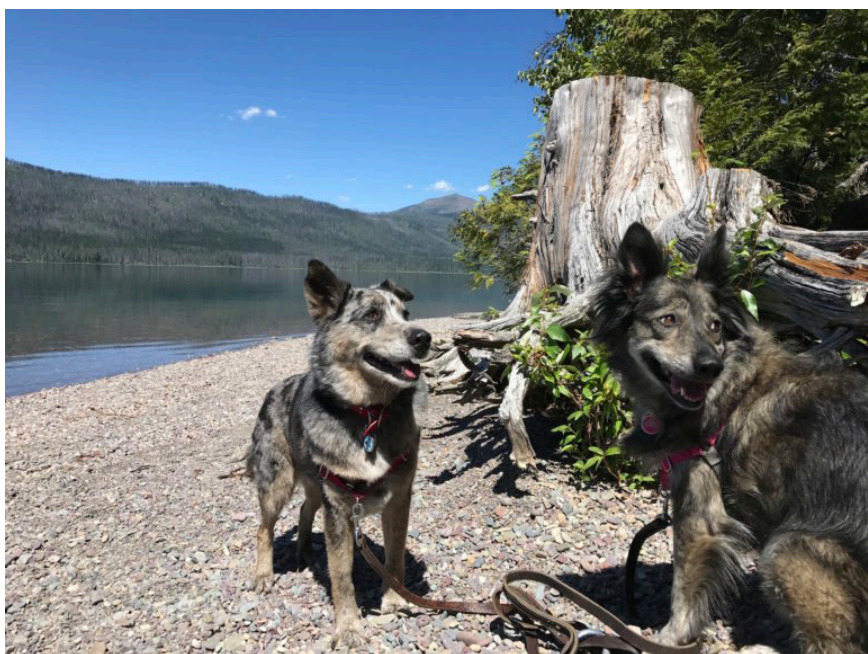
All along the road, there are several pull-outs. We found a pull-out with no cars, and ventured down a short path to a beach. An empty beach. In the middle of summer, on a Friday afternoon, in one of the busiest national parks, we found an empty beach. Couldn't believe our good fortune. Doggies and human had fun.

The clarity is really visible in the images below with the dogs. Trax is standing IN the water. It's almost hard to tell, the lake is so clear. I have never seen water as clear as this.





Trax says, "This invisible water is delicious."



Another interesting fact about Glacier is that it shares a border with Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta, Canada. In 1932 the two parks combined to form the world's first International Peace Park.

"Although the management of each component of the property is directed by its own management plan, there are a number of guiding principles related to natural and cultural resource management, visitor use and interpretation, science and research and relations with Aboriginal peoples that are common to both parks, reflecting strong cooperation among the property managers." (Source: whc.unesco.org).

Waterton-Glacier is also the first multinational dark sky park in the world. Gotta love our friends to the north.

Thanks for following along!

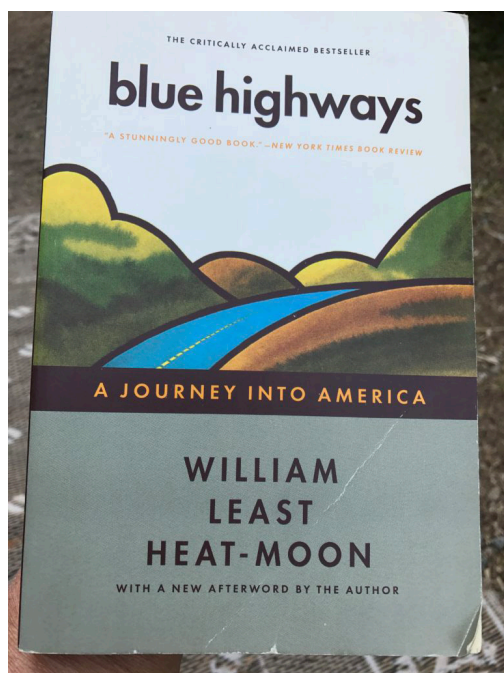
NOTE: For the record, Sally and Trax would like to declare that, during this two-day period of seeing friends, THEY ALSO enjoyed seeing other familiar faces besides mine.

Where did this all start?

August 3, 2017

I don't consider myself an unconventional person. On the contrary, I'm kind of a rule follower. Ho hum. So it probably seems unusual for someone like me to chuck it all and head out into the wind in a van with my dogs. But it doesn't seem at all odd to me. It seems perfectly natural.

I think the wanderlust might have been triggered when my brother gave me a copy of this book back in the mid-1980's.



Blue Highways is the story of a man who loses his job and his wife on the same day. To "find himself," he takes off in a van that he names Ghost Dancing, and travels on an extended trip around the U.S. The name Blue Highways refers to his preference for sticking to the back roads, which at the time of the book's writing in 1982, were colored in blue on the road atlas. The author, William Least Heat Moon, visited the tiny towns on the blue highways and get to know the locals. One detail that I recall is his practice of rating cafes after the number of calendars on the wall. A three-calendar cafe would invariably have better food than a

two-calendar cafe. I loved the book, and throughout the years have read certain passages over and over.

There is an especially funny section that he writes about the drive up past Fountain Hills, Arizona to Payson. An excerpt follows:

"I don't suppose that saguaros mean to give comic relief to the otherwise solemn face of the desert, but they do. Standing on the friable slopes they are quite persnickety about, saguaros mimic men as they salute, bow, dance, raise arms to wave, and grin with faces carved in by woodpeckers."

EVERY time I make that drive, I think of this passage.

The book presents, in my opinion, a perfect balance between the romanticism and realities of being on the road. He has a long section on loneliness, for instance (NOTE: I'll report back on that in a few months :-).

The copy pictured is fairly new — only a few years old. My dog-eared original is back in Phoenix in a safe place. For anyone who likes road travel or has a bit of the wanderlust, I highly recommend. Maybe you will catch the bug and join me out here!



I don't know why I put the mat out for the dogs. Trax is sitting just off it, and Sally is under the camper. (Behind the blue water bottle). :-)

Something New Evokes a Memory

August 8, 2017



Our time in Montana was short. We spent just four nights there, then headed back to Idaho. But Montana was beautiful and we will be back.



We spent a couple nights in a lakefront Montana state park (Salmon Falls), and our neighbors recommended Priest Lake, Idaho as a place to check out. I was able to get a reservation at the state park campground for three nights, so we headed right there.

I grew up just a few miles from one of the most beautiful lakes in the US, Lake George, New York. My first reaction to Priest Lake was an instant memory of Lake George.





This is a very large northern lake. Surrounded by pines and with islands sprinkled here and there.

It's funny — I haven't been back to Lake George in many, many years. Since I was a teenager, in fact. But standing on the shore of Priest Lake made me feel a little bit homesick for awhile and brought back many summer-time memories. Triggers are funny things.

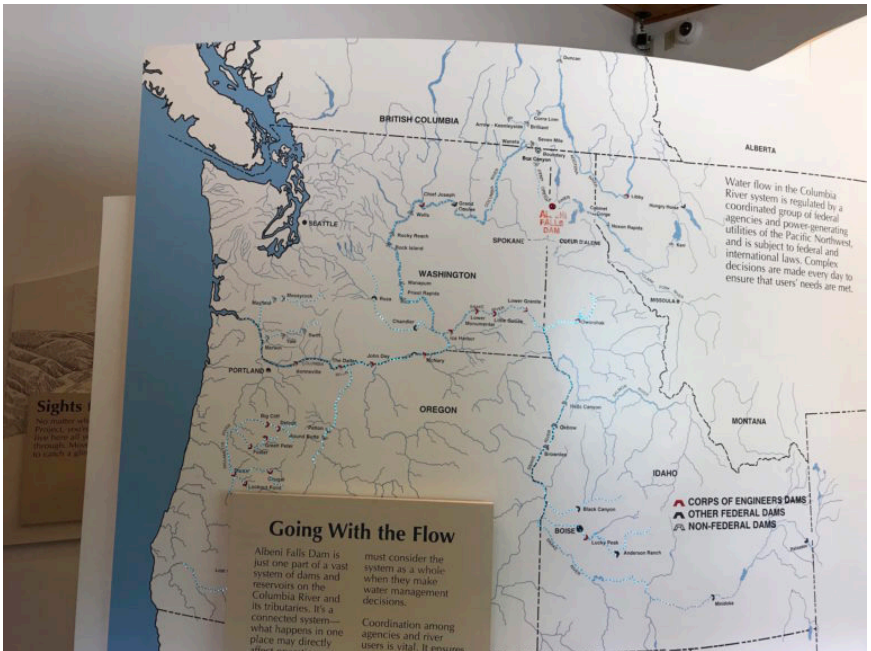


Many fire restrictions in the campgrounds.

The fire danger here is extreme, and we started to see the smoke drifting down from the devastating fires in British Columbia. It turned the blue sky hazy, and make the deep blue water less blue. But it created some interesting skies at sunset.

From Priest Lake, we headed just a few miles south and stayed at a Corps of Engineers campground in Priest River. The two areas got their moniker "Priest" from settlements of Jesuits in the 1840's. An earlier name was "Kaniksu," which was the native word for "black robe," a designation that's much more interesting, yes?

From our campground, we traveled about five miles to check out the visitor center of the Albeni Falls Dam. It's perched up on the bank of the Pend Oreille River.

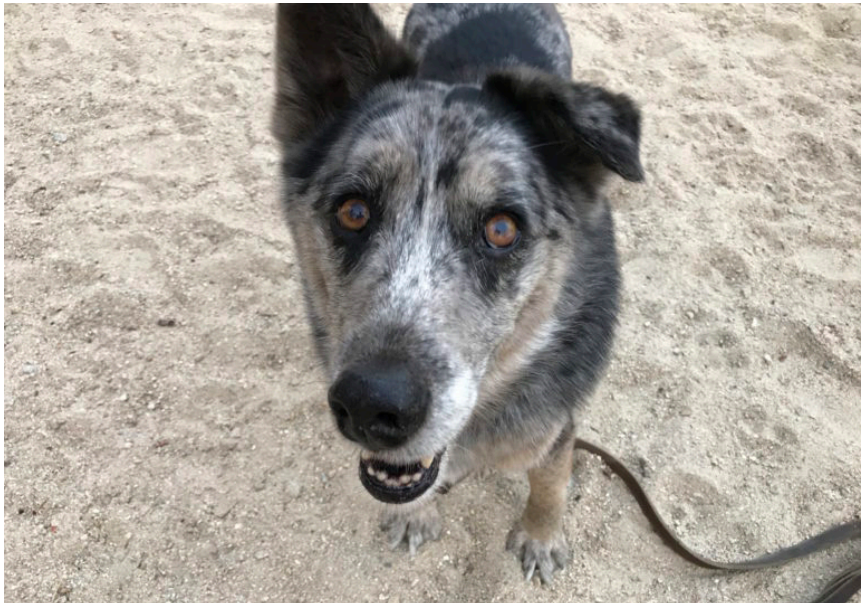


The blue lines represent the Columbia River system.

There was an interesting display of the full Columbia River System. It consists of 29 major dams. The Army Corps of Engineers operates 22 of them, and per the signage, it's the largest hydroelectric system in the world.



I hope they don't have to kiss it goodbye. Who gets the reference?



Trax says, "Thanks for following our travels."

Making Tracks.

August 9, 2017

Last week when I wrote about motivation, I referenced a book, *Blue Highways*, that I read in the mid-1980's. Does that mean that I've had this burning desire to walk away and live in a van down by the river since then? Nope. Not even remotely. This whole thing has evolved.

As a young adult, I camped here and there over the years, and enjoyed it. Then Charly and I purchased a small Toyota-based camper to use for vacations from our home base in Phoenix.



We loved, loved, loved it. We loved the mobility it gave us to see interesting places, and we liked being able to move on down the road if a place wasn't to our liking. Also, as Charly used to say when comparing it to hotel stays, "We know who slept in our bed last night."

When he died, I was left with a big 30 foot motor home that we had planned to use for some cross country travel. It sat in the storage lot for more than a year. I gave away all my camping/ RVing "stuff," figuring those days were behind me. They were pretty sad times.

One day, I was motivated to go over to the storage lot and get the big RV cleaned up so it could be sold. I went through it all on the inside — shampooed the carpets and upholstery and polished the wood cabinets. I hired an RV guy to come over and get it ready to run — drain out the stale gas and refill with fresh, put in a new starting battery, and fill the tires with air. A detailer made the exterior shine. And you know what? As I did all that, I got the bug. I had adopted Trax by then, and I said to Trax, "Trax, Charly is not here, but you are. And you and I can do this."

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR CONTEXT: For those who have not been paying close enough attention to the blog — Charly is my late husband. Trax is my dog.

The big RV was too big for me and Trax (the dog), so I placed an ad for it in the RV Trader, and sold it on a Saturday. On Sunday I bought my current camper van. It's a 2004 PleasureWay Class B RV, built on a Ford E-350 Van Chassis. Sturdy and reliable. I was described that way once (seriously, by a colleague). I chose to take it as a compliment.

When I would take the camper out, I felt in charge and in control for the first time in a very long time. It was a huge step in working through the grieving process and discovering how to live again.



I've enjoyed the same camper van for vacations and long weekends for the last 8 years. It feels empowering every time I get behind the wheel. Even after 8 years.



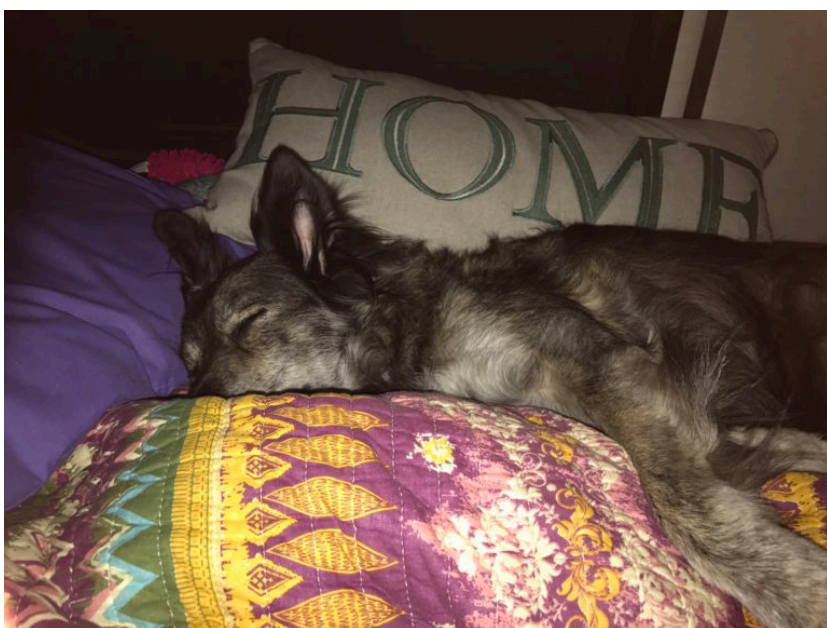
NOTE FOR CLARITY: The photo below is of Trax — the dog. The photo of the smiling man in the first photo in this post is of Charly — the late husband.



Even before this big trip, the camper van has taken us safely on vacations through Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah's Five National Parks, and countless trips throughout New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.



And for now, by choice, it's our full-time home. And no, the camper van does not have a name. But the blog does. Representing moving forward. Making tracks. Makin' Trax.



NOTE: The photo above is of Sally. The second dog. There are no additional husbands.

Appreciating the Tree Army's Legacy.

August 14, 2017

We stopped for a few days at Heyburn State Park in Idaho, just a few miles south Coeur d'Alene. It's the oldest state park in the Pacific Northwest (created in 1908), and once was under consideration to receive National Park status. Much of the area was cleared and built up by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's. The CCC was a key part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.



Rocky Point Lodge was built by the CCC. It was operated as a rooming lodge from 1935 to 1994.

During the approximately eight years of its existence, the CCC implemented a general natural resource conservation program in every state and territory. Enrollees planted nearly 3 billion trees, constructed more than 97,000 miles of fire roads, built lodges and related facilities in more than 800 parks nationwide and upgraded many state parks. It was called "Roosevelt's Tree Army."



You can tell we are in logging country.

From one source, "...it left a legacy of strong, handsome roads, bridges, and buildings throughout the United States." Between 1933 and 1941, more than 3,000,000 men served.



The Tree Army's legacy is still obvious almost a hundred years later in beautiful places like Heyburn State Park, where families can retreat from day-to-day busy lives, bond around the campfire or over a game of UNO at the picnic table, and recharge. In my opinion, we need places like this now more than ever.



The smoke from the area forest fires gives an orange glow to the sun.

Change of topic: Many public campgrounds can be reserved online via [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) or [ReserveAmerica.com](https://www.reserveamerica.com). The service is not free, but it's easy and convenient.



Some parks just add a tag to the post at the site you've reserved, with either name (or in this case, my initials). Others make you register more formally.

What's sometimes disappointing, though, is when you see campsites that someone reserved, but no one occupies the site. I've observed it for years. It seems so wasteful. The sites are not expensive — about \$20/night. But another family could have used that space. *Sigh*

I took this photo on the morning of the 9th — the site, just catty corner from ours, was empty the entire time we were there. Grr.



Someone was a lazy girl.



Another Gem in the Idaho State Park System

August 17, 2017



As part of our hopscotching around the Idaho parks, we spent a couple nights at Farragut State Park, just south of Coeur d'Alene.

Damn the torpedoes. Full speed ahead.

We've all heard that phrase. I've heard it used in business more times than I can imagine, but thankfully not recently.

The park was named after David Farragut, to whom the "Damn the Torpedoes" phrase was attributed. Farragut was a US Navy admiral known for the victory at the Battle of Mobile Bay, 1864 during the Civil War. He uttered the famous phrase when his brigade pushed through an area of tethered naval mines, at that time called "torpedoes."



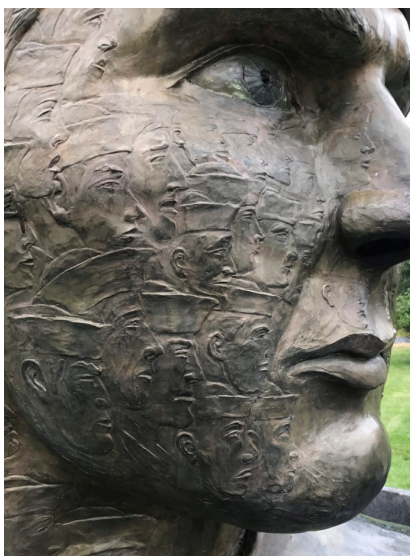
The site of today's Farragut State Park was formerly a US Naval Training Center, and was opened soon after World War II began. Built inland so that it would be protected from coastal invasion, almost 300,000 sailors received basic training there, and it also housed about 900 German prisoners of war. The site was decommissioned in 1945, was a college for a short time, and then developed as an Idaho State Park for recreation.

There is a very moving museum in the park, dedicated to its history as the Naval Training Center. It's located in the former brig.





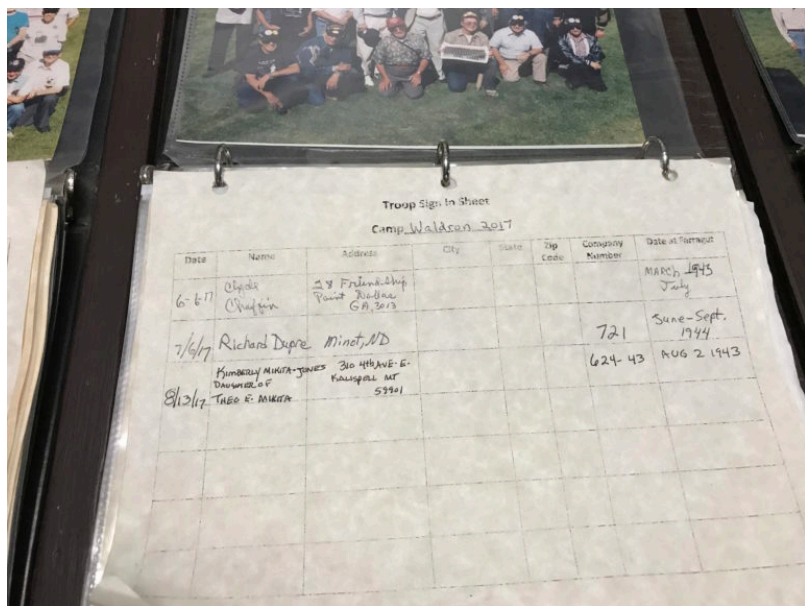
This bronze sculpture of a sailor is positioned at the front of the grounds of the museum.



There are tiny sailor silhouettes on the sailor's face and the back of his head.



The original knot board used by recruits.



The museum had a sign-in sheet for each of the divisions. Either actual recruits or their families were encouraged to sign in. A recruit who had spent time at the camp in 1943 signed in earlier on the same day I visited.



Cloudy and rainy skies made for a nice day to spend a few hours in the museum at Farragut. Because of the weather, there were lots of families there — they had three different sets of “scavenger hunt” maps to occupy and engage the kids. Smart.

NOTE: I was out of internet range for the entire time we visited Farragut, so when I toured the museum I was unaware of the horrific events that were occurring in Charlottesville. I only heard the news on Monday when I was able to get back online. I think it's ironic that at virtually the same time all that was happening, I was immersed in a slice of history devoted to honoring those who fought 75 years ago against the hateful fascist ideology. In retrospect, it makes the visit much more poignant.

“You Don’t Write, You Don’t Call...”

August 20, 2017

Some time ago, an out-of-state friend visited my home in Phoenix. We were chatting about this plan of mine to travel in the camper van with the dogs. Our conversation went something like this:

Friend: “So, Eileen, how will you keep in touch with people so we know you’re safe?”

Me: “When I travel, I check in via text with a few folks when I change campsites.”

Friend: “Okay, good. And you will add me to that list?”

Me: “Yes.”

NOTE: This is where I should have ended the conversation.

Me: <After a pause>....”Of course, that only works when I have cell service. Lots of places I go are out of range.”

Friend: “How are we supposed to know you’re safe when you are out of range?”

Me: (Realizing I’ve stepped in something)...”Well...if you don’t hear from me, you can start looking for me in the last place you heard from me!”

Friend: “Not good enough. What if you get eaten by a bear?”

Me: (Starting to bristle because this conversation is threatening this dang independence I am so proud of....) “That hardly ever happens, and if it did, it would be on the national news. You can keep an eye out for it, and then you’d know.”

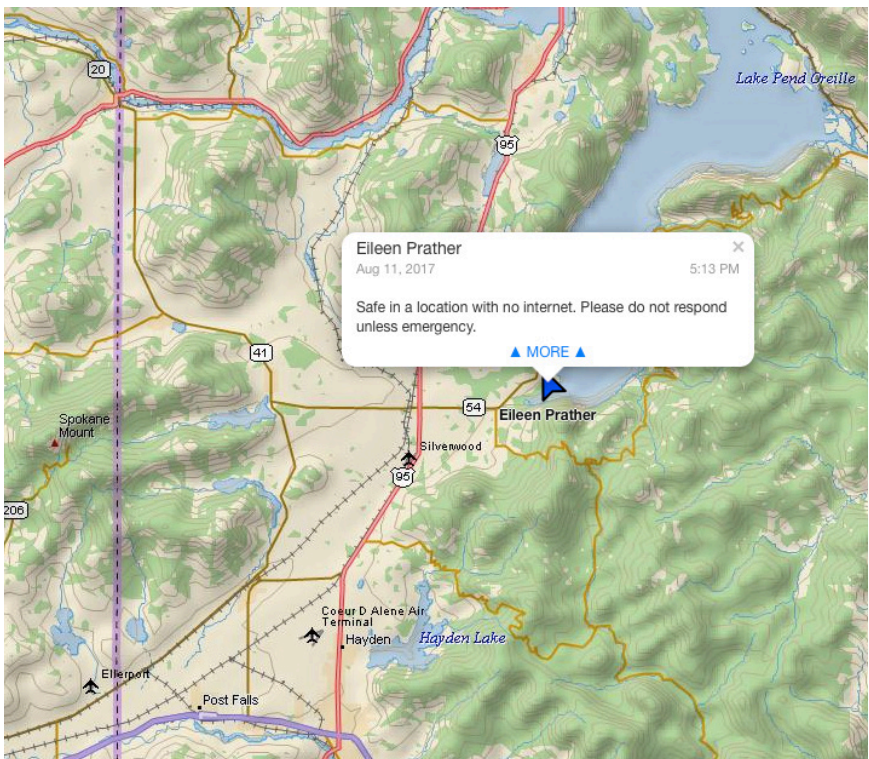
Friend: (who is not impressed with my sarcasm). “I am too busy to keep an eye out for the national news reports of you having become a meal for wildlife. You have a lot of people in your life who will want to have a way to know you are safe. And NONE of us have the time to do Google searches on ‘Recent Bear Visits to Women Traveling in Camper Vans’. Figure out something better.”

Me: (Realizing that I’m going to lose this one)...”Okay.”

Here is what I use:



It's a GPS two-way communicator. I can program three standard messages, that are attached to a pre-populated email/text list of contacts. When I reach an area where I am unable to send a text, I send the pre-programmed message, "Safe at a location without cell/ internet." The message is accompanied by a link to the location specified by the GPS coordinates. It's really cool.



The "do not respond unless an emergency" language is included because I only get a few actual text messages as part of my \$15/month subscription. I can send an unlimited number of these pre-programmed messages.

The other cool thing is that the device also features an SOS capability. If I have a medical emergency, I can activate it, and whoever monitors these things can send assistance. Regrettably, from what I have seen, there is no way to send an event-specific SOS message such as, "Send someone with a really big net because I am currently being eaten by a bear." Maybe the next software update will contain such a feature.

NOTE: The conversation above happened virtually word for word. Except there were some glasses of wine involved, so the part about the bear may not have really occurred. But it could have.



Trax says, "We do our best to protect her. I can bark really loud when I have to."

It's a Bird, It's a Plane...It's Both!

August 24, 2017



In mid-May, I was in a Passport office in Phoenix, making sure I would get my renewal passport before I left town on this trip. I got to chatting with a couple who were going to travel to Alaska via RV. I blabbed on about my plans for this trip, and mentioned that I wanted to spend some time in Idaho. The man looked up at the ceiling (like we do when we are trying to remember something), and said, "there's a great bird museum just north of Coeur d'Alene."

I politely thanked him, but didn't think that it sounded too interesting. Robins and canaries and such? Not in a museum. I promptly dismissed it.



Fast forward to last week. I was headed back to my campsite, traveling on Route 95 about 30 miles north of Coeur d'Alene and a few miles south of Sandpoint Idaho. I see a sign that says, "Bird Aviation Museum, 12 miles" with a sign pointing down a rural road. I think...."Huh, I wonder if that's what that guy was talking about." I didn't know if I would find a museum dedicated to birds, or one about an aviator named "Bird," or something else. But it was a beautiful afternoon and I was open to an adventure. So I flipped a U-turn, and headed east on the back road — 12 miles on a very narrow, mountainy, curvy road — until I reached the museum.

The Bird Aviation Museum and Invention Center is one of those hidden secrets that's special to run across.



Dr. Bird was the pioneer of Intensive Care Transport aboard helicopters. This was accomplished during the Vietnam War; thus, going on to save millions of lives worldwide in both military and civil helicopters.

Dr. Forrest Bird, who died two years ago at 94 years, was a medical doctor, aviator, and inventor — one of those renaissance people. “A perfectionist”, according to the museum volunteer that I spoke with and who knew him for years. He invented the first reliable ventilator for acute and chronic cardiopulmonary care. One of his inventions, the Baby Bird, is a respirator that cut the mortality rate for premature babies from 70 percent worldwide to less than 10 percent.

Throughout his life, Dr. Bird was constantly inventing. I heard one of the volunteers state that Dr. Bird holds the number three spot for number of US issued patents, but I was not able to verify that fact online.

The museum has three “sections.”

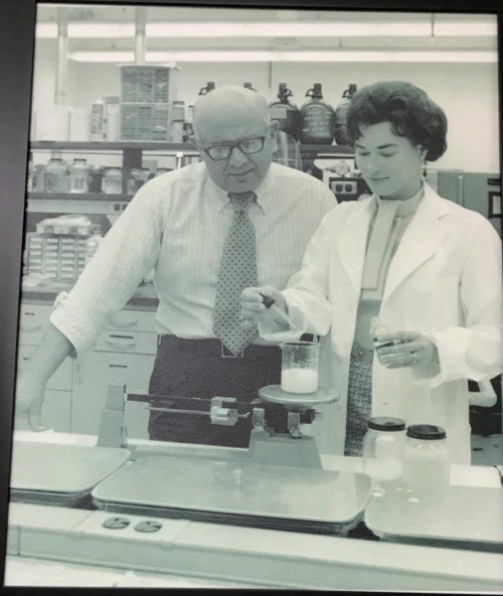
One is dedicated to historical artifacts of WWII, in which Dr. Bird served as a pilot.



The second section is the collection of airplanes. There are 20 aircraft displayed in the two hanger-like buildings (I saw just the main building).



And the third section, and to me the most impressive, is a collection of famous inventions and patents, including the Barbie Doll, Scotch-guard, many versions of Dr. Bird's respiratory medical equipment, the electric guitar, and more.



Women are inherently better
inventors than men because
they never follow a recipe.

~ Patsy Sherman, Inventor

Scotchgard

I like the quote :) This is from the inventor of Scotch-Guard.



Admission was free, and I got a sense that the museum existed as a way for Dr. Bird to give something back to his local community — to inspire innovation and invention, especially among school kids. They host summer camps for students intended to motivate the use of imagination to make the world a better place. It was reported that Dr. Bird would visit the museum every day to meet the visitors — until shortly before his death.

I had goosebumps for most of my visit — it'll sound corny, but I really felt that I was in a place that celebrated greatness, but in the most humble way possible.

I am so glad I made that U-turn.

Settling Down for Awhile

August 27, 2017

Two weeks ago today, we were leaving Farragut State Park (the one with the giant sailor head statue). We had been in northern Idaho for almost two weeks and were ready to move on. However, we were in a little pickle about where to go next. There were lots of forest fires in the states of Washington and Montana, to our west and east respectively. In Oregon, to our southwest, there were some fires, but also the campgrounds were filling up with eclipse-watchers. We found a campsite not far from Farragut where we could stay two nights and figure it out.



Springy Point is right on the shore of Lake Pond Oreille, south of Sandpoint, Idaho. The campsite is managed by the Corps of Engineers, meaning that I get half price camping using the All Access Senior Pass (AKA Geezer Pass). On the second day, we were able to move from the reserve site to one of the "first come, first served" campsites (and what I considered to be one of the best campsites in the campground). We stayed ten nights. It felt good to stay put for awhile, as we had put a lot of miles behind us since we left Phoenix in early July.



The lake shore is about 60 steps from our campsite.

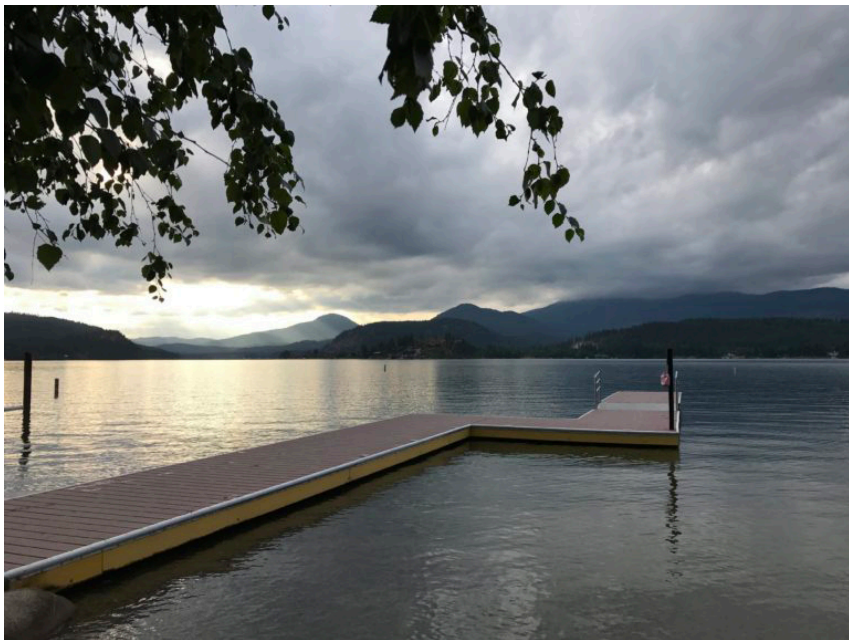
We used Springy Point as our springboard to other activities (see what I did there?).

We visited the Bird Aviation Museum, which I wrote about in the last post.

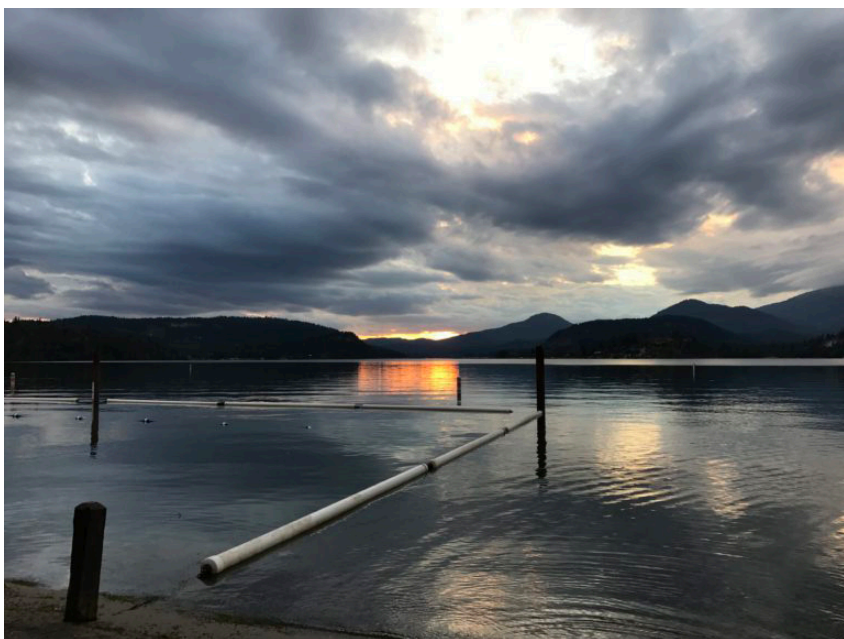
We did mundane errands and chores (laundry, got a new battery, etc).

Here's one...I had not had pizza since we left Phoenix, so I got a slice at Babs' Pizzeria. Now, I was initially skeptical about the name. No disrespect to Babs, but it is not a name that I would generally associate with pizza. Luigi's, or Geno's, or Maria's. Those are pizza names. I should have paid more attention to my skepticism.

Every night, we walked along a trail by the lake at sunset.



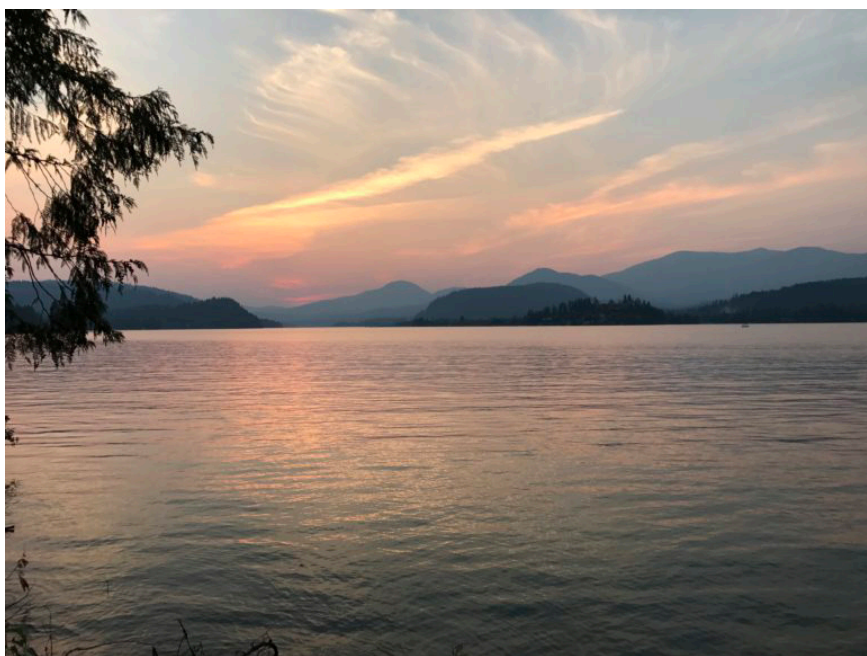
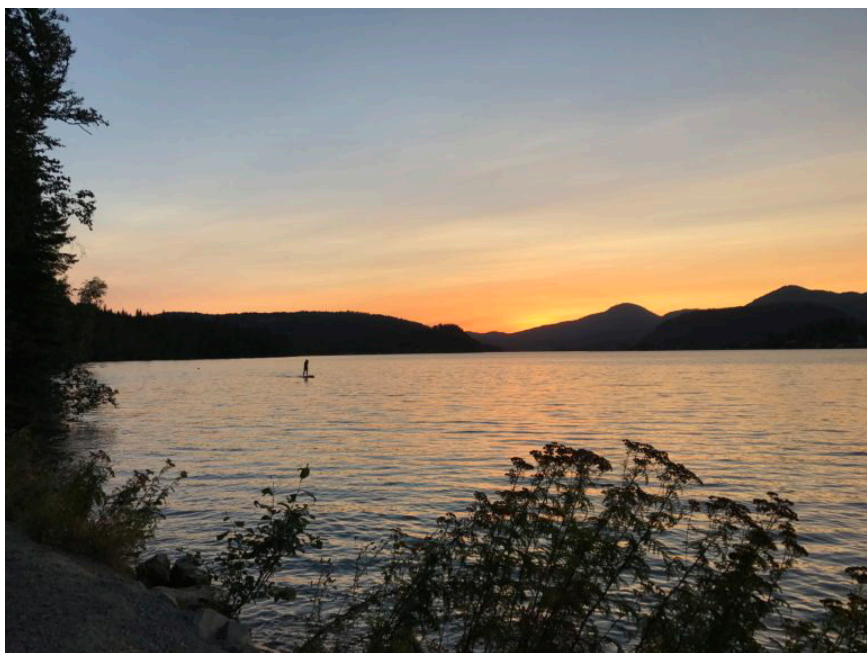
The day we arrived, it had stormed. Skies were blustery.





After I took the photo above, I thought that it was a pretty cool composition, and that if I were in the photo, I would want to have it. So I walked out to the dock, and approached Chair Shadow Woman. "Hi," I said. "I just took what I think is a pretty cool photo, and you are silhouetted against the sunset. Would you like to have it?" She immediately said yes, and I emailed it to her on the spot. We chatted ever so briefly, then I excused myself.

A few days later, Chair Shadow Woman responded to my email, thanking me for the photo, noting that her two sons are also in the image (fishing on the dock), and that she will use it as her screensaver through the long winter as a reminder of her vacation. It was a nice slice of life and made me smile for days.





Leaving Springy Point was difficult, as was leaving the state of Idaho. It is a state of much geographic beauty and variety, and

many, many friendly people. I met a few different folks who were from the area, who spoke of having “tried to leave,” but the area pulled them back. I counted it up and we spent 23 nights in Idaho. We will definitely return some day.



On to Oregon

September 3, 2017



Oregon is home to so much. Dense forests, a northern boundary along the mighty Columbia River, a plethora of craft beers, wineries, and miles of Pacific Ocean coast. We'll explore some of that later, but for now, there are a couple places that we found interesting.

When I started the planning for this trip, one of the ways I decided to economize was to only make purchases that were either A: Immediately essential, or B: Could be used on this trip.

Much to the dismay of some of my friends, and you know who you are :-), that included my wardrobe. One of my purchases was to get two flannel shirts — and on the most casual of casual days, I would sometimes wear one to work (at my gig in PetSmart's Legal Department). The oft-heard comment was that "this is the day that Eileen dresses like a lumberjack."



Perhaps because of my alleged affinity for lumberjack attire, I always wanted to tour the Pendleton Woolen Mills. They are famous for their wool blankets, but also offer apparel such as shirts, coats, hats and the like. We stopped at the original mill in Pendleton, Oregon, which was built in 1909. They conduct tours throughout the day.

The tour was quite interesting, demonstrating the process involved in getting the wool from its rough format and loaded onto spindles where it can be woven into the blankets made in the facility and sold worldwide.



Wool spinning.



After significant spinning, the wool is ready to be put onto the spindles.



Spindles being wound.



The yarn spindles feeding the weaving machines are actually located in the floor above where the machine is located.



Each roll of woven blankets contains several individual blankets. Each is visually inspected for flaws. If a flaw cannot be repaired, it's tagged and goes into the "seconds" pile for sale at the outlet store. The flaw is clearly marked with tape so that the end consumer knows precisely where it's located.



This is a stack of blankets of varying styles awaiting the inspection process.

While the tour was interesting, I think that a missed opportunity is that it was conducted by a non-professional tour guide. She was certainly pleasant, but lacked that “pizazz” that can make a narrated tour more stimulating for the visitors. A professionally narrated tour makes it more memorable and can turn an impartial visitor into a fan of the brand. I think it’s a miss to turn it over to an amateur — especially given that they offer about 20-25 tours a week. As concerning, there was no call to action at the end of the tour...just “put your headsets on the table, and thank you for coming.” I would have expected something like, “and you can see the fine Pendleton blankets that are made right here in this factory, in the back corner of the shop.” (I guess I will always have marketing in my blood).



I treated myself to a cap and a wool fedora.



Every girl needs a cap.

A Delicious, Yet Tempered, Ten Days in the Portland Area

September 9, 2017



Portland is so cute...it has its own ketchup!

With the exception of seeing two groups of friends for one day each in late July, we've been on our own since we left Phoenix. So I rolled into the Portland area about 10 days ago with gobs of anticipation at the prospect of spending time with friends.

We ate well, drank some nice wine, saw some beautiful places and most importantly, spent hours in conversation. All of those things — delicious. A few highlights of our stay, both good and bad.



Dinner at the McMenamins Edgefield

McMenamins is an Oregon/ Washington company that specializes in taking historic properties and turning them into community gathering places. They brew their beer, make their wine, and distill their spirits. One could arrive and never have to leave.



The Edgefield location, located in Troutdale Oregon, consists of a hotel and a couple restaurants on the site of a former poor farm. It was dog-friendly, so we spent a great day porch-sitting, wine-drinking, admiring the beautiful grounds, and wrapped up the day with some steak-eating.



NOTE: I was having such a great time visiting that I took nary a photo at McMenemy's except for the one above with the steak. Thanks to my friend Kathleen for sharing her photos.



Milo McIver State Park

I stayed at a campground about 35 miles from the Portland area.



Once I had proven my prowess with getting out of difficult predicaments using only duct tape and paper clips, my fellow campers welcomed me, Trax, and Sally.



The campground is right on the Clackamas River.



My “commute” to my campground each evening included this great view of Mt. Hood.

Silver Falls State Park



We also spent a few nights in Silver Falls State Park, which is southeast of Portland.

It's another great Oregon state park, and features many natural waterfalls. Only a few were accessible to trails that permit dogs, but what we saw was lovely.



A day trip from Silver Falls yielded some yummy ice cream from a roadside business with a can't-not-stop name.



This was ordered as TWO half scoops. Honest.

We even ran into a roadside vegetable stand with an honor system payment method.



Okay. Next is out of chronological order in this retelling... but the most...I don't know what adjective to use. "Poignant"? "Maddening"? "Tragic"? "Thing that Makes Me So Pissed"?



On our way into the Portland area early last week, I and the doggies traveled down the beautiful Columbia River Gorge.



We enjoyed a stop for lunch at a Marina in Cascade Locks, and snapped some pics of the statues of Sacagawea (who accompanied Lewis & Clark on their expedition to the Pacific, serving as interpreter and liaison to the native peoples), and Meriwether Lewis' Newfoundland dog, Seaman.

While we were sitting in the sun munching on our lunch, I texted this exact message to a friend — “At this very moment, sitting on a patio right next to the Columbia River with my dogs at my feet, enjoying fish & chips and iced tea, I cannot imagine being any happier.”

That was on Monday August 28th.

Horribly, the following Saturday, September 4, that entire area was evacuated (and still is at this writing), due to the devastating fire in the Columbia Gorge. It's one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. And this is what the exact spot looked like less than a week after our visit.

Fire devastates Oregon's Columbia Gorge - and nature lovers



This Monday, Sept. 4, 2017, photo provided by KATU-TV shows a wildfire as seen from near Stevenson Wash., across the Columbia River, burning in the Columbia River Gorge above the Bonneville Dam near Cascade Locks, Ore. A lengthy stretch of highway Interstate 84 remains closed Tuesday, Sept. 5, as crews battle the growing wildfire that has also caused evacuations and sparked blazes across the

Reports are that it was started intentionally by a 15-year old boy with fireworks. Dammit, dammit, dammit.

I am so sad for my friends in Oregon, and throughout the West for that matter, who are enduring the loss of life and property due to the rampant forest fires. And for those facing the hard work in recovering from Harvey in Houston. And for those who are in harm's way this weekend due to Irma's approach of Florida. And on, and on. We are safe and are enjoying our travels, but our hearts are heavy.

363 miles of coast, and it's all mine.

September 19, 2017



We arrived on the Oregon coast on September 8th, and for much of that time have been out of internet range. And yeah, yeah, while we were out of range, I DID deploy the special GPS communicator message system that I wrote about in my blog on August 20.

But now here we are in a state park near Newport, Oregon with a few days of rainy weather and great internet service! Perfect for getting caught up.

I've been down the Oregon coast before — in 2012, I took a two-week vacation and traveled from Phoenix to Oregon, down the coast, then over through northern California and home. 2,200 miles in 17 days. It was fun, but so fast. This time, in our spirit of meandering, we are trying to spend time in a few different areas.



Oregon has 363 miles of coastline, and virtually all of it is accessible to the public.



Oregon has a long history of ensuring public use of its lands and in 1967 enacted the Oregon Beach Bill — all land within sixteen vertical feet of the average low tide mark belongs to the people of Oregon and guarantees that the public has free and uninterrupted use of the beaches. This prevents a developer from establishing a “private beach” for use of guests or homeowners. Sweet!

Enhancing the accessibility is the robust state park system — I read anecdotally that there is one state park every ten miles. I couldn't verify that fact, but from what I've seen so far as we've driving along, it sounds about right.

Note to Oregonians: Forgive me for my blog title. I know, I know, I'm not a resident of Oregon, so technically it's ALL “yours” and NONE of it is “mine.” But thank you for lending it to me for the time we're here.



The Columbia River forms the northern boundary for Oregon, and it meets the Pacific Ocean at the site of Fort Stevens State Park.



Like so many of today's parks, Fort Stevens was a military establishment, built during the Civil War to guard the mouth of the Columbia River.

In June of 1942, a Japanese submarine surfaced off the coast, and fired 17 shells at Fort Stevens, making it the only military location on mainland United States to come under enemy fire during World War II. It was decommissioned in 1947.



The jetties provide stability to the mouth of the Columbia, an important shipping channel.



This jetty was built between 1885 and 1895. The jetties narrow the current to flush out sediment and help keep ocean beach sand from clogging the river's mouth.

Where the river meets the sea. Got it. Now on to another liquid — an amber one.

Another Oregon tradition is the importance placed on craft beers. It is estimated that 53% of the draft beer consumed in Portland is actually BREWED in Portland. It makes sense — Oregon is the second largest hops growing state in the country.

I am doing my part to be a good researcher.



So that I could sensibly dip my toe into the Oregon craft beer culture, I invested in a half-growler. About two and a half glasses!

For the uninitiated, a “growler” is a glass jug, typically about 64 ounces, that you have filled with your favorite brew, allowing you bring fresh draft beer home. Refrigerated, the beer will keep a few days, but not long at all after it’s opened. It’s fun to walk into a bar, have the mini-growler filled, and leave with a cold jug of draft beer. So very roguish!



Trax: "C'mon Sally, there's all new smells out there:
Seaweed, clam shells, even crabs!"

Sally: "Growl"

I relinquished all my privacy rights.

September 20, 2017

If you see the blog headline and assume that I'm referring to last week's Equifax breach, you are W.R.O.N.G. Granted, I am on the list of those impacted. But read on for this nearly equally serious issue.

One of our recent campgrounds, Cape Perpetua, was in a fairly dense forested area. Until you walked the mile or so to the beach, you'd have no idea you were that close to the ocean. Big tall trees. Kind of damp. Rainy.

On Thursday afternoon, I was returning to my campsite after walking the dogs, and spotted this sign in front of my new neighbor's campsite.



Such a statement is unusual in a campground, so I stopped to greet the new campers, a couple with a young son. They were very nice people, arriving at the campground in advance of the weekend to set up for an annual reunion/festival of some of their friends. The woman introduced herself as "T." Or "Tee." Or "Tea." I didn't ask her to write it out. I provided her with my full name.

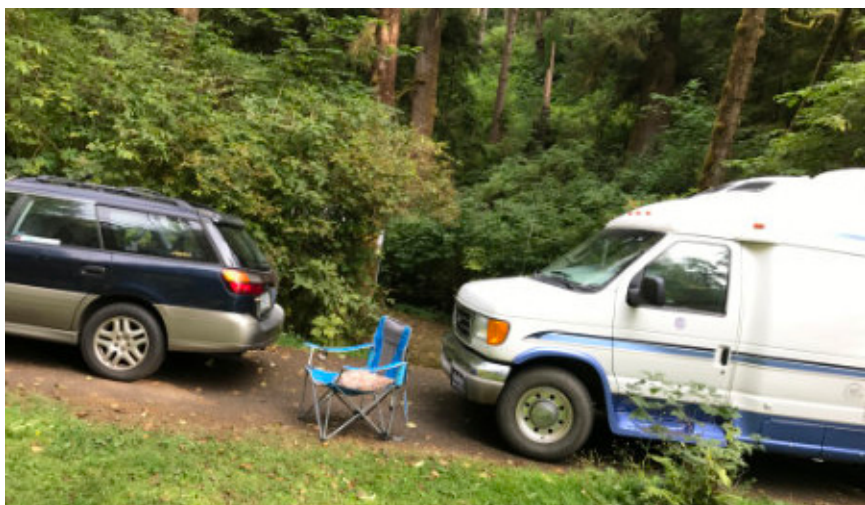
On Friday morning, there was some activity at T's campsite and I stopped by before I headed to town to do some errands. Some of the festival-goers were arriving, and there was already some concern that they wouldn't have enough campsites. They were headed to talk to the camp host when I left for town.

Jump to Friday afternoon when I return from town. I hop over to T's site to offer up the tent pad on my own campsite in case any of her festival people had a tent but no place to put it. T jumped on that offer.

Okay. So when I was driving back from town and considering making this offer, I said to myself, "Self, you know what a privacy freak you are. If you do this, make sure you either A. define the parameters, or B. live with the consequences of not defining the parameters." "Parameters" would be something like saying to T, "T, so that I have my own privacy, please make sure your friends do their socializing/cooking, etc on your group's site and just sleep in my site." Even the act of typing those words is almost too tight-assed to bear — I could not imagine saying them out loud. So I chose Option B.

And they moved in.

They brought a car, which was parked in front of my camper (yes, effectively blocking me in :-).



My blue chair wedged between the tenters' car and my camper.

And they put up a tent. And erected a canopy. And brought a cooking stove and cooked meals on it. And unloaded about a dozen plastic coolers and bins of gear. And hauled in wood for a fire. Etc. etc. etc. It's what you do when you tent.



But other than making my skin crawl a just a tiny bit when the tenters would walk directly in front of my camper window, it was totally fine. In fact, it was more than fine — they were nice, gracious people, and I'm delighted to have met them. And they were all exceptionally interested in Sally and Trax, and they in them.



Trax says, "We like having company — lots more petting to go around."



Sally says, "What Trax said... in fact, we like this buddy system. Lots of petting."

This group of friends has been meeting annually for about 15 years for their “Drowning Rat” festival. They meet near water, often by a river but this year at the ocean, and make a gigantic Rat out of pieces of wood. Each piece added symbolizes something that the participant wants to release — anger, fear, etc.

Once the wooden Rat is built, they throw it into the water and drown it. Pretty cool concept.



Lots of Rat symbols. I had to walk by this one going to and from my own camper. It scared me half crazy...twice. There's a rat in the leaves.



I loved this sign. At one point, the forest service was warning the festival goers that they might have to take it down. I was pleased to see it up for the duration. It's hilarious.



It's a small group — about 20 people. I met most of them, and enjoyed their company and their energy. T and her family. A couple with connections to an Oregon community college. A doula and her dad. And thankfully they probably headed out without referring to me as that crazy bitch lady with the ridiculous camping rules. Actually, they were probably referring to the camp host using those terms, but that's another long story (and one of the reasons I offered up my spot in the first place).

By Sunday night the campground emptied out — it was a little sad.



"Hey! Where'd all our new friends go?"

Historic Oregon Beacons

September 21, 2017

I can think of no other edifice... as altruistic as a lighthouse. They were built only to serve.
— George Bernard Shaw

There are 11 lighthouses along the Oregon coast, most of them accessible to the public. We've seen two so far.

The first, named "Tilamook Rock" and nicknamed "Terrible Tilly" sits atop a pile of rocks more than a mile out to sea off Cannon Beach. Terrible Tilly took 575 days to build with only one life lost.



"Terrible Tilly"—First lit in 1881 and abandoned in 1957 due to the cost of upkeep.

The second, Heceta Head, was built in 1894 and is one of the most famous and photographed. It's located in one of the Oregon State Parks just north of Florence and is accessible via a short 1/2 mile hike up from the shoreline.



You can just glimpse the Heceta Head lighthouse though the trees.



The lens in Heceta Head is called a Fresnel lens — 8-sided and produces a characteristic flashing pattern that can be seen for 21 miles before it's obstructed by the curvature of the earth.



A long view of the lighthouse keeper's house.

Three lighthouse keepers were required. Winding the clockworks, keeping the lamp lit, and monitoring the beacon. Heceta Head lighthouse was not automated until 1963 at which time the lighthouse keepers were...well...they were RIF'd.



This was taken standing right in front of the lighthouse.



Spectacular views from the lighthouse and on the walk back down the path. As we get to see any more of the 11 lighthouses, we'll add them in later posts.

Campground hosts/volunteers

September 29, 2017



During our almost-three-month adventure, we have stayed primarily in state and national parks. Compared to private RV parks, they tend to be more rustic, are often located in more beautiful natural locations, don't tend to cram campers on top of one another, and cater to a wider variety of people.

Central to the enjoyment of the national and state parks are the volunteers. Each campground typically has two or more "hosts" that work to keep the campground running smoothly. The volunteer hosts are often retired couples, though I have seen some singles doing the work.



The camp host/volunteers' chariots.

In exchange for their work, they generally receive their RV space with water/electricity and waste services, but little to no other compensation. The volunteers work a schedule of 3 days on and 3/4 days off, or something similar. Duties range from working the front gate to maintenance of the rest rooms, delivering firewood in the evenings, giving tours, collecting fees, etc. etc.

The volunteer days can be long — I chatted with one of the hosts recently on her 8:00 pm last “run” around the park in her golf cart, and she said that she would return to it at 5:00 am the next morning. In a Corps of Engineer park where I stayed in August, the day started at 7:00 am and didn’t end until they locked up the gate at 10:00 pm and took one last loop around the park in their little cart.



Because the hosts are the public face of the campground system, the jobs seem to attract individuals who have pretty good people-skills with interesting life experiences. I really enjoy visiting with them when they have time on their rounds.

But in my most recent campground, I ran into a situation that was, let's say "off-brand." It was at one of Oregon's state parks, called Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial Park — remember that name.

oregonstateparks.org

Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park - Oregon State Parks and Recreation

On one of my walks with the dogs, I stopped into the campground Welcome Center — it's a place that serves complimentary coffee for campers, sells firewood, a few trinkets and usually has a video loop running about the sites to see in and around the area. Two people were staffing the Welcome Center and I was the only visitor.

It was several minutes before I was greeted with "May we help you?" I thought that was odd, but moved on. I say, "Yes. Who was Jessie M. Honeyman?" Response on the part of one of the two volunteers was hilariously clueless — mouth downturned, eyes wide open with a "You askin' ME?" expression, and shoulders shrugged. You all know the look. The second volunteer stammered something like, "I used to know, but I forgot."

If there had been a third volunteer, I would have expected, “The dog ate the campground history brochure.”

Sigh. I won’t claim to be the most curious or resourceful person that’s ever lived. But if I were volunteering in a park, at a Welcome Center which tends to be where newcomers congregate, and the park was named with the specificity of “Jessie M. Honeyman” (not Jessie K. Honeyman — Jessie M.) I am 100% positive that I would find out who he* was.

I admit to standing for a few seconds in the center of the welcome center, looking from one volunteer to the other in stupefied amazement. Any minute I expected one of them to pipe up and say, “Well, let me look it up on my smart phone.” But no.

So instead, I took my own iPhone from my pocket and said, while stepping carefully away and out the door, “Uh, thank you. I will look it up on my phone.” And I did.

As president of the Oregon Roadside Council, Honeyman worked with Samuel Boardman, Oregon’s first Superintendent of State Parks in the 1920s and 1930s, to preserve Oregon coastal lands.

Thank you, Wikipedia.

I might repeat the exercise at my current campground, which has “Umpqua” in the name. I certainly hope that the response is “The Umpqua were an indigenous people of present-day Oregon,” and not, “I dunno. Maybe something to do with Oompa Loompas?”

NOTE: I was genuinely interested in the question I posed to the Honeyman campground hosts. I met Jessie M’s great-granddaughter this summer, also with the last name “Honeyman.” She was a campground host in Idaho. I asked her for a couple referrals to area places — laundromats for instance. In each case she and her husband immediately looked it up or made a phone call on my behalf. Stellar. Funny the difference in people.

NOTE2: Jessie M. Honeyman was a “she.”

Runnin' Down a Dream

October 2, 2017

I've always been taken with "road trip" songs and movies. On top of the list of favorites, especially once I began seriously planning this extended road trip adventure, is Tom Petty's "Runnin' Down a Dream." I would turn it up, belt out the lyrics (with emphasis on those in bold below), and dream that this adventure that I'm now on would come to fruition.

Today, after the senseless slaughter in Las Vegas,* these lyrics take on a more melancholy meaning. There has to be something better.

It was a beautiful day, the sun beat down
I had the radio on, I was drivin'
Trees flew by, me and Del were singin' little Runaway
I was flyin'

Yeah runnin' down a dream
That never would come to me
Workin' on a mystery, goin' wherever it leads

Runnin' down a dream

I felt so good like anything was possible
I hit cruise control and rubbed my eyes
The last three days the rain was unstoppable
It was always cold, no sunshine

I rolled on as the sky grew dark
I put the pedal down to make some time
There's something good waitin' down this road
I'm pickin' up whatever's mine

Yeah runnin' down a dream
That never would come to me
Workin' on a mystery, goin' wherever it leads
Runnin' down a dream

In spite of the horrors of today in Las Vegas, and the divisions we face in our country, I still believe that anything is possible. To paraphrase another of Tom's songs, "we won't back down."

RIP Tom Petty. Many, many thanks for the inspiration.

** The violence referred to in this post is the mass shooting where the shooter opened fire on the crowd attending the Route 91 Harvest music festival on the Las Vegas Strip. He fired more than 1,000 rounds, killing 60 people and wounding at least 413 others. The ensuing panic brought the total number of injured to approximately 867. (Thank you again, Wikipedia.)*

Constant.

October 9, 2017

I love these Oregonians. They are serious about their craft beer, their environment, and their lighthouses. In the past couple weeks, we have seen a few more of the latter.

One area has two lighthouses, and a third was open for tours. A fourth was the subject of a painting controversy, and the fifth is the picture perfect stereotype of a lighthouse standing tall.

In Newport, Oregon, there are two lighthouses. Yaquina Bay and Yaquina Head Lighthouse.

First up is Yaquina Bay Lighthouse.



This little lighthouse looks more like a private home. It was only used for three years and was discontinued in 1874 — ships approaching could not see its light because it was blocked by protruding headlands. I scratched my head at that one. It is believed to be the oldest structure in Newport, Oregon.



On the grounds of the Yaquina Bay Lighthouse is a memorial for local fishermen who were lost at sea. There was no formality to it at all — just an enclosed area with some benches and this table in the center. The table contained personal items and memorial notices of those lost. I spent more time there than I did in the lighthouse. I found it to be quite moving.

Yaquina Headlands Lighthouse

The replacement to the Yaquina Bay light was the Yaquina Headlands lighthouse.



Situated about three miles north, it sits high up on the headland. It's the tallest lighthouse on the Oregon coast.

About half a mile down the road from the Yaquina Head Lighthouse is a very modern Interpretive Center. The group responsible for marketing the visitor center may have used a bit of hyperbole in the naming.... Or maybe not. It really was outstanding.



Umpqua River Lighthouse



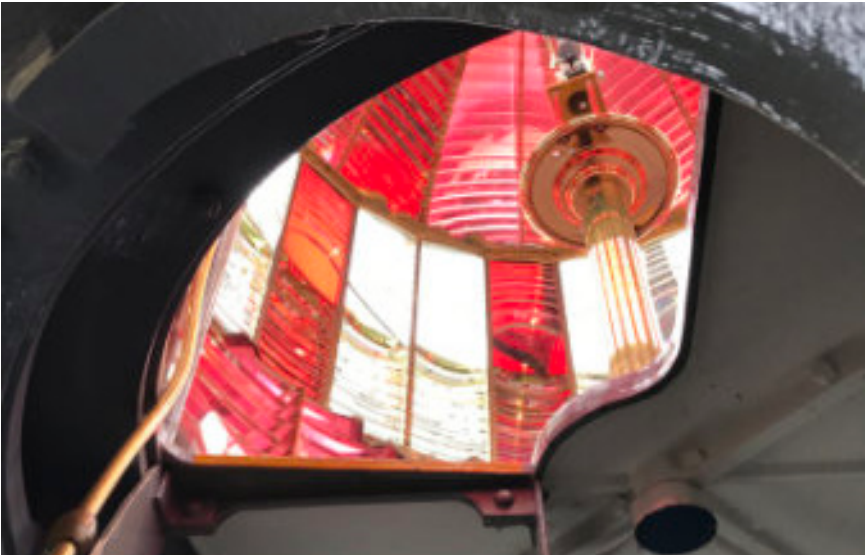
We stayed at the Umpqua Lighthouse Campground. This is one of the lighthouses that is open for tours.

Our tour group was led up the iron spiral staircase to each of the three levels. And yes, as we ascended to the upper levels, the stair steps got narrower and narrower. Yikes.

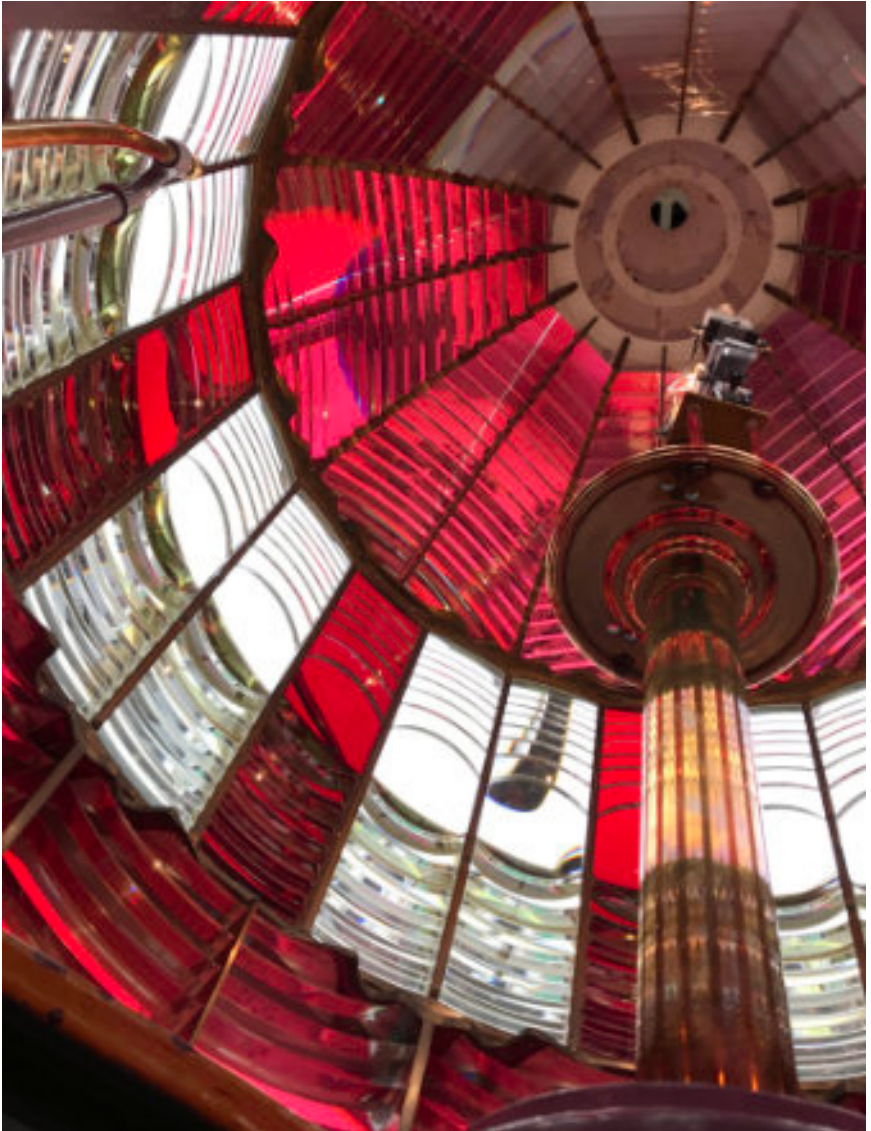
On the second level there was a cool display of the evolution of the light device over the years. It went from a wick system that used five gallons of kerosene a day, to an oil lamp that used one gallon of kerosene per day, to incandescent light, and now to halogen.



The coolest part, though, was that each of us got to step up and put our heads in the actual lens!



We stepped up to the third step...NO FARTHER. And the tour guide was watching like a hawk.



It was amazing to see this!

Each lighthouse has what's called its unique "signature" so that it can be recognized by the navigators at sea. The Umpqua signature, for instance, is two white flashes followed by a red flash.

Coquille River Lighthouse

This was also adjacent to one of our campgrounds. It was not open to the public, nor did I see any volunteers working there. But what was interesting is that in about 2007 the lighthouse was restored and was all painted white. The locals disputed use of all white, and from what I could find online, they found historical photos showing that the base was originally red.

I didn't find an updated news report, but on the day I visited, the base was red. Somehow the people got their way :-). Power to the Lighthouse People.



Cape Blanco Lighthouse

One of the most spectacular, perhaps because of its location. Cape Blanco is the westernmost point of Oregon and is second only to Cape Alava in Washington as the westernmost point in the continental US. The coast is rocky, the wind blows virtually non-stop, and it's COLD.



I stopped by the lighthouse yesterday (Sunday), but didn't take the tour. As I write this at 3:18 pm on Monday, I see that I cannot take the tour today. Or tomorrow. And we head southward tomorrow. So I guess I missed it. Boo.



It's just picture perfect, standing up there all tall and constant.



So I think that's it for the Oregon lighthouses. They are quite interesting to see and be around. Even though GPS has rendered them largely obsolete, there is an absolute reverence for their heritage. The Coast Guard operates the navigational aids, but ownership and often operations have been assumed by local authorities working with preservation associations.

I noticed a distinct sense of awe on the part of the tour guides and many of the visitors. I can only speak for myself, but when I was at each of the lighthouses, I spent a few minutes gazing out at the ocean. I imagined the reliance that was placed on them by the navigators at sea. Reliance. Year after year. A constant.

In our turmoil-filled world of NOW, what... all of us wouldn't give for that.



When the wind blows, a girl's gotta put on her hat!

Do One Thing Every Day that Scares You.

October 18, 2017

As I've written about, and many readers know, in early 2007 I lost my beloved husband Charly to suicide. They were dark days, both before and after his death. To help deal with the myriad of emotions that came with losing my best friend and soulmate in such a horrific manner, I filled my little world with books on grief, affirmations of hope, texts on how to manage anger and guilt. And on and on. The mirror in my bathroom was filled with printouts of song lyrics that were meaningful, mini-posters of hope, cards that were sent to me, etc. It looked like a Hallmark Store Grief Outlet. As the months and years went on, I healed and was able to put away the cards and printouts.

There's one though, that I relied upon early on, and that was never put away. It's on the wall in my little camper right now.



In 2007 and beyond, by some miracle I knew (or others smashed into my brain/heart) that the only way through the grief was to do the hard work. The scary things. The phrase "Do One Thing Every Day That Scares You," was a mantra that got me through several years. It was useful in its simplicity and directness. Moving — scary. Changing jobs — scary. Getting my very first dog, going to my first party as a single person, facing the first birthday alone, going alone to places that Charly and I had loved — all scary. But after awhile, doing scary things required less mindfulness — it became more habit.

Ten years later, this year, as I got really serious about making this change in my life — selling my cute little home that I loved and leaving my steady job to LIVE IN A VAN — I returned to a little more mindful approach of the “scary” aspect. I knew that there would be risk involved. And that it wouldn’t always be fun. But for me, moving forward, which means doing scary things sometimes, is the only way to have an interesting life — to make tracks.

“Do One Thing Every Day That Scares You” — that’s a keeper.



Sally – “We have lots of tracks to make, Trax.”

Trax – “It’s okay, we have her two feet and our eight paws. We’ve got this.”

You Really SHOULD _____.

[Oct 21 '17 Eileen Uncategorized](#)

Fill in the blank. "You really should eat more kale." "You really should get another job." "You really should change your hair."

Speaking just for myself, when someone starts a sentence with, "You really should" I generally start to lose interest really fast. My attention zooms away from the subject at hand and off to something like, "I wonder how many blades of grass are on that lawn across the street?" I think it's a common reaction.

What I just said above? It goes out the window when traveling solo in new places. I have found that some of the most interesting places have come from referrals from fellow travelers. Listening and paying attention to their experiences can yield some gems.

"You really SHOULD eat at the diner right off 95 in Cottonwood, just past the grain elevator." Told to me by the proprietor of the Bark Park Bed & Breakfast in Grangeville, Idaho. It was the Farm to Table Cafe, and I enjoyed an outstanding burger.

You really SHOULD take Route 199 from Crescent City to Grants Pass, it's a beautiful drive." Told to me by a guy in a shop in Winchester Bay Oregon. I did and it was.

You really SHOULD try Tasty Kate's bakery in Port Orford, Oregon. Told to me by a bookstore owner near Umpqua Lighthouse State Park. I did, and Kate herself got tears in her eyes when she heard that her old friend had made the referral and that I followed up on it.

You really SHOULD check out the Washed Ashore Project in town. It's very interesting." Told to me by my camper neighbors in Bullard's Beach State Park near Bandon, Oregon. It was indeed interesting, and outlined below. You really SHOULD read about it. :-)



The headquarters for the Washed Ashore Project is located in the small coastal town of Bandon, Oregon. Their mission is to turn pollution, primarily plastic, from the ocean into art in order to raise awareness of this global issue.

When communities engage in beach cleanup efforts, the trash is collected by the Washed Ashore team of volunteers. It's washed and sorted so that it can be used to create artistic works.

The works travel the nation to raise awareness of the problem and its impact. For instance, the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago is in the first month of a year-long exhibit and there is an ongoing exhibit at the Smithsonian.

There were several works on display in the Bandon headquarters, as well as an area where any volunteers could stop and spend some time volunteering to do prep work for in-process works.



A starfish made from plastics and the inner section wine/beer bottles. All collected from beaches.



Sea Turtle



The eye of the turtle — note all the bottle caps.



A bowl made from the bottoms of plastic water bottles.



"Nora the Salmon." Made from sunglasses, lures, cans, water bottles, toy shovels, boots, and more. All of it trash.



A fish made from flip flops. All trash.

It was a fascinating place and I'm so glad I stopped in. Many thanks to my neighbors for the referral. For more info on the Washed Ashore Project, check it out at <http://washedashore.org>.



"We've been posing here for this photo for at least a minute. You really SHOULD give us that treat you have in your hand."

I am Smitten

November 4, 2017



To those who are thinking, “Oh thank goodness, she finally has a boyfriend,” I say, “Think again, grasshopper.”

I am indeed smitten, but it’s with the State of Oregon. I had traveled to and through Oregon a few years ago. Twice. Each time I enjoyed it. Like I enjoy a lobster roll. It’s really nice while it lasts, but I don’t think about it a lot. I don’t finish with the lobster roll, and then suddenly decide to stay a little longer and maybe have another. I don’t walk back to the table and look longingly at the empty plate that once held the lobster roll. Like a lobster roll, Oregon was high on my list of things I liked, and that was that.

Now to move on from this ridiculous analogy...

On this adventure, everything changed. We were lucky to be able to spend two months in Oregon, and six weeks on its coast. I was planning to leave the state a little sooner than we did, but I lingered longer. We drove into the state on a late August day with a temperature an unseasonably warm 100 degrees, and we left it in full autumn. I am certain that I could not tolerate Oregon's famously long damp winters, but it's a place that is under my skin. I will return again, and hopefully again after that.

A few of our favorite things...

Sunset over the Columbia River on our first night in Oregon.



Miles and miles of coastline.



A state park system that rivals any I have ever seen. There is a state park about every 25 miles along the coast.



Seafood shacks, huts, and shanties serving up fresh seafood and chowder. I ate more than was probably healthy and likely would do it again.



More lighthouses than we had time to visit.



Small towns with quirky little museums. In this one, I came in about 30 minutes before closing — the attendant insisted on giving me a rain check for free admission another day since I wouldn't have time to get my money's worth. My \$3.00 worth, to be precise.



Oregon has rain and rain makes puddles. Reason enough for this desert girl to holler at Amazon to deliver these. I understand they are called "boots."



Slugs. Okay, just this one, but I have read there are others :-). I almost stepped on this one because i thought it was a carrot.



Not my desert skies, but the prettiest ocean sunsets. Every day.



Small towns on the coast with quirky places to eat,

shop, and linger.



Bridges everywhere. One could make a summer out of photographing the beautiful Oregon bridges.



Beaches with stacks and rocks and cliffs. As if the ocean needs more drama, these formations add just that.



Views that belong on a postcard. Younger readers, ask your parents what a “postcard” is.



Random art, like this painting on a stump.



We stayed long enough to see autumn. Crunching leaves underfoot made me almost giddy.



We have moved on from Oregon and are enjoying our current travels. But at the risk of sounding like a goober, I have to admit that I've thought wistfully of the state since our departure.



Trax is also wistful. He is also unashamed at being a goober.

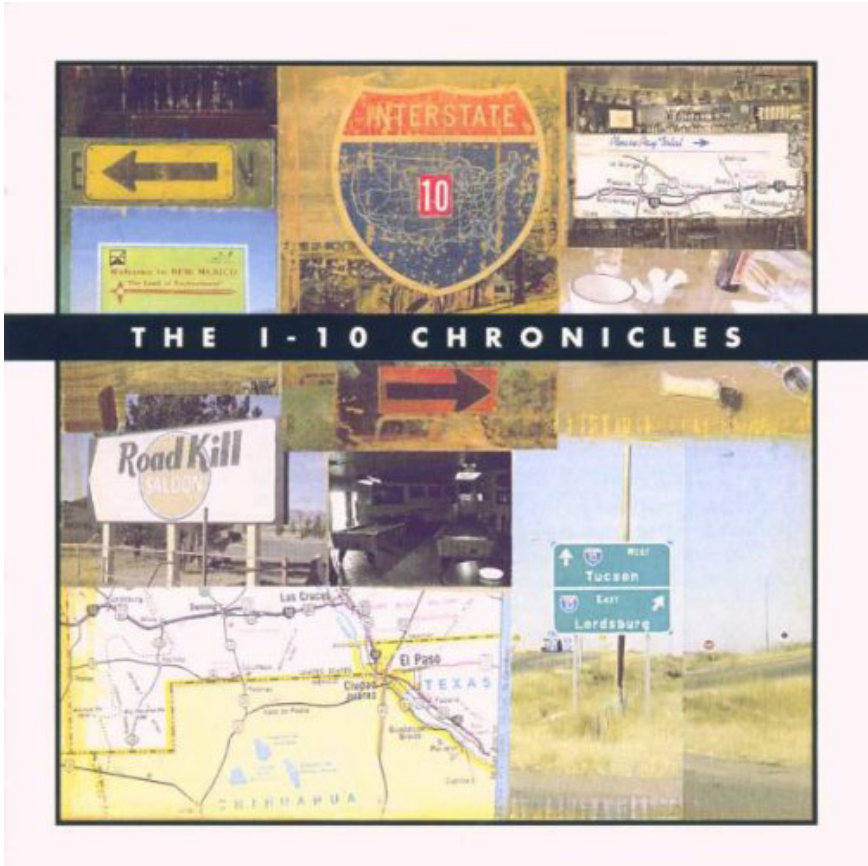


Sally says, "Mom, did you say we are having lobster rolls for dinner"??

No goober this one.

I-10 Chronicles

November 26, 2017



I am a sucker for road songs. Back in the 90s, people used to perform this quaint practice of going into music stores and buying CDs. I picked one up that sounded good to this road song junkie, the "I-10 Chronicles." It's a compilation of various artists, and it features music that one might hear along the interstate 10 between Los Angeles and Texas. I bought it without listening to nary a track. I got lucky — it has some great, eclectic tunes. In fact, one of the tracks is named "Are you Listening Lucky." I say, "Yes. Yes I am."

A couple weeks ago, as I drove away from the Los Angeles area headed toward Arizona, some of the album's lyrics were rolling around in my head.

If I can just get off of this LA freeway without getting killed or caught

I'd be down that road in a cloud of smoke for some land that I ain't bought

Adios to all this concrete, got to get me some dirt road back streets

The I-10 is the main southern interstate, and the primary route between Los Angeles and the city I've called home for more than 30 years — Phoenix. I've had two camping areas in recent weeks that were pretty close to the I-10.

The first was our home for four nights.



It was a primitive “dry camp” on a ridge overlooking I-10. It was far enough away that highway noise was not an issue, but close enough that I could clearly see the cars and trucks passing by. And many of them would turn into the nearby rest area where food/ coffee and gasoline were available.

In my current location, I am on Bureau of Land Management land about 50 miles west of Phoenix. I am further from the I-10 — about 3 miles as the crow flies — but I can also see the cars as they move along.



In each of these two camping areas, I enjoy sitting in the pitch dark outside my little camper with Sally and Trax at my feet, sipping a glass of wine, and alternating between star-gazing and watching the lights of the vehicles on the interstate. The lights never stop coming. I wonder about the people inside each vehicle and what their story is for the snapshot of time they are zooming down the interstate into the night.

If they are truckers, I know they are on the job. Making a living for their families. Many others are traveling for the recent Thanksgiving holiday.

If they are RVs or camp trailers, I figure they are either on their way to or from a vacation, or are like me, living in their home on wheels and on the way to the next stop. But I wonder why they are making the trip at night. Did they leave work at the end of the day and want to get to the beach by sunrise? Or are they headed home after lingering at the campground a bit longer? Or do they do the campground equivalent of “dine and dash?” That’s when you arrive after the attendant has gone home and leave before they open up again – and do it without adhering to the honor system that most camps use — grrrr.

Other interstate drivers might be business travelers – on the way to or from LA for a trade show or an important product demonstration. Some might be excited to get to a concert or a sporting event. Others might be heading to or from a family emergency. Or returning to the family homestead to deal with the passing of a loved one. Maybe they are moving in search of a new opportunity. Or returning home after a failed one.

I know nothing of these people that I observe from a distance. But we often have a story at any given moment in our lives, and at that moment it can be the most important thing on the planet to us.

My story for now (that is, when I am not playing peeping Tom on the cars that drive by me), is that I’ve been on an amazing nearly 5-month adventure.



About 50 more miles for me this week on this I-10. We will still be in our littler camper house, but will be near friends and much of what's familiar for at least the next couple months. I'm ready for that.

The "dry camp" along the interstate was directly under the flight path for the little adjacent airport. Nice!



No, I have not adopted a kitten! The dry camp had a cafe nearby and it was owned by cats. Or there were pet cats around — something like that. Anyway, this little one paid me a visit when I walked down for lunch around noon one day.



ALERT: In the paragraph above when I state, "I enjoy sitting in the pitch dark outside my little camper with Sally and Trax at my feet, sipping a glass of wine, and..." let me be clear: I am drinking the wine – not the dogs. Neither Sally nor Trax are old enough.



Sally and Trax say, "Too young for wine, but we always celebrate Tongue-Out Tuesday! Even on Sunday!"

Keep Shining Brightly

December 30, 2017

On Christmas Eve, 2015, I published the following on Facebook. A friend reminded me of it today. Since it still rings true, I thought I would share it here. It's past Christmas, but the holidays are not quite over.



December 24, 2015 –

Last weekend, half the lights on my little Christmas tree went out and I had to replace them all. The culprit was one of those strings where ALL the lights go out when one bulb goes out. Grrrr. I ripped off the existing light strings and replaced them with some that have this statement on the package: “When one goes out, the rest stay lit.”

I was thinking about that today in a different context. I have noted several messages this week from friends who will be missing a loved one during this holiday season. An empty chair at dinner, so to speak. First, for those of you who shared, thank you for doing so. I was touched by your stories. And second, I hope you find peace in the memory of your loved one(s). And third (bear with me, I am almost finished), let’s not be like my old holiday lights, where one missing bulb makes the whole string go dark. Let’s be like the new sets – “when one goes out, the rest stay lit.” I totally believe that our loved ones would want us to keep shining brightly even in their absence. Totally corny analogy, but it made me smile. And sometimes that’s all we need.

Everyone, be good to yourselves this holiday season. And thank you for your friendship.

December 30, 2017 – And from today, Happy New Year to all. Thank you for following along with our travels — I am so grateful for your interest and comments. We look forward to sharing more with you in 2018.

My Arrogant Moment

January 14, 2018



During the early weeks of my travels last July, I was in a small town in Idaho. I had stopped at a roadside attraction and was chatting with the proprietor about a variety of things. Since it was approaching mid-day, and I had not yet eaten a single meal in a restaurant on the trip, I asked her for a recommendation for lunch. Her immediate response was that there was a great Mexican restaurant in a town not far away.

I'm sure the thought bubble above my head read something like the following:

"Look, lady. We are standing in a grain field in Idaho. Why would I want to eat Mexican food in Idaho of all places? I have lived for 30 years in Phoenix, where there's an awesome Mexican restaurant in every strip mall, and thankfully there's a taco truck on every corner. C'mon, gimme a referral to a place that will serve me one of your famous potatoes."

But in deference to civilized discourse, I did not read the contents of my thought bubble aloud. I instead said something like:

“Well, I think I’ll save Mexican food for when I return to the Southwest.”

The “Roadside Attraction Proprietor” paused for a moment, leveled her wise gaze at me and said something like the following:

“Let me tell you the story about the owner of that Mexican restaurant. He came to this country as a young man and spoke very little English. He took a job washing dishes in a restaurant, and worked alongside an older man who also spoke little English. The younger man realized that he needed to take the steps to improve his life so that he could avoid being a dishwasher in 40 years. It took time, but he learned English, collected and perfected his mother’s recipes from central Mexico, and opened the restaurant that’s now in our town. The food is excellent and draws diners from many far-flung towns in the area. He’s an important part of our community.”

I realized after I drove away that I should not have labeled the woman, “Roadside Attraction Proprietor.” Rather, I should have labeled her, “Thought Bubble Reader.” Or more accurately, “Bubble Reader of Arrogant Thoughts (BRAT).”

I mumbled to BRAT something about having actually just driven from the town where the Mexican restaurant was located, and could she give me a referral to a location in the direction where I was headed, on Highway XYZ.

I had my lunch at her second referred location — I had a great meal accompanied by my tiny-bit-more-open-mind. :-)

As our news cycle this week has been dominated by stories of immigrants and their contributions to our country, I have reflected back on this instance several times. It’s a very warm memory of our travels. So I thought I’d share.

As for BRAT? I don’t know how if or how she would have labeled me. But I have my guesses :-).

House-sitting!

January 29, 2018

A couple days ago, we finished up an almost-two week gig of house-sitting for a friend who was doing some international travel.



Given that we are close to starting our seventh month of living in a van, staying in an actual house for an extended period of time was a nice change.

Here's what I loved:

TELEVISION!!



I have a TV in the camper van, but only have it hooked up to an over-the-air-digital antenna. Which means that I get about 150 channels of crap. One time I was clicking through and there were five stations featuring Dennis the Menace reruns. Not too compelling. Any decent TV I want to watch has to come from one of two sources — either streaming through my Verizon mobile plan, or via WiFi if I happen to be at an RV Park. The former is not a great option because though I have Verizon's unlimited plan, it's not really "unlimited." They can throttle after you reach a certain threshold. And as far as RV parks go, they are generally not a viable option. I don't like to stay in them because you tend to be jammed up right next to your neighbor — cheek to jowl :-). And when they advertise "WiFi," it may not work anywhere except in the office. Anyway, unlimited TV was really nice. I got my fill of CNN and Shark Tank.

LAUNDRY!!



Back when I was just a yute and moved into my first apartment that had a washer/dryer, I said that I would never step foot in a laundromat again. Um, yeah. When you make the decision to live in a camper van, the local laundromat is your BFF. The good news is that laundromats are much nicer than they were a hundred years ago when I was patronizing them. Gigantic machines within which I could snuggle and take a little nap if I so chose. But using my friend's laundry meant that I didn't have to raid my stockpile of quarters.

INDOOR PLUMBING!!



When one lives in a real home with indoor plumbing, you generally only have to deal with the pee and poo once. Flush it away and wave bye-bye. Not so much in an RV/camper. Yes, you can flush it away. But you can't say bye-bye until later — when you finish up at the holding tank dump station. When I would camp with Charly — he was the master of the poo dumping and I was glad to let him have that honor. Solo camping, of course, means that I do all the jobs — once again, the lack of opposable thumbs on those two dogs renders them useless to help. But the luxury of being able to say “bye-bye” at flush-time for a couple weeks was a nice perk — LOL.

Of course, indoor plumbing also means unlimited shower availability. I have a shower in my camper, but it's quite tiny, and I only use it in rare situations when I have no other option. Campground showers are generally adequate, but certainly not the same as showering “at home.” I used the heck out of the shower at my house-sitting gig :-). Hot water bill for homeowner = \$\$\$\$ cha ching!

DOGGIE YARD TIME!!

When we are camping, the doggies get tons of walks and get to run in dog parks when we find them. But they don't really have a yard that they can play in without supervision. It was super nice to have a yard for fetch and tug o' war.



Here's a link to a video so you can see the awesome pink hedgehog tug o' war: https://youtu.be/eCjC_D95eYg

When I told one of my pals that I would be doing this house-sitting, she expressed concern that I would be reluctant to leave it. Not to worry — there were some things — important things — that we missed:

Sunsets — I didn't see a single sunset during my 12 days of house-sitting. Since the camper life means that we virtually live outside, I see the sunset every single day. I missed it.

Dog walks — since we had a big yard to play in, I didn't focus on taking the doggies for a walk. So for those 12 days, they didn't see any new areas or smell any other dog's butts.

Reading — I was so focused on the novelty of TV that I didn't really read much of anything.

And lastly, I noticed that I felt kinda lonely. Except for the times that I got together with friends, I didn't really see or talk to anyone. Just as it was when I lived in my former home, I would come to the house, close the garage door, and stay inside or in the fenced-in back yard. Camping life, even for someone who travels solo, tends to be pretty social. There are generally no walls between you and your neighbors — lots of people to wave to, chat with, and get to know. Dog-walking time is a natural conversation generator. I have met some very interesting people in my travels, and was glad to get back to that.

While the house-sitting gig was a lovely respite, and I would jump at the chance to do it again sometime, I was glad to get back into our little house on wheels.

There's a saying among RVers — "little house, big back yard." It's very real.

“Dude! When’s Your Next Blog Post?”

May 21, 2018

So asked a friend recently.



Yesterday, a little after noon, we slipped over the Arizona state line into Utah. It’s been a blogging hiatus during our time in Arizona. That was intentional, mainly because it felt like blogging about our ordinary life, with narrative such as, “We went to the grocery store today,” or “The dogs are back on their normal pooping schedule,” is hardly worth taking the time to write about, or asking our readers to read.

(But please know this — Sally and Trax both have dang good pooping schedules).

As we are moving toward points north for the next six months or so, we would like to share an overview of some of the experiences that we've had since we arrived back in Arizona in November.

We spent lots of time in the Maricopa County Park system.



I am telling you... the park system in Maricopa County is, in my opinion, stellar. The network of parks surround the perimeter of Phoenix. You are technically still in the city, but the experience is not city-ish at all. Each of the parks has a campground with rest rooms and hot showers, play areas for kids, hiking/biking trails, usually a visitor center, etc.

Usery Mountain on the east side, McDowell Mountain and Cave Creek in the north/north east, and White Tanks in the west valley. All stellar.

We stayed in our own home.



Except for the 12 days we spent house-sitting, every night was spent in our camper van. Sometimes friends generously let us spend the night in their driveway, or in their back lot (in the RV world, that's call "mooch-docking"). Other times we parked out in the desert. And in a couple rare instances, we bunked in the parking lot of a business establishment. But, we kept to our home on wheels. For the foreseeable future, it's where we choose to live — and where we love living .

We saw many, many friends.

We were delighted to catch up with most of our friends, both two-legged and four-legged, through bunches of lunches, dozens of dinners, and a healthy mix of happy hours.

Parties.

We went to a Super Bowl party, and four birthday parties (two of them were mine — score!).



We got our checkups.



Doggies and humans went to our medical appointments. And the camper van got checked over by the service shop I trust. All of us are hopefully good until the fall. Got our shots, renewed our meds, had our fluids changed and lubed. And Sally and Trax had their tires rotated.

We got groomed.



Sally and Trax got pampered by their favorite groomer a couple times. As did I, by mine.

We ate.

Man oh man, did we eat. Friends prepared favorite meals for us – you know who you are, and thank you!!! Others entertained us in some of our favorite eating places – you know who YOU are, and thank you!



Beef bourguignon for Christmas dinner. All day as we worked on the recipe, we talked like Julia Child — awesome!

On our own, we sought out some of our favorite foodie locations. Yep, when I came back to town, I had a list. Top on the list was pizza from two locations and chipotle raspberry wings from the sports bar in my old 'hood.



We shopped at Trader Joe's.



This, as it deserves, has its own category. From the time we left Phoenix last July to the time we arrived back in November, we did not encounter a single Trader Joe's store. Oh, the humanity!

We saw a gazillion sunsets. And an occasional moonrise.



Every evening that we were not busy with one of the aforementioned social events*, we took time to watch the sunset – with intention.

*Don't get me wrong. We are NOT social butterflies. Most evenings my butt was happily in the camp chair with my eyes and camera turned westward.

We saw many big western skies from our spot in the campgrounds in the Maricopa County Parks. And during our travels through southern and northern Arizona to the State Parks in Apache Junction, Catalina, Dead Horse Ranch, Kartchner Caverns, and Picacho Peak.





Ritual can be a good thing, and the evening sunset watch, especially when the sky is seen from the Arizona desert, is a ritual that I cherish.



We rang in a New Year.



Giving thanks once again that I and my two furry pals, Sally and Trax, can live this amazing vagabond lifestyle. It was a comfortable winter and spring.



And we enjoyed it all.

But we are ready to hit the road again.

Gotta get out of this comfort zone — and get a little bit lost.



C'mon Mom! Let's get on with it!!! Go, go, go!

Good Morning America, How Are Ya?

May 23, 2018



One of my friends is currently about half-way through a 40-hour train trip. She's traveling by Amtrak from her home in the Pacific Northwest to see a family member in Arizona.

When I think of train trips, especially those that take place in the dark of night, I immediately think of "City of New Orleans," the Arlo Guthrie version. It's a song full of melancholy and the disappearance of a way of life.



I texted my friend and asked her if her trip was inspiring her to think of the song, "City of New Orleans."

She said "Nope."

I texted song lyrics to her, in the hopes of getting a good ear worm going. Her response was that she was not really familiar with the song.

What. The. Hell.

I was frantically texting about this song, hoping to get a partner for this trip down memory lane. No such luck. So I, all-by-my-myself-thank-you-very-much, veered off into another memory that involved travel through the dark night.



In the 1980's, my late husband Charly drove from our home in Lexington, Kentucky to Wichita, Kansas. A long boring story why he did that, but he was just planning to be gone a couple days. I got the (harebrained) idea to take a bus from Lexington to Wichita and ride back with him. It sounded romantic.

So I did. A friend dropped me off at the bus station in Lexington in the early-afternoon. I bought a one-way bus ticket to Wichita, a trip that with transfers would take about 18 hours. I brought a small bag with two books, some soap and a washcloth, and a toothbrush and toothpaste. Charly had taken my clothes with me in the car when he left, so I was able to travel lightly.

It was October, so it got dark around 6:00 pm and we rode for several hours through the night. Many of the stops were local — pulling into small towns and dropping off or picking up people at gas stations or in front of supermarkets. One of my seat mates for many miles was a young man visiting from Australia, seeing the USA by bus.

The bus arrived at the bus station in St. Louis in the late-evening. I remember it distinctly because one of the World Series games was just finishing up — one between the St. Louis Cardinals and

the Kansas City Royals. A “local” series as it were. The series was on bar TVs and was even being played over the PA system. The mood in the St. Louis bus station was electric. Really.

I left the charged atmosphere in St. Louis, and headed along, still in the dark, on the bus to Kansas City. I knew that I would have to change bus terminals in Kansas City, but the ticket agent in Lexington had assured me that the terminals were adjacent. He was either mistaken or lying. I choose to believe the former (see reference to “bumpkin” below).

We arrived in downtown Kansas City about 3:00 am. I departed the bus, and asked an agent which door I should exit to walk to the other bus terminal. He looked at me aghast and (kinda rudely) informed me that the other terminal was a few miles away.

Well then. I’m sure I probably cursed. But then I went to the restroom and made good use of the toiletries I had stashed in my bag. I must have figured that if one were to navigate finding a bus station at 3:00 am in Kansas City, one might benefit from fresh breath and a clean face. The restroom, by the way, was only the second nastiest I have ever seen.

With my clean teeth and fresh face (looking, I am sure, like a big bumpkin), I went outside and found a cab. I gave Cab Driver Lady my destination. We pulled up in front of the terminal at about 3:30 am. Cab Driver Lady took a long look at the entrance — it had a sign that said it didn’t open until 4:00 am. Cab Driver Lady turned in her seat, looked me in the eye, and said, “I’m not leaving you here.” She then turned off the taxi’s meter and we sat and visited until the doors opened. I wish I could recall what we talked about. All I remember is that it was an incredibly generous gesture on her part — and hopefully I tipped handsomely.

The rest of the trip was uneventful — well, except for the part where the bus arrived in Wichita and I caught a glimpse of Charly waiting for me at the station. I was pretty excited to see him, pointed him out to my seatmate, and told her that I had traveled by bus all night to get here. Her question was thoughtful, “When did you last see him?” I am sure she expected a response

like “6 months,” or “2 years.” My response was “the day before yesterday.” I am positive that I saw the following in the thought bubble over her head. “This chick’s fresh clean face made me think she’s a bumpkin, but now I am certain of it.”

Train travel. Bus travel. Travel by camper van. It’s all different ways to do more than just get from Point A to Point B. It’s slow travel — often done for economic reasons, but also, as in the case of my currently-rail-riding friend, it can be a choice. It lets us experience a little part of our world. And I think it makes good memories.

NOTE: For those of you who are also unfamiliar with “City of New Orleans,” here is a link to the lyrics.

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/arloguthrie/cityofneworleans.html>

NOTE 2: Many thanks to my friend Kathleen for allowing me to use her train pictures.

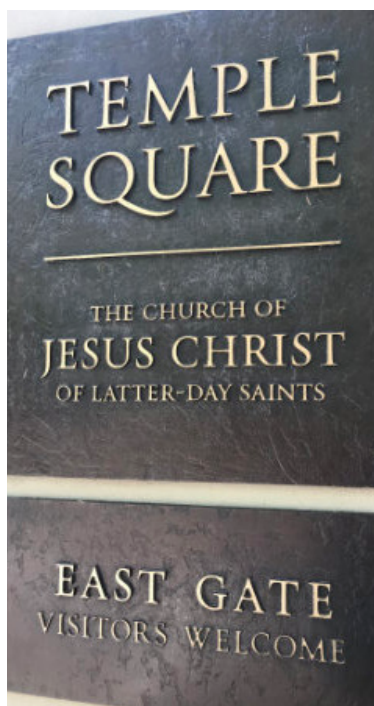
Temple Square, A Visitor's Perspective

June 2, 2018

This week, I spent a few days in Salt Lake City having some maintenance done on my camper van. My almost-always preference is to stay in remote state or national forest service campgrounds.

This time I thought I would change it up a bit and I found a nice RV park in downtown Salt Lake.

I spent an afternoon doing something I've always wanted to do – visit Temple Square, owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (aka “LDS,” aka “Mormons”).



Temple Square occupies 10 acres in the downtown area, and per Wikipedia, is the most popular tourist destination in Utah – 3-5 million visitors a year. I didn't find it crowded at all, but maybe I was there on an off day – it was a Tuesday afternoon.

The temple itself is an enormous and magnificent structure.



It has been standing since the late 1800's, and the construction process took 40 years.



Being a building considered sacred by the church, there is no public access to the temple building. But the surrounding buildings were open to the public.

Instead of a tour, I'll just share the things I found most interesting:

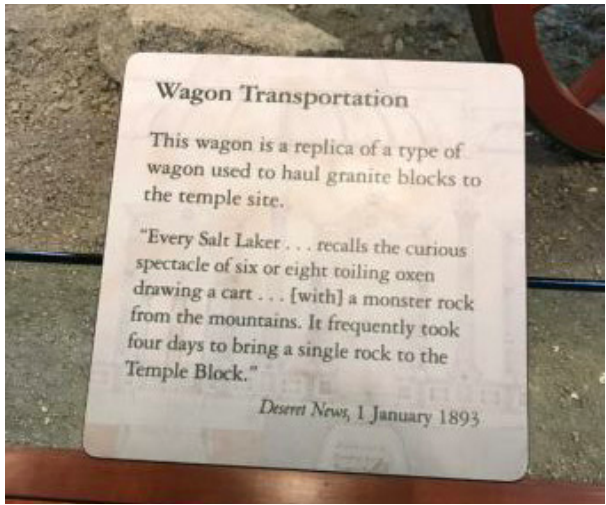
There are TWO visitor centers

Bookending the temple are two multi-floor visitor centers. My first stop was in what I will call the more secular of the two. It contained many displays and exhibits about the community/family approach of the LDS. Focus on the family, community welfare and the like.



As expected, the displays were top-notch.

There's also display after display about the temple itself. For example, the effort to haul stones for the building process...



... and a cutaway view of the temple.



This approach, in my opinion, served to humanize the building that is off-limits to almost all visitors.

The second visitor center seemed more focused on the spiritual part of the religion. Many displays had as their subject matter the scriptures and/or Jesus.



In the center of the second visitor center is a multi-story ramp that leads up through walls painted with clouds.



At the top of the ramp is a very large room with a gigantic Jesus statue at the front.



There was little visible security.

The tabernacle, the building that is the home of the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir, is situated across from the temple building. The door was unlocked, open, and had a sign welcoming all.



The only nods to security that I observed were rope railings that marked off areas that the public shouldn't walk through.

The Tabernacle Organ was spectacularly beautiful.



Two young women were the only church members that I could see in the building, which houses the famous (and I am sure quite valuable), Tabernacle Organ. My understanding is that there are regular concerts, all open to the public.

Accessibility (to the areas that are accessible), is emphasized

This was quite apparent when I stopped in to the Family History Library. As many likely are aware, researching ones ancestry is an important task in the LDS church. The Family History Library is the largest genealogical library in the world, and It's open to the general public. There is no charge to access its collection. I was able to, and encouraged to, visit each of the four floors and take my pictures. There was a metal detector, but it was on the way out.

Almost every research kiosk was occupied. And even though I told the volunteer that I was just there to take pictures, he offered to call up a research specialist to come speak to me. I politely declined.



I Became Parched, but My Thirst was Quenched

My visit was on a warm afternoon and I spent about three hours at the Temple Square. There were drinking fountains located near each rest room. But I didn't see any vending machines or other places to get a bottle of cold water.



Flowers, flowers everywhere, but not a drop to drink.

So, here's what happened in my actual conversation at what looked like an information desk in the Church History Museum. There were three people, two women sitting, and a tall man off to the side to whom they were speaking.

Me : Good afternoon, I wonder if you could answer a question for me?

NOTE: I really talk that way — I'm always unfailingly polite in these places.

Woman # 1: Of course!

Me: Could you tell me where I could find a place to get a cold beverage?

Woman # 1: A cold beverage?

NOTE: From the pained look on Woman # 1's face, I honestly think she thought I wanted a beer.

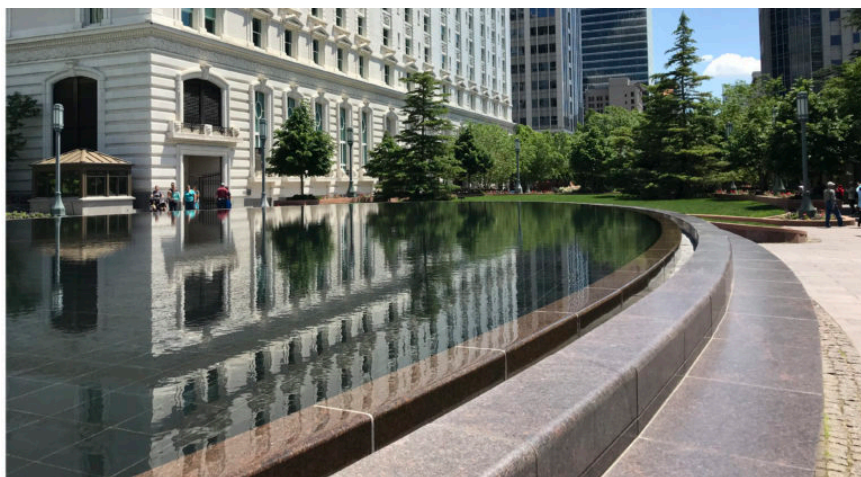
Woman # 2 aka "Snickering Woman": You know <kind of snickering>, we don't drink Coke.

Me: No, no. I don't need Coke. Water will be fine.

NOTE: I was thinking, "interesting that Snickering Woman used 'we'. I don't think I am dressed like a hooligan."

Woman # 1: Oh, there are drinking fountains around the corner.

Me; Yes, I saw those. I would just love to be able to buy a bottle of cold water.



A reflecting pool...from which I was tempted to take a sip. But I digress. Back to the story.

Tall Wise Man: Here, I'll tell you where to go. See those doors over there?

He is pointing out the window at the building across the courtyard, the Family History Library.

Me: I do.

Tall Wise Man: Go through those doors, and bear to the right.
Walk all the way to the back of the building. Act like you know what you are doing.

Me: Ok, I can do that.

NOTE: I am thinking, "Acting like I know what I'm doing has gotten me through most of my life so far. I can certainly do it right here, right now, to get this water."

Tall Wise Man: In the back, you'll find lots of vending machines.

Woman # 1: I never knew that.

Snickering Woman: I didn't either.

Me (to Wise Tall Man): Your secret is safe with me.

Sure enough, the vending machines were in what looked like an employee lounge. Lots of reasons to avoid providing that kind of stuff to the visiting public – litter, spills, etc. Marketers, remember cleaning up that crap from trade show booths?

Overall, I am glad I visited. The facilities are well-kept and the display designs are quite professional. If one were to read every exhibit in each visitor center and see every movie, one could spend a day or two.

My intent was to get an overview, which I did. I will say, though, that I sat in the Tabernacle and gazed up at that beautiful pipe organ for several minutes. If I ever visit again, it would be at a time to hear it being played.



It was super nice to be able to leave Sally and Trax safely in our camper with the air conditioning running while I took a Lyft car the three miles from our park to the Temple Square and back again. But they had other opinions.



No idea what this thing is. There were several scattered around. Anyone?



"Hey, bring us next time. Please, please. I missed the comparative religion class in the canine academy."



"Yeah, Trax, and don't you think that thing she called a 'reflecting pool' is really just a giant doggie water bowl?"

My Neighbors are BALD!

June 22, 2018

I've had some great neighbors in campgrounds. Two stand out as among the most memorable. One former neighbor is a great couple that I met last year on the Oregon coast. They sold their home in Georgia, left their jobs, and took their 9-year old twins out of school for a year — all to homeschool the kids so that they could travel the country visiting our National Park system. Another women is from North Carolina, and even after meeting only one time a few years ago in Capitol Reef National Park we still chat regularly on social media. The special nature of travel is as much about the people we meet as the places we see.

But the neighbors that I had in Bear Lake, Utah are pretty special too.

As I mentioned, they were bald. A family of bald EAGLES!!! Two adults and two fledglings in the nest. See the story in photos below.

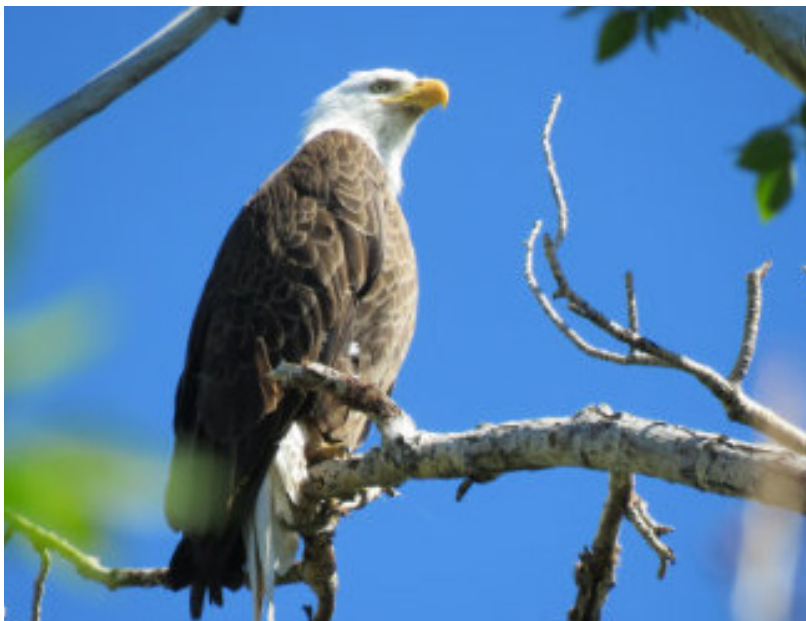


This was what I saw the Friday early evening that I arrived at my campsite. Note the parent on the limb and the large nest at the bottom right of the photo.

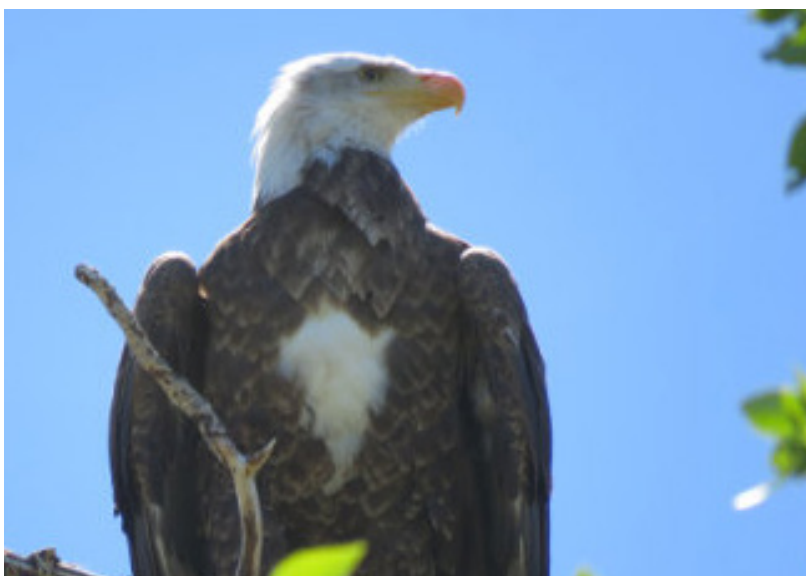
When I say “neighbors,” I am serious. The nest was directly above my campsite! I was beside myself with excitement.



I have never before seen a bald eagle in the wild. And to be able to look right out and see this in the tree right above me... so exciting. When I woke up in the morning, I could peek up at them from my bed!!



So patient.

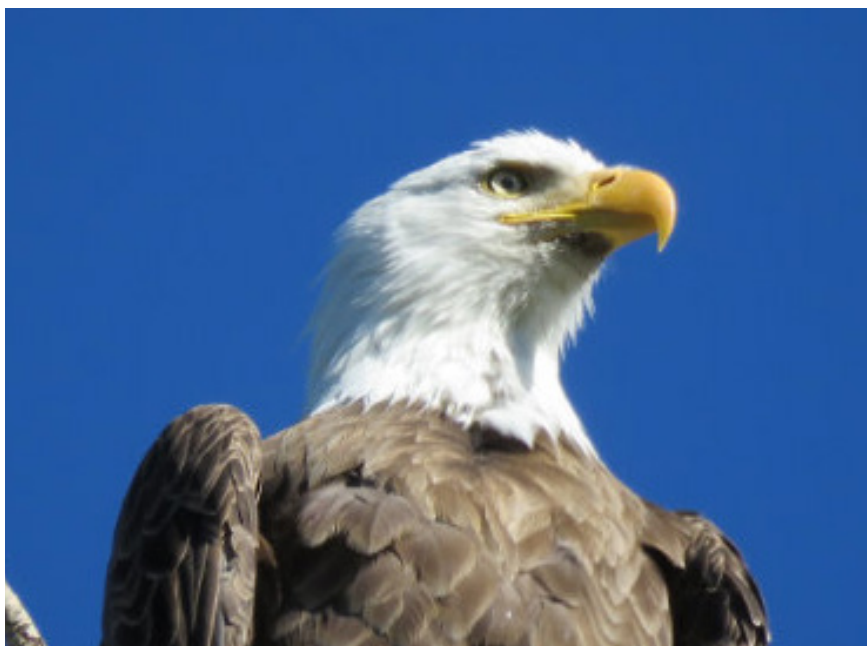


There were two fledglings. The first few days of my 12-day stay, they stayed in the nest and just peeked out at the world below.



Once in awhile the eagle kiddos would come up and sit on the edge of the nest. Notice the size of the kiddo — I think the one is standing on the back edge of the nest here. “I’ll just wiggle my wings a little for Eileen’s picture.” There was a lot of wing-flapping by the kiddos in the nest. Like they were getting used to the wing-things attached to them.





Parent looking out. That is truly an “eagle eye.”



One of the parents taking off — for dinner, maybe.



On a few occasions, both parents would perch by the nest. They mate for life and return to the same nest year after year.



This is the only time I observed an adult actually sitting inside the nest. The adult looks so cute and non-majestic in there :-)



Most of the time, the adult would scan the horizon. In this case, he is looking straight down at the nest. I think I heard the following conversation:

Eagle Parent: You two are too quiet down there. What are you doing?

Eagle Kiddos: N,n,n,nothing.



The two parents perched and one of the kiddos getting a tiny bit of lift from its wings.



This parent eagle looks like he/she has something important to say.



The eagle kiddos are starting to locate themselves higher up in the nest.



About five days after my arrival, the eagle kiddos started venturing out onto a limb. I didn't ever see them get there, and I saw lots of instances of wing-flapping while remaining perched on the limb. I don't know if they walked out onto the limb and did the dry wing-flapping, or actually flew up to it. The practice of trying out this flying thing on branches is aptly named, "branching."



Magnificent neighbors. Interestingly, there was no area near the nest cordoned-off, and the eagles seemed oblivious to the comings and goings in the campground.

This was taken my last day in the campground (the 12th day after meeting these neighbors). Both parents and both kiddos out on the branch. It was hard to leave them, and I've thought more than once since I left there a week ago if the kiddos are actually flying yet.



The campground was also quite nice — but oh, the neighbors!!! Damn, they were special.

I believe that I stumbled into a once in a lifetime experience.



The National Parks are Indeed “America’s Best Idea”

June 29, 2018



I am a big fan of the Ken Burns series “THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA’S BEST IDEA.” It ran on PBS a few years ago, and it was one of the points of inspiration for me to take off on this camper van adventure.

The series spends a lot of time on John Muir, considered by many to be the Father of the National Parks. He wrote:

*Keep close to Nature’s heart... and break clear away,
once in awhile, and climb a mountain or spend a
week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.*

~ John Muir



In the past two weeks, I was able to spend a few days each in the Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park. Each park was spectacular, I was delighted to spend time in each, and I will definitely return.



Some fun facts... Yellowstone was established in 1872 and is the world's first national park. Estimates of its size are 3,472 square miles, and more than 2 million acres. Add to that the 420 square miles and 310,000 acres that make up the Grand Tetons, and you have about 4,000 square miles of protected, natural beauty. Just in one corner of northwest Wyoming and part of Montana.



There were most certainly debates and disagreements over the establishment of these and other National Parks in their infant and adolescent years. But the supporters of the concept that visiting nature washes our spirit clean — they prevailed. Today, more than 140 years after the establishment of the first national park, we continue to be the beneficiaries.



Sadly, we are seeing the reverse happening today. Land that was formerly protected is being made available for profit-making activities. Like most, I think the political situation in our country is, in a word, deplorable. But for me, spending a week in those two parks, Yellowstone and Grand Tetons, made the deplorable bearable — at least for awhile.



A few of my friends have told me that they have stopped watching the news. I have a better, albeit unsolicited, idea. When the news gets you down, don't stop watching. But DO take a break. Step away from the television and visit a national park.



Or, take a hike to a place where you can't see another human. Walk on a beach in the fog. Heck, just go walk the damn dog in a field of green grass.



Keep close to nature's heart. Then come back refreshed so we can be vigilant and aware. And vote.

Actually, I am going to have the hubris to update what Ken Burns said... It's voting. VOTING is America's Best Idea.



"Um, Mom. We get that you're passionate about this. But you just used the phrase 'damn dogs'. For the sake of family harmony, we are going to assume you meant all the OTHER dogs and not us. We are your sweeties."

The First Sunset of our Second Year!

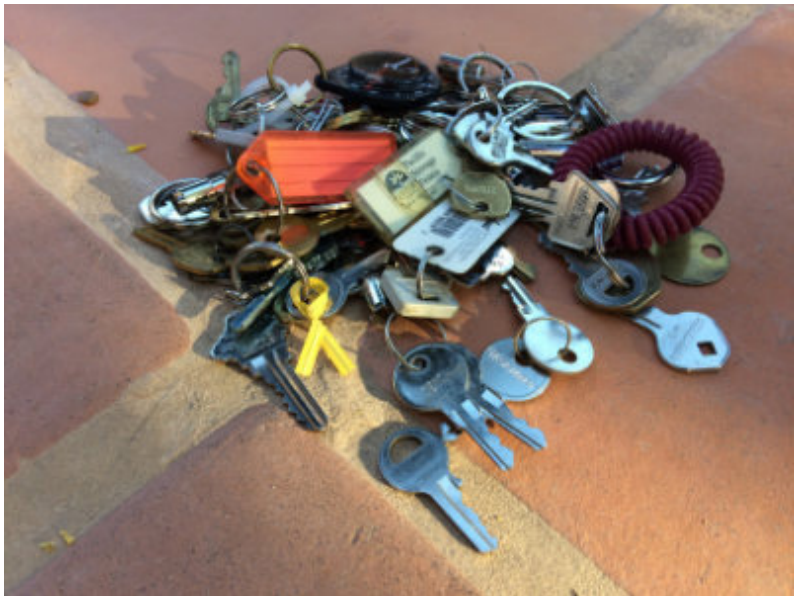
July 8, 2018

It was last night. So that means that one year ago Friday we drove away from our life in Phoenix to drive into America. On that day, other than wanting to be in Portland for Labor Day, we really didn't have much of a plan.



All my attention had been on selling my house, putting stuff in storage, leaving my job, getting last medical appointments for me AND the dogs, etc., etc. So many balls in the air.

When asked where we were going, I remember saying, "Good question. How about Idaho? I've never been to Idaho and I want to find out about it."



Forty years worth of keys!

We got to Idaho. And there's a lot to it. In fact, I am writing this from one of our favorite spots from last year, Sandpoint, Idaho.



I've been asked a lot of questions about this lifestyle choice – to leave my cute home that I loved, my job, my friends, and a fairly stable life in Arizona — to live in a van.



Our home.

In fact, this lifestyle choice is just weird enough that lots of people have questions. To celebrate our first year anniversary, I'll answer some here.

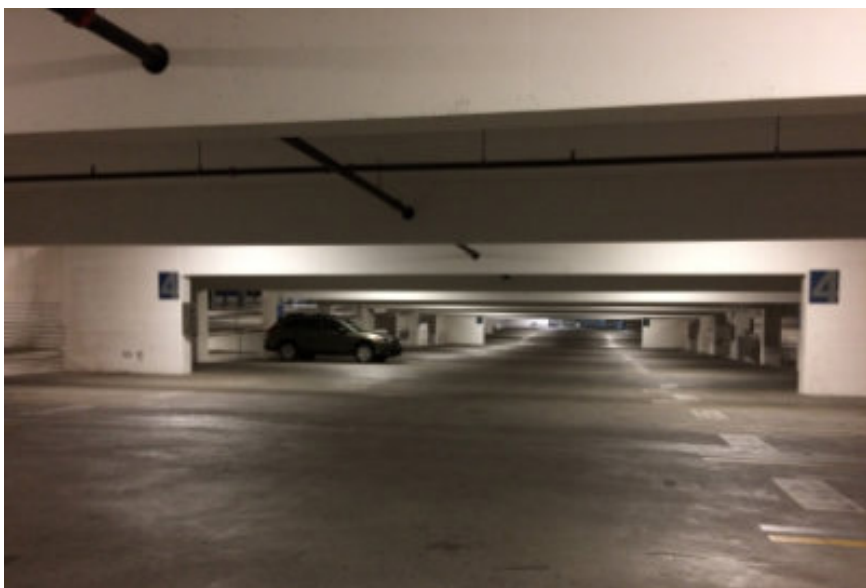
Aren't you scared?

This is typically asked in the context of me being a woman traveling alone. Short answer: Nope

I belong to several RV-ing groups, some specifically for women. And I am always saddened when I see questions from women who let the fear of traveling alone keep them from pursuing their dream. Some helpful souls suggest that they always put out two chairs at the campsite. Others, and this is an oldy, get a pair of size 14 men's workboots from Goodwill and leave them outside the camper every night.

The extra chair and the workboot ideas are good ones, I guess. But I don't do any of them. To me, the answer is simple: Don't be stupid. And trust your gut. If a place makes you feel uncomfortable, leave. If someone starts asking too many personal questions, walk away. Both have happened to me, and I step away without regret – I don't owe anyone my time or attention. I also believe that my chances of encountering a bad guy were exponentially greater when I left work every night at 7:00 pm in Phoenix than they are walking my dogs in the night in a forest campground.

NOTE: of course, lots of solo travelers keep a firearm for personal protection. I am not going to engage in a discussion of that topic in this forum.



My view almost every night the last two years of working — a nearly deserted parking garage.



My current office.

How do the dogs like it?

Sally and Trax seem to like being with me every day. All day. And they love all the interesting smells when we get to a new place. Trax would rather avoid the actual riding in the RV part, but he never hesitates to hop up in his spot when it's time to hit the road. I love the doggie part of this life.



I think a pine tree might grow right out of Trax's fur.

Do you have a bathroom in there?

That's one of the common questions I'm asked about my van. Answer: Yes. And a shower, and a stovetop, and a refrigerator. We have everything we need. I generally use campground showers when I can – it's just easier. But they can be a trip – maybe one day I'll do a blog post about campground showers. The title will be easy — "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly."

What does “boondocking” mean?

That term means living without electric or water hookups to the camper van – generally in a remote area. For instance, right now, we are in a semi-primitive, U.S. Forest Service campground – there are a couple shower stalls for use by the entire campground, but no electricity or water to the campsites. I have a solar panel and generator that I can use to keep the camper battery charged to power our lights/refrigerator/fan/computers/phones etc. It's perfectly adequate.

How do you shower every day if there are only two showers for everyone to use?

I don't always. If you have any questions, do a Google search on “birdbaths,” aka “sponge baths”, aka “PTA baths.” It's the lifestyle. But I will tell you this — when you get a group of full-time RVers together and the conversation turns to personal hygiene, hilarity is apt to ensue.

I did take a shower this morning.

How long can you stay in one place without moving the camper van?

We usually are on the move every couple days. If we stay in the same campground, I get restless and either go sightseeing or do errands. Yesterday I drove to Yoke's, the local grocery store, and then stopped at a bakery for a trail mix cookie and a cup of coffee. And about once a week we have to go dump our holding tanks and take on fresh water.

What has been your favorite thing?

Easy. The Oregon coast. I haven't been to a whole lot of places, but it's the most beautiful area I've ever seen.



But we have seen beauty in almost every place we've visited. Montana was pretty special – next year I might have to spend more time there.



Speaking of Idaho — I have yet to have an Idaho potato in Idaho. Got to get on that.

What has been your biggest disappointment?

Easy. Eastern Washington, south of Spokane. I knew that area was flat and arid, so my expectations were already low. But it was a hard multi-hour ride to get through it. I apologize in advance if that's your beloved home town area.

Any regrets?

Not really. I have heard others who live this life say, "I wish I had done this sooner." But for me, this has been the perfect time. I was ready to take a break from going to an office every day, and all the other factors seemed to align.



THERE ARE
SEVEN
DAYS IN A WEEK
SOMEDAY
ISN'T ONE OF THEM

I have a few more FAQ's that I want to address, including, "Don't you get lonely?" and "What's next?" I'll do that in a later post.



I Love Getting Questions....

July 29, 2018

I really do enjoy responding to questions about this lifestyle. I am totally aware that is not for everyone. And for most people, it's not even normal — LOL. But many are curious.

Here's part two of the Q&A that I started earlier this month.

What about money?

I get lots of questions about the cost of my lifestyle. I am not comfortable giving specifics, so I've been struggling with how to communicate it. I have the plan and will put it in the next post.

How do you cook/What do you eat?

I don't eat much differently now than I used to when I had a house and went to a job every day. A little yogurt and fruit or cereal for breakfast, maybe a sandwich or salad for lunch, and a light dinner. Coffee in the morning, always.

The biggest difference from my camper van and a house is I don't have a real oven — I miss that. But I DO have a convection microwave. I recently attended a little class on how to use it, so I hope to expand my eating choices. I have a little outdoor propane stove and a couple iron skilletes that I've also been using. I chose the stove over a portable grill, as I thought I'd get more use out of it.



I got this cute little travel trailer mug right before I took off on my trip. It didn't last. My current mug has a cow on it.

Once in awhile I need to stop into one of these little mom and pop grocery stores in either tourist or rural communities. Prices are generally high. I just close my eyes and hold out my wallet for the proprietors to take what they need. Yes, the name of the store is "Bear Bottom Country Store."



I also have a two-burner stove inside the camper.



A couple days a week, I treat myself to a couple eggs. I am learning how to cook them in the iron skillet outside on a propane stove — those things have two settings. OFF and HIGH :-)

I don't eat out much, but one of the things that I love about this lifestyle is visiting local restaurants, generally on a travel day.



On the day this picture was taken, pie was lunch. I hear that it's a complete meal when you add in the ice cream and coffee.

Unless it's a rare occasion, my practice is to make a "lunch out" yield three servings – one in the restaurant, and two meals of leftovers. I love leftovers, and I don't mind eating the same thing on consecutive days, so that works. When it works out with the travel schedule (and my travel schedules are generally very, very fluid), I like to go at downtimes. Say at 2:00 pm for lunch – the servers are usually not busy and I can typically chat them up a bit.



I like to try local favorites. I haven't tried this yet, but Montana and Idaho are crazy for huckleberries.

Do you get lonely?

Yes, sometimes I do. You had a hint to the answer when I mentioned above that I schedule my eating out times for when I can chat with the servers :-).

I am pretty comfortable being alone, but I often miss camaraderie – sharing a meal, laughing with a friend or two. It usually is most apparent at dinner time, when my camping neighbors are gathering for the family/friend meal.

Staying active on social media/texts helps me to stay connected. One of my favorite things is to text to a friend a photo of some unusual thing I am seeing in my travels, accompanied by a smart-aleck message – and bless those friends that engage in and respond to my smart-alecking ways.

Also, being out and about with two active dogs invites conversation and means that I am more likely to meet new people who are interesting and whom I would never in a million years meet otherwise. Two examples below...

At my last campground, I met a fellow camper who, in the first two minutes of our conversation, and without appearing to be at all obnoxious, described the girth of one of the body parts of his son's dog — quite graphically. WTH? There's lots of commentary to be made on that – all of which I will forgo. It was not embarrassing and was barely awkward — but WAS memorable.

And last month in Libby, Montana, a man doing his laundry in the campground laundromat shared with me that his wife of 60-some years had died in February AND the day before our chat he had hit a deer with his RV while returning from a solo trip to Maine where he had spread her ashes – doing serious damage to the RV. Even with all that, he had an incredibly optimistic outlook.

It's hard to stay too lonely when you run into these slices of life on a near-daily basis.

I will say that I think the beautiful locations that I am visiting would be richer if I traveled with someone that I love to share them with. Alternatively, though, I think I have richer experiences with the people that I meet because I am meeting them by myself. I can be fully engaged in the conversation. It's all a trade-off, ain't it?

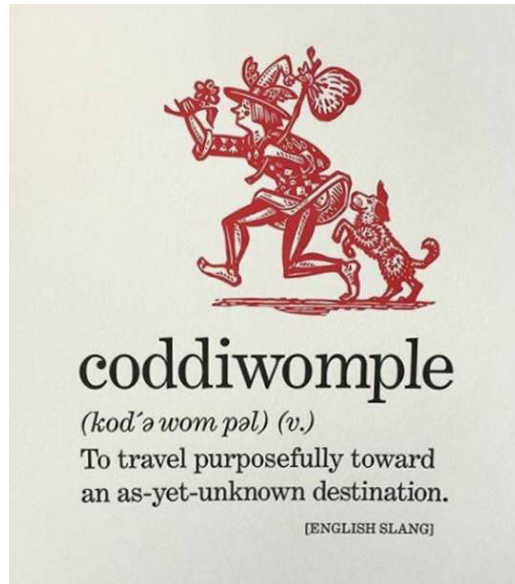


Our little house on wheels.

What does the future hold?

I really don't know. We are still having a blast in this vagabond lifestyle. As we get into our second year, we are tending to stay a little longer in each given place. That's a development that I was expecting – the first year can be kind of a frantic travel pace. Sometime in the future I would like to have a part-time home base of some sort, but I'm not sure yet what that would look like.

What I will add is how fortunate we are to be able to live this life at this time. Somebody recently asked if I would want to try to add in some international travel – like to Europe. My response was pretty swift. I love traveling over the road. There are too many locations in the USA, Canada, and Mexico for me to travel to before I consider air travel to other locations — not that I know what they are yet! :-)



I thank you all for your attention to this blog. I love to read your comments – in fact, I get a little tingle when I get an alert that there has been a comment. Please feel free to post any questions here. I'll do my best to respond to them.



"Just ONCE, can't we sleep in, Mom?"

Idaho – It’s More than Potatoes.

July 31, 2018

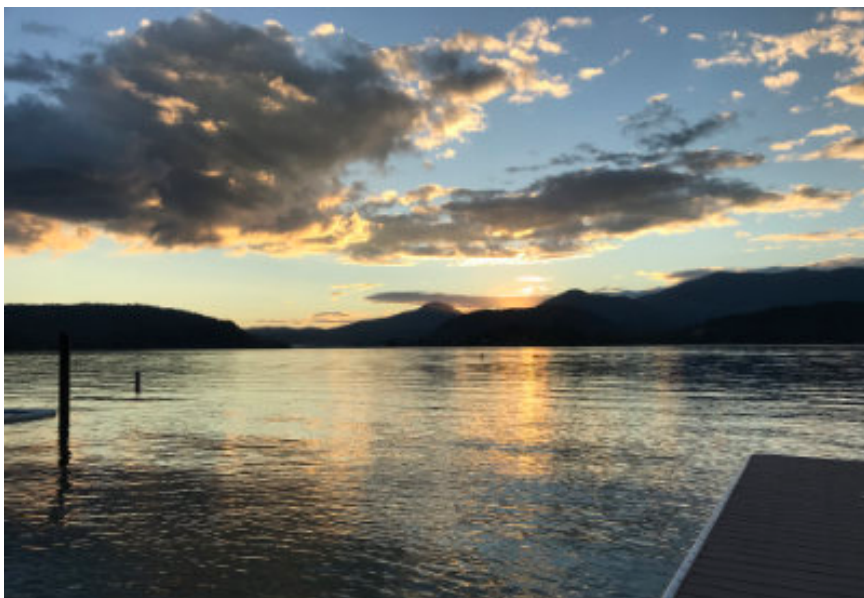
On July 1st, we crossed the state line from Montana into Idaho near Bonner’s Ferry, which is almost as far north as you can go without crossing into Canada. We spent every minute of the month of July in the panhandle of Idaho.



This trip saw a return to three locations that we especially enjoyed last year. Two weeks in Sandpoint, Idaho at the cute campground at Springy Point which sits smack dab on the shore of Lake Pend Oreille, followed by two weeks at Heyburn State Park south of Couer d’Alene, and then five nights at Winchester Lake State Park. As you can see in the map, it’s just a fraction of this beautiful state.

We’ll tell the story of July in the following pictures...

A great homecoming sunset over Lake Pend Oreille.



There's a great grocery in Sandpoint, Yoke's. Love this approach!



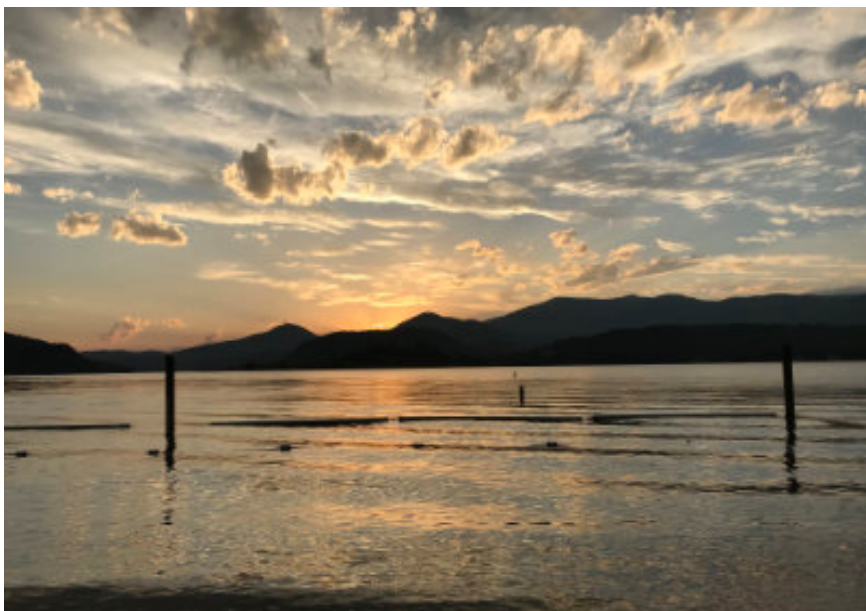
This happy guy was standing outside the high school in St. Marie's, Idaho. Note the "SM" on his belt buckle — cute, yes? :-)



Some sort of fungus — it was about 8 inches in diameter.



I cannot get enough of these sunsets — they rival what we see and love in the southwest.



I stepped out of the camper one night to just look at the sky. I saw what I thought was lights from a house on a hill across the lake, but realized it was the moon rising. And it was orange — there are no fires here, which would otherwise account for the color. Really beautiful.



I try to eat pretty healthy. But I saw these things and just couldn't resist.



Check out the description of these chips. I Googled it, and it is indeed a Canadian thing. They were magically delicious. I love Canada!

When I went back a couple days later to get another bag of chips, the shelf was bare. And there was no shelf tag — it was as if they never existed at all. If I didn't need a reason to go to Canada before, I do now :-)

WE INTERRUPT THIS BLOG POST FOR A POP QUIZ.

HOW MANY GEESE ARE IN A GAGGLE?

No, not just one!



Maybe this is closer...



I'd say THIS is a gaggle!



I do a few hours of computer work every day, between this blog and other activities I'm involved with. Most days, my office can't be beat.



There is so much more to this beautiful state that we haven't seen — the Sawtooth Mountains, for instance. More reasons to come back again. Idaho is called "The Gem State," and it's easy to see why.



So many pine trees, they deserve their own sign.

It was really nice to experience some of the same places we saw last year. There's always a thrill to experience the new, but the familiar is always good too!

Tomorrow we will leave Idaho and turn our travels westward.



Sally says, "I am going to open a franchise to capitalize on Tongue Out Tuesdays. I'll use the same business model as the trivia nights at bars — I think it'll be a big money-maker."



Trax says, "Yes, Mom, I am resting on the picnic bench. You can run and get my dinner kibble any time."

Spending Time with my Inheritance.

August 25, 2018

Two weeks ago yesterday, I drove in to the adorable airport in Redmond, Oregon. A friend from Phoenix was due to arrive for a four-day visit to Bend, Oregon, and I and the dogs picked her up.



The “Roberts” in the field name was a 1920’s era promoter of building an airfield.

It was an unseasonably hot day — sadly part of the new normal for the Northwest. I had to leave Sally and Trax in the RV with the AC running — the pavement was too hot for their paws.



There was a cool purple cow in the airport waiting area.

My friend stayed in an Airbnb in Bend, and the doggies and I were in a nearby state park. On Saturday morning, I dropped Sally and Trax off at a Rover.com sitter for two days so that we humans could do touristy things.

First stop...brunch!



Good morning, Mary!



Salmon salad — a fairly healthy choice. That trend would not last.

We used Uber and Lyft throughout the weekend. Our first stop after brunch was to a museum about 10 miles south of Bend. We knew we were in trouble when the Lyft driver mentioned that his phone mount broke, so he was going to “one-hand it.” Second warning — he was a talker. And yup, he totally missed our turn, we had to go an extra 10 miles to the next exit, double-back, and the fare was then about tripled. The driver was all beside himself with apologies and a promise that he would “take care of it.” We stepped out, not too happy. More on this later.



The High Desert Museum is located on 135 acres, and has both indoor and outdoor exhibits. It's really quite nice and I recommend a stop if you're in the area. We spent about three hours and didn't see it all.

Check it out here:

<https://www.highdesertmuseum.org/visit-bend-oregon/>

Below is one of the coolest art exhibits I've ever seen. It's called Blanket Stories: Talking Stick. That tower is made of blankets and quilts all stacked one on top of the other with no visible outer support.

The exhibit is located in the middle of an otherwise empty room — the one with the tallest ceiling in the museum.

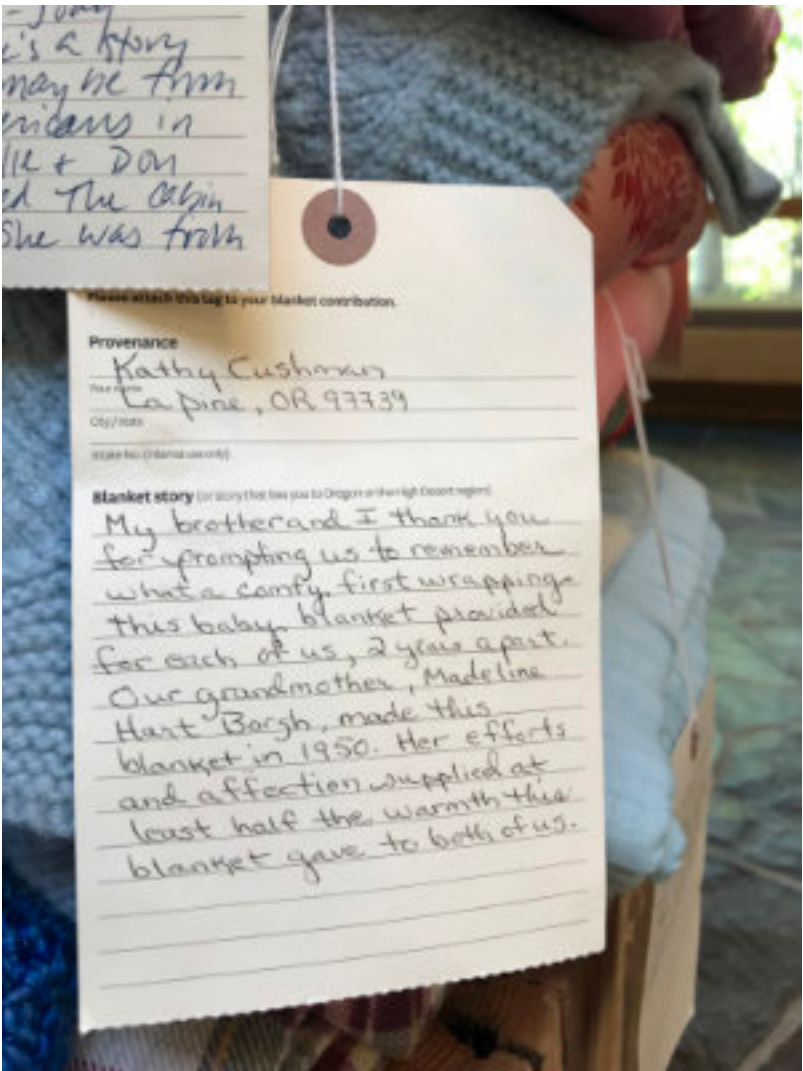


Every blanket/quilt was donated by a member of the community, and each one has a hang-tag that describes the story behind it.



The tag below reads:

My brother and I thank you for prompting us to remember what a comfort first wrapping this baby blanket provided for each of us, 2 year apart. Our grandmother, Madeline Hart Borgh, made this blanket in 1950. Her efforts and affection supplied at least half the warmth this blanket gave to both of us.



Another was donated by a woman whose aunt made the quilt out of her kimono silks after the family fled the area to avoid being detained in a Japanese internment camp in the 1940s.



I was totally fascinated by the Blanket Stories. I read every tag I could reach. Since I'm a short people (the kind you have to pick up just to say hello), most of the tags had to go unread.

The docent at the exhibit had a few interesting factoids:

The artist assembled the display in secret, and she would not reveal how it's held up. Theory is that there is a pole in the center.

Lots of people come in and try to tip it over (what the heck is wrong with people?). It sways a lot, but so far, it hasn't rained blankets.

Visitors who are touched by the exhibit share their own stories with the docent. She said that everybody has a blanket story.



I was completely mesmerized by this display — I would spend time, leave it, and return. I did that at least twice. More than once I had tears in my eyes — from reading the stories, and from sheer awe of the concept. The history. The families represented.

For more about the Blanket Stories, see <https://www.highdesertmuseum.org/blanket-stories/>

I noticed this on the way out. I have no idea what it's for. Maybe before I lived in the desert for 30 years, I knew of such things.

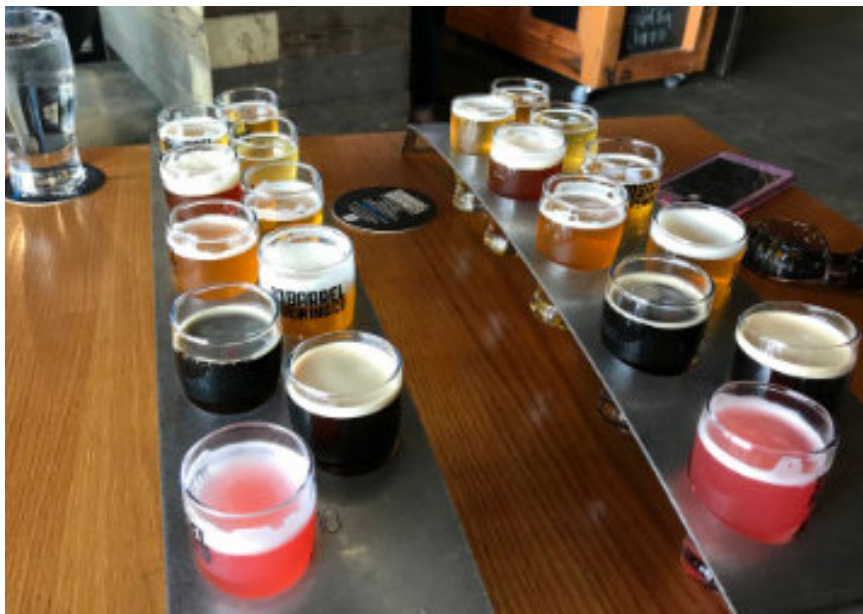


When we finished up with the museum, we hailed a Lyft driver for the return ride to town — an excellent driver. We described the pretty awful ride we had experienced earlier, and his comment was, “driving one-handed while watching his phone is illegal, and he should be fired” It’s state law in Oregon — no mobile device use while driving. We reported the incident on the app, and Lyft promptly refunded the fare for the out-of-the-way portion of our travel. And probably one Lyft driver was jobless by the end of the day. Too bad, so sad.

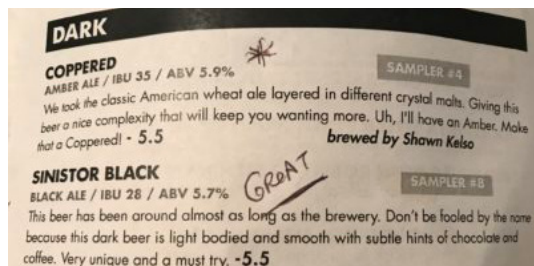
Bein’ a Lyft Sheriff can make a couple gals work up a powerful thirst. And beer is big in Bend. I found a stat that stated that there is one brewery for every 4,500 people in the town, which is the most breweries per capita in the state of Oregon.

We had our new friend, the Good Lyft Driver, drop us off at a brew pub that had been recommended by some camper neighbors I met in Idaho. The Camper Guy grew up in Bend, and said this one, 10 Barrels, is his favorite.

We each had their flight, which is ten 3-ounce beers.



We ignored the not-so-subliminal hint.



The tasting notes were well done, and the beer was quite delicious.

We were gabbing away: it took us about an hour to get this far:



We also ate something. But there are no pictures of said food, so it must not have been memorable. But I think the name of the town, Bend, comes from all the elbow-bending they do here.

The next day we stopped at Spork. The name says it all, and the menu was wonderfully eclectic — it was like ordering from a dozen different food trucks.



We split two items. The Pozole Rojo, Mexican stew with pork and roasted guajillo peppers, tomatillos, hominy, cabbage, cotija cheese, green onions, cilantro and radishes. Also the Korean Short Ribs. My friend had an Old Fashioned – I had a Mexican Coke.



INTERRUPTION:

Excuse me while I wipe the drool off my keyboard.

The Deschutes River flows right through town — lots of watersport activities.



We sat in a park on the grass and watched the river — Sally got her fill of rolling in the grass and belly rubs.



We packed a lot of fun into our four days. On Tuesday we drove the short distance to the airport and said goodbye to our friend, who was able to book a non-stop flight from Redmond to Phoenix. And then we drove off to our next stop by ourselves — happy, but just a little lonesome.

I love the life that I live — traveling with just the dogs from here to there and back again. But it is always special to be able to connect with friends – especially to become real tourists and explore someplace new to both of us.

A last note...this particular friend was originally, along with her parents and sisters, a friend of my late husband Charly. I knew them all, but not really well. After he died, she befriended me, and in the ensuing 11 years we've become quite close. I call her my inheritance.

:-)

A Peaceful Return...

October 10, 2018



This year makes the third road trip I have taken down the Oregon coast. And each time I started in the Astoria, Oregon area, which is situated where the mighty Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean. Astoria is a working port city, and per Wikipedia, was the site of the first U.S. Post Office west of the Rockies.

Jetties, common along the coast where rivers meet the sea, keep the wind and waves from pushing sand into the river mouth, and clogging up the shipping channels.

This is the South Jetty – about a mile from my campground. To the right is the Columbia River, and to the left is the Pacific Ocean.



My campground, Fort Stevens State Park, had no Verizon service, which for me means no internet. Boo. Each day I traveled to a marina where I could get online, and one day was treated to a Disney cruise ship going right by. It docked at Astoria for the day.



I recall posting last year that Fort Stevens was the only location of a Japanese attack on the continental US during WWII. There is a little museum that had some newspaper clippings describing the incident.



I spent a day at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria. I dropped Sally and Trax off at a Rover.com pet-sitter, and drove down the steepest hill I have ever been on in my camper. It must have been at 15% grade. The museum is right on the river and has tons of parking (which for an RVer is always top of mind).



The museum was pretty cool — lots of focus on the challenges presented by the meeting of the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. The area is called the Columbia Bar. Each year the ocean currents build up sandbars equivalent to 5-10 feet high. It's up the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge to remove the sand from the Bar. In a typical year, they dredge enough sand to fill 500,000 dump trucks.



The museum also features exhibits that describe the efforts on the part of the Coast Guard to rescue ships and crew that run into trouble navigating the Columbia Bar.

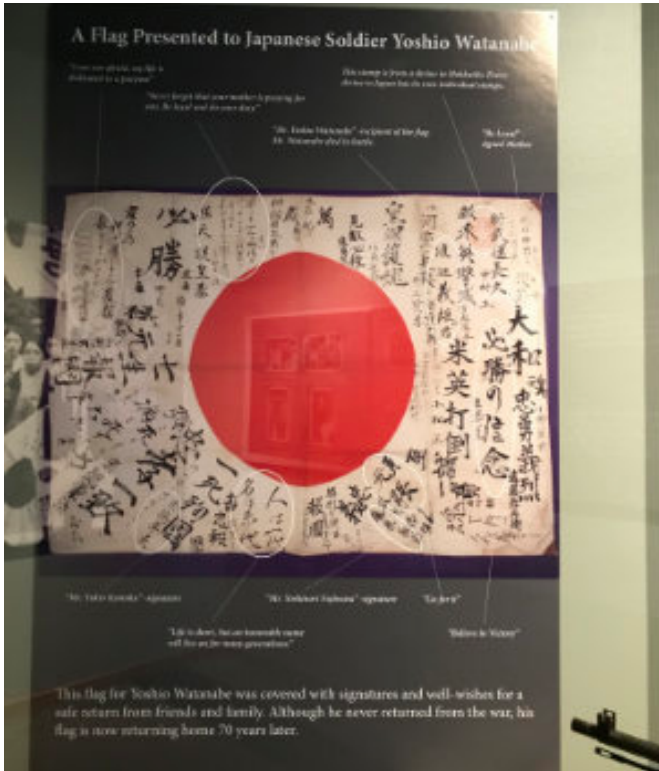


There were two exhibits that I found most unique and memorable.



First, a Japanese abalone and sea urchin fishing boat called The Saishomaru. It was swept out to sea during the 2011 tsunami in Japan, and washed ashore TWO YEARS LATER at Cape Disappointment, which is just a few miles from the museum on the Washington coast. The boat's owner was found, but he declined the offer to have the boat returned to him. Dang, if that boat could talk!!

Second, a very cool exhibit titled "A Peaceful Return" that featured Japanese flags, called Yosegaki Hinomaru. The flags, covered in signatures and messages of support by family and friends, were carried into battle by Japanese soldiers in World War II.



As part of the tragedy of war, many of the Yosegaki flags came home with returning American soldiers, who collected them from fallen Japanese as souvenirs. Many of the flags, along with other war mementos, were put away in lockers and boxes where they mostly sat for the intervening 70-odd years.



In recent years, these flags began surfacing in veterans' war memorabilia, and the American families are realizing that the flags are personal items that belong to the family of the lost Japanese soldier. A non-profit group, OBON, collects the flags from veterans, researches the family history, and arranges for flags to be returned to the family. OBON is named after the Japanese season when ancestors' spirits are honored. You can find out more about the OBON Society here: <http://obonsociety.org>.

A Peaceful Return. What a lovely title for an exhibit. Making peace one flag at a time.

Thanks for your patience as I took a blogging break. I had several campgrounds with no internet in recent weeks. And quite frankly I've been distressed, as we all are, at the negativity that we see every day in our news reports. I will admit that it's taken a little of the wind out of my sails. But there's two things I CAN do. Writing is a great outlet, so I am back to it. And I am changing my travel schedule a little bit so that I can be back in the Phoenix area on election day in November to cast my ballot in person. I'm going to dedicate my vote to peace — we certainly could use some at all levels.

Arizona, You are One Big and Beautiful But.

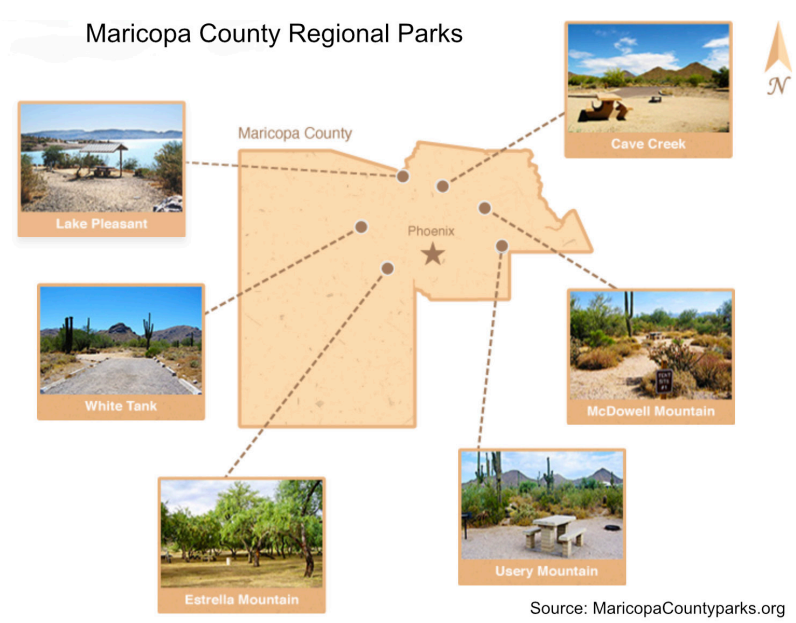
May 10, 2019



We spent the winter in Arizona. Since central Arizona has been home to me since 1986, I figured that there wasn't much to blog about. But – and this is a big but – as I was planning my leave from the state, I reflected on the beauty of Arizona. And how when I'm in Arizona in the winter, I am lucky enough to stay in some of the most beautiful parts of the state. So, Arizona, my blog has ignored you this winter, but here's a belated homage.

NOTE TO READER: If you want to just see pictures of Arizona sunsets and desert blooms, skip through the detail of the camping park immediately below. But, as the devil is in the detail, so is the interesting part. Scroll at your own peril.

Phoenix, my home city for the last 30 years, is in Maricopa County. Maricopa County is home to 6 exceptional regional parks, 5 of which have developed campgrounds. We were in Arizona since November, and spent about 5 out of those 6 months in the Maricopa County campgrounds. You can see below that they are sprinkled on the perimeter of the Phoenix metro area.



We stayed in White Tank, Cave Creek, McDowell Mountain, and Usery Mountain. Estrella doesn't offer individual campsites, and not being a boater, I'm not a fan of Lake Pleasant.

Because it's handy to much of my life, I spent much of the time in Usery Mountain Regional Park, in East Mesa near where the Loop 202 turns from its northeastern most point to head nearly due south.



So, first of all, yes, I come home in the winter and live in a campground. I think I'm lucky to be able to do so.

During my last two years of travel throughout the West, I've stayed in many beautiful areas — the facilities that Maricopa County offers in its regional parks are virtually unrivaled. The park system features hiking and biking trails, nature centers, family events, and lots more. In this blog post, I'll focus on the camping section, since that's where my home and life are. And it's my blog :-). For more info on the Maricopa County park system in general, go to maricopacountyparks.net/

This is a typical campsite. Each campsite has a place for me to hook up to electric and water. Unless, of course, I have miscalculated my reservation and am banished to the dreaded overflow. If you were marketing overflow, you'd call it cozy.



For every 30 or so campsites, there is a strategically located rest room. There is a women's side and a men's side, each with a couple toilets and showers. My camper van has a shower but it's a pain to use – it's cozy – so I use the campground showers.



The showers are pretty nice, and are cleaned every day. This one was a bonus because it had lots of hooks — that isn't always the case :-). Rarely do I see a spider. Never have I seen a snake or other critter in the rest rooms, though I never, ever stop looking.

The only downside of living in an RV is that you have to dump your tinkle and poo tanks somewhere. Each of the parks has what we call a dump station, most with a place for two RVs to dump at a time.



RULE OF THUMB: DO NOT EVER START CHATTING WITH A CAMPER WHEN HE OR SHE IS DUMPING.

Yes, I intended to yell in the above caption. A friendly nod or a hello is fine. But for most people, when they dump they want to focus on what they're doing, then get the hell out. Two weeks ago, when I was dumping (we don't call it taking a dump — that is something else), a lady and her husband pulled up in the station across from me. About two feet away. While he was doing the dump dance, she sat inside her RV and talked to me out of the open window!! She found my status as a solo female traveler novel — or maybe freakish. It was weird.

In this photo you can see the word "PHOENIX" painted on the ground with an arrow pointing to the left. This is visible from many of the sites in the campground.



The backstory from the Arizona Republic, May 30, 2015:

According to historian Jay Mark . . . a former WWII pilot was convinced some sort of directional aid was needed to help pilots find Phoenix. In 1949, Charles Merritt convinced Boy Scouts to clear brush in the Utery Mountains and arrange rocks in a 'go this way' fashion. According to Mark's story, the scouts needed more than five years to complete the 1,000-foot-long, 100-foot-high arrow with "Phoenix."

"Mark wrote that scouts occasionally maintain the arrow, perhaps for their 'Clean ridiculously huge arrow on a hill' badge."

Usery Mountain has an archery range within walking distance of the campground.



This archer guy paid no attention to me. It's fun to watch.



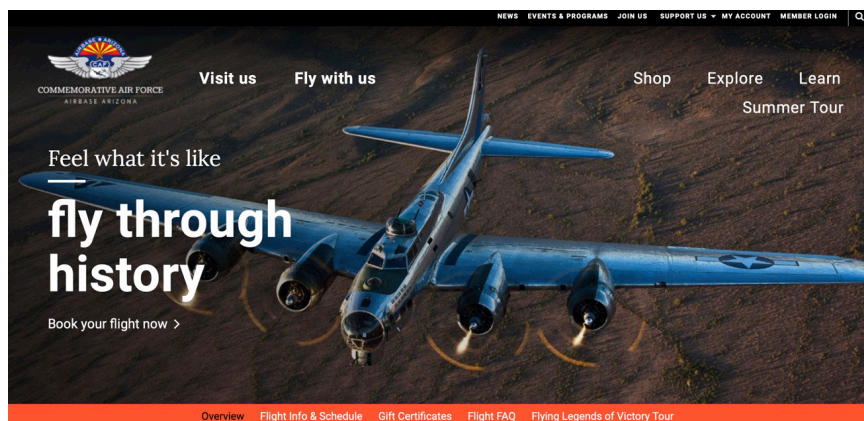
I have no idea what this sign means. I could have done a Google search on it, but sometimes it's more fun to speculate.



Usery Mountain is a few miles from Falcon Field in Mesa, where there are several vintage WWII planes. Folks can take rides in the planes, and they often fly right over the campsite.



If you want to check out more about the vintage planes (they call 'em Warbirds), check here: azcaf.org/fly-with-us/. Screenshot below for a tease.



It's thrilling to see them. Sorry for the gray photos — next year I'll wait for a bluebird sky day to take the pix :-).



Our winter was exceptionally wet this year, which meant we were treated to lots of desert blooms. I might be biased, but the sight of

the desert in bloom is one of my favorite things. It doesn't happen every year, and when it does happen, it doesn't last long. Its rarity adds to the magic.





And then, there are the sunsets. I'll shut up now and let them speak for themselves.









Bye-bye, central Arizona. It's hard to leave you, but we need to be makin' tracks for locations north. We'll see you again in November.



Trax: "Sunset, shmunset. Once her camera comes out, the belly rubs stop."

Sally: "That's true, Trax. But once the sunset time is over, and she's finished tiptoeing around the cacti getting pictures, it means it's dinner time for us doggies."

Trax: "Girl, you are ever the optimist."

Thanks for following along. We will check in again soon!



Happy Summer's End!

September 2, 2019



Labor Day weekend. A holiday weekend for many, often involving barbecues and beaches. Sometimes a time to reflect on the summer, but almost always a symbol of the start of autumn. I am guessing that even my friends in Phoenix, where the temperature as I am writing this is 107 degrees, are thinking of sweaters and boots and pumpkin-spiced things (full disclosure – I am not a fan of the latter – hate me now).

As the doggies and I look toward fall, I thought I'd take a couple blog posts to document and update our late spring and summer. In the interest of efficiency, I will execute it using captioned photos with just a smidgen* of narrative.

*A smidgen turned out to be more like novelesque. I am breaking this into two parts.

Flashback to late April — as the weather started to warm up in the lower elevations of Arizona, we headed for the north-country. That proved to be a bad idea.

We spent a couple weeks meandering around Williams and Flagstaff.



In our previous two years of late April travel, I delighted in enjoying the warm days and cool nights of the northern part of the state, while appreciating that I was avoiding the Phoenix countdown to hell. This year, not so much.



While Phoenix enjoyed a lovely, history-making cool month of May, we saw hail and sleet and rain. 23 days straight.

NOTE: For any Phoenician who reads the above section and thinks, "Serves her damn right for being so smug when she thought she escaped the first 100 degree day," you are totally correct!



This was a familiar sight. Day. After. Day. Sad doggie faces trapped inside a 99 square foot van. Wet doggies :-{.

One of our camping locations was within walking distance to a brewery. A first ever for me — get a flight of beer in the afternoon ALL BY MYSELF. It was the rain talking.



Since we were hanging around northern Arizona, we decided to take a detour to the Grand Canyon (South Rim).



We shared our campsite with these cuties.



In the 33 years I've called Arizona my home, I've been to the Grand Canyon at least a dozen times. It never disappoints.



This is the Watchtower at the East Entrance. One of my favorite locations in the park.



During my first trip to the Grand Canyon in 1987, I saw the below sign in the then-visitor center. I took a bunch of photos of it — photos that are now tucked away with thousands of others in my storage unit in Arizona. On this trip, I looked all over the visitor center – no special sign with the words of Teddy Roosevelt. Of course, in the intervening gazillion years, the visitor center has been replaced with a new one.

But my favorite sign is still in what they now call the “Park Headquarters.” A nice blend of progress and tradition.



In our current political climate, where the elected and appointed leaders of our country have no concept of preservation, words like those above ring so much more true than they did when they first impressed me in 1987.

We drove into Utah in mid-May. First stop – Kanab.



I'm not a big sweet-eater (I'm more of a salt & crunch girl), but I have adopted a new travel practice — seek out the local bakery. It's always good for an experience. Coffee + Pastry = Experience.



Our weather continued to be yucky. Sorry, weather is a theme in this post. Below is the view out our back window. Yes, that's rain. Below is a closer look at the lovely items I got to see.



For reasons too long to get into (think weather), we needed to stay in Kanab longer than planned. Because it was over the Memorial Day weekend, the manager made up a little campsite for us. The gigantic rusted dust bins and pitchforks didn't make up the most scenic campsite we've ever had, but it worked in a pinch.



Wasn't there a scene in the movie Twister when these things were swinging from the ceiling of a barn?



I am always all over the local laundromat. There is a sad/happy simplicity to that as a commentary on my life :-).

Leaving Kanab on the actual day of Memorial Day, I was stalking the reports on road conditions. I grew up driving in snow, but it's been many dozens of years.



The road condition report for this mountain pass road said, "Road Wet." Ummm, that may be adequate for the Utahan mountain road warriors. But for me, the report should have said, "ABANDON ALL HOPE, YE DESERT GIRL WHO ENTERS HERE."

We were glad to arrive safely at our destination for one night, a somewhat deserted campground in mid-Utah, sans pitchforks.



We will leave this post for now and update with Summer Part 2 in a day or two.



Check in soon!!!

Goodbye Summer! Part 2

September 3, 2019



Our travels in the last update post left off in mid-Utah in late May. Our first stop in June was in northern Utah at Bear Lake State Park. That's the place where we last year saw the Eagle family (see my post from last year on June 22).

They were still here this year, but with just one fledgling, a couple weeks or so older than we encountered them last year. As in the last post, the story here was the weather.



Last year's visit at this same week saw beach-goers swimming and kayaking. Not a chance this time.

Bear Lake is fairly large, 109 square miles, and straddles the border of Utah and Idaho. Interestingly, for a lake of its size, Bear Lake has no wind alerting system. One evening, I was chatting with some campers, and within minutes the weather turned from resembling the first photo on the next page to what is depicted in the second photo.



Calm. Almost glassy.



Approaching ferocious.

It's hard to demonstrate wind speed in a blog. Here are three attempts, each of them 100% true:

The wind was blowing so hard, I was afraid that it would bend the hinges on my camper door.

The wind was blowing so hard, Trax's pee was sideways.

The wind was blowing so hard, Sally looked up at me like I had lost my mind when we went outside in it. She is too smart to mess with sideways pee.

However, dear readers, never fear. You will not have to imagine wind speed ever again. Because I, like any self-respecting traveler to windy places would do, got THIS!

A handheld digital anemometer with a black body and orange accents. It features a large circular fan at the top and a small LCD screen displaying '00' and '30.0'. The device has several buttons on the front and a coiled cable attached to the side.

BTMETER Digital Anemometer Handheld BT-100
Wind Speed Meter Gauge, Accurately Measure
Wind Temperature Speed CFM with
MAX/MIN/AVG, Backlight LCD for Shooting,
HVAC, Drone Flying

by BTMETER

★★★★☆ 50 customer reviews | 45 answered questions

Amazon's Choice for "air flow meter"

List Price: ~~\$35.99~~
Price: **\$27.99 & FREE Shipping.** [Details & FREE Returns](#)
You Save: **\$8.00 (22%)**

Coupon ☐ Save an extra 6% when you apply this coupon. [Details](#)

Color: **BT-100**

I really did. I am such a dork.

And for those interested, below is how hail looks when it lands on a lake. I had three different days with pictures like this – mercifully, I am just posting the one.



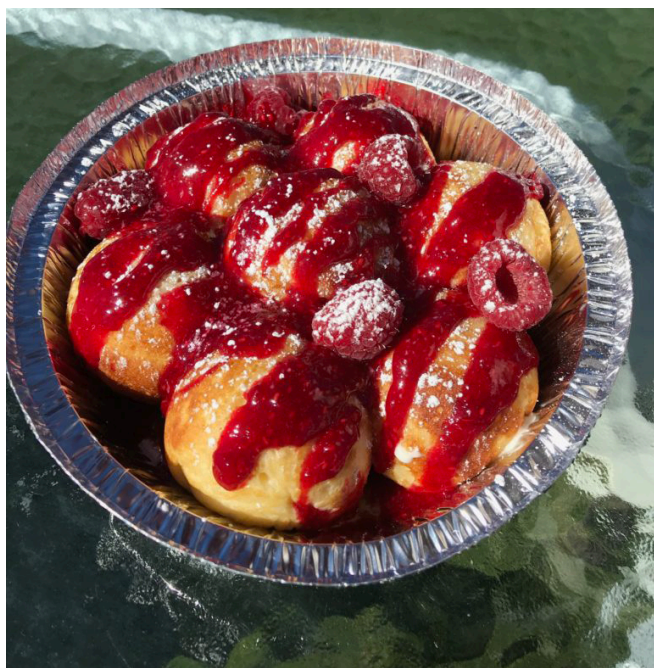
Trax: "Sally, last year at this time, we were dipping our paws in that big lake — the one that is RIGHT OUTSIDE THE WINDOW."

Sally: "I know, Trax. And naked little cherubs were bringing us mud biscuits."

Trax: "No cherubs. No nakedness. And these sweaters. What a difference a year makes."

On the 14th day, our stay at Bear Lake was up, so we were back on the road. Just for fun, I did a Google search for “pastry” on the way out of town. Oh my goodness.

The pastry in the picture is something called an ebelskiver (or Aebleskiver). I chose the Razzle Dazzle Ebelskiver, filled with cream cheese mixture with a fresh raspberry preserve drizzle & dusting of powder sugar.



From the baker’s website:

Ebelskivers are a fluffy Danish pancake ball and we are the only place that serves them in the state of Utah. I make them in all different variations so we have something for everyone from sweet to savory. This is an old recipe that came straight from Denmark from a dear friend’s mother. You will find nothing like them around here.

If you ever go there, get them. <https://rucasbearlake.com/>. Better yet, go there TO get them.

Our travels took us up through a corner of Wyoming, and into Montana. In this blog, I try to present a somewhat realistic view of our life.



"Hey everyone, come over for a picnic! We have plenty of room for all of you! Oh wait..."

Below is a good visual. The first picture is a late afternoon shot of our creekside campsite in Dillon, Montana. So lovely, peaceful. Like a postcard.



The picture below was taken from the same location, only pivoting about 90 degrees to my right.

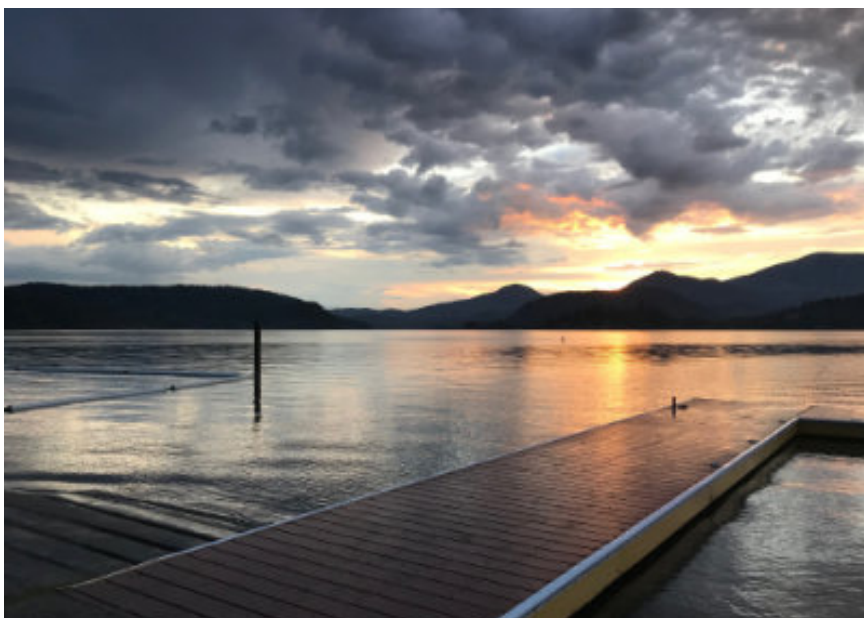


Nothing like a giant crane and farming equipment silhouetted in the sunset.

As late June and July moved along, we returned to some familiar spots, and added a couple new ones.



A favorite riverside campsite near Missoula, Montana.



Sandpoint, Idaho and Lake Pend Oreille. Still one of the favorite places discovered since I've been on this 2+ year traveling adventure.

Was fortunate to get a peek at the peak of Mt. Rainier.



“And they called it Paradise, the place to be...”



We blasted through the Olympic National Park. No small feat – it's huge.



Why they call it the rain forest.



Another lucky find. A little cafe in Port Angeles, Washington with the best seafood chowder I have ever had.



Actually, an adorable little cafe.



Introverts camping at that site.



August 1st brought us to a little town called Bandon on the southern coast of Oregon.



In September of last year, I had the idea to spend the month of August THIS year in one place. In my two full summers (and now three) on the road,

I have learned a lesson – no matter where you are, camping in August sucks. It's hot, the campgrounds are packed, and the parents and kids have a going-back-to-school-soon-gotta-pack-in-all-the-fun-we-can kind of frenzy. So I took a spot in an actual RV park in Bandon. High temperature was 74 degrees. Much of the park was interesting local residents. Walking distance to the cute harbor town. It was a good decision.



Three blocks from my RV park.

After a low-key August, this post brings us to the current time period. We are back traveling to our favorite state parks in Oregon and will keep you updated.



Summer is for ice cream. And August is part of summer. And the creamery was almost within shouting distance!





Sally says, "Trax and I have decided that the 'RV Park in Bandon' idea might have worked for HER, but not for us. We saw nary a squirrel in the entire month of August. BRING ON THE STATE PARKS."

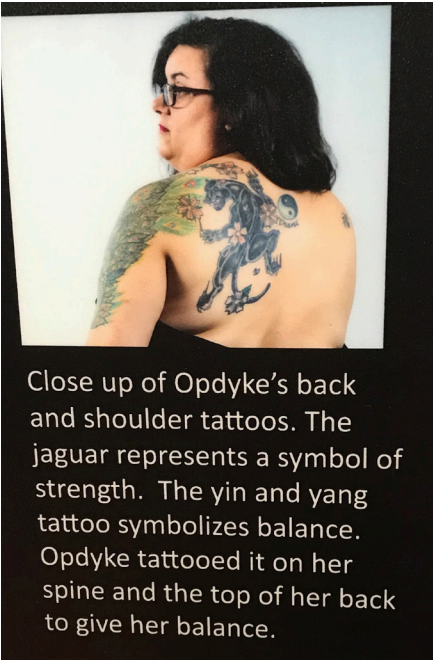
I Stumbled Upon a Cool Tribute to Veterans in Coos Bay, Oregon

November 10, 2019

This past summer, while visiting the Oregon coast, I stopped in to the Coos History Museum, in Coos Bay, OR. It was just a small place, holding a collection of displays highlighting the cultural history of the area and the south central Oregon coast. As is my custom, I blew through the museum pretty quickly until I found a pretty fine display tucked away on the second floor. I took some pictures, planning to create this posting for release for Veteran's Day.




The display is named “Vet Ink” and is a collection of about a dozen images of veterans showing their tattoos inspired by their own military service. I found it really moving. But instead of me writing about it, I’d rather let the images and words of the veterans tell the story. The full description of the display is on the last picture.




Close up of Opdyke's back and shoulder tattoos. The jaguar represents a symbol of strength. The yin and yang tattoo symbolizes balance. Opdyke tattooed it on her spine and the top of her back to give her balance.






*"The significance to me is Patriotism.
My love for the country.
I loved my service.*


*The other tatt was to honor
two of my friends that
got killed in Vietnam."*




James Bailey in dress uniform, December 1968.



Basic Training at Camp Pendleton Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. Uncle Al (left) accompanied the entire 1st Squadron to the same hometown in Warren, Ohio. Bailey is second from right. He sat with a strange place in the back of the line.



Bailey received a letter from his parents for a year or so. He was in the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Division, 1968. Packing of the chest took approximately one hour.



Bailey getting ready to be deployed at a U.S. Cavalry Division, 1968. He was in the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Division, 1968.



Jenna J. Turnipseed

ARMY ACTIVE DUTY 2001-Present Commander B Co Support Battalion 1st Special Warfare Training Group (AFCP)

"Rosie is a symbolism of America's ability to band together to defend the nation. Many people see her as a symbol of women's rights, but to me she is the representation of everyone in America willing to find a way to help, when they are called."



Working at the Forwarding Command, Fort Lee, VA, 2011.



Working at the Forwarding Command, Fort Lee, VA, 2011.



Working at the Forwarding Command, Fort Lee, VA, 2011.



The matching feet of the three Brecher brothers right after they got their tattoos. All three brothers currently serve in the US military representing the US Navy, US Coast Guard and the US Army.



Serving in the military is a family tradition for the Brecher family. Dustin Brecher, 3rd from the right, is shown at a family wedding. Brecher's wife, father, mother and two of his three brothers also serve or have served in the US Military.

For more information about the Coos History Museum, go to their website: cooshistory.org/. It appears that the Vet Ink display was just a short-term exhibit. You can learn more about it at their website: veteranink.com/.

Even more interestingly, I spent a total of about 60 minutes in the museum — 50 of those minutes were at Vet Ink.

VET INK
Tattoos Inspired by Military Service


A tattoo is a dedication to a permanent mark. The wearer of the tattoo has chosen the art based on a personal experience they want to carry with them for life. Tattoos, like the ones displayed in *Vet Ink: Tattoos Inspired by Military Service*, are exquisite examples of profound personal experiences. The greatest part of these tattoos is the fact that they invoke conversation. A soldier or veteran will probably tell you what they are for, but sometimes there are key parts they hold back. Some tattoos are now faded but still carry significance behind them just like the memories that inspired them. Tattoos can commemorate a lost friend. A set of boots with rifle and helmet with a name is held in silence, and is a living memorial to someone that gave the ultimate sacrifice. The practice of using tattoos to document a shared military experience continues today. Though tattoos are sometimes regarded in a negative light, Ink can be used as a form of healing by the artist and the wearer.

Vet Ink: Tattoos Inspired by Military Service is a venue for active duty and veterans to open up and share their stories with the community. Many hold their emotions deep inside and this exhibit is an opportunity to demonstrate that talking is sharing, and sharing is a great way to heal and help others open up about their experiences too.

Vet Ink: Tattoos Inspired by Military Service is an exhibition created to honor the men and women who serve.

Coos History Museum 1210 N Front Street, Coos Bay, OR 97420 541-756-6320 www.cooshistory.org
Aron Tyler Photography • Exhibit Design by Larry Watson WOW arts & exhibits Inc. • AV presentation by Inner Sanctum Studios

EXHIBITION SPONSORED BY
Coast Metal Works, Inc - West Coast Contractors - Oregon Pacific Bank - CB/NB Rotary Club - City of Coos Bay - K-Dock - Lions Club

 COOS HISTORY MUSEUM

Where Have We Camped?

Below are the places we've stayed. They appear in reverse chronological order. For my privacy and safety, I will not publish a location until I have moved on from the area.



- Paso Robles RV Ranch – Paso Robles, California (4 nights)
- Parked in the street in front of relative's home – Concord, California (3 nights)
- Parked in the street in front of friend's home – Richmond, California (2 nights)
- Mount Shasta KOA – Mount Shasta, California (1 night)
- Valley of the Rogue State Park – Rogue River, Oregon (4 nights)
- Harris Beach State Park – Brookings, Oregon (7 nights)
- Cape Blanco State Park – Port Orford, Oregon (2 nights)
- Humbug Mountain State Park – Port Orford, Oregon (3 nights)
- Bullard's Beach State Park — Bandon, Oregon (4 nights)
- The Mill RV Park — North Bend, Oregon (3 nights)
- Umpqua Lighthouse State Park — Reedsport, Oregon (3 nights)

- Jesse M. Honeyman Memorial State Park — Florence, Oregon (4 nights)
- South Beach Campground — Newport, Oregon (3 nights)
- Cape Perpetua Campground — Yachats, Oregon (4 nights)
- Tillicum Beach Campground — Yachats, Oregon (3 nights)
- Nehalem Bay State Park — Nehalem, Oregon (3 nights)
- Silver Falls State Park — Sublimity, Oregon (3 nights)
- Parked in the street in front of my friends' home —Beaverton, Oregon (1 night)
- Milo Mciver State Park — Sandy, Oregon (6 nights)
- Jantzen RV Park — Portland, Oregon, (1 night)
- Umatilla Marina and RV Park — Umatilla, Oregon (2 nights)
- Plymouth Park Campground, Plymouth, Washington (1 night)
- Springy Point Campground — Sandpoint, Idaho (10 nights)
- Farragut State Park — Athol, Idaho. (2 nights)
- Heyburn State Park — Plummer, Idaho (5 nights)
- Priest River Mud Hole Campground — Priest River, Idaho (3 nights)
- Priest Lake State Park, Indian Creek Unit — Coolin, Idaho (3 nights)
- Thompson Falls State Park — Thompson Falls, Montana (1 night)
- Salmon Lake State Park — Seeley Lake, Montana (2 nights)
- Fish Creek Campground — Glacier National Park, Montana (1 night)
- Whitefish Lake State Park — Whitefish, Montana (1 night)
- Woodland RV Park — Libby, Montana (1 night)
- Travel America RV Park — Sagel, Idaho (2 nights)
- Winchester State Park — Winchester, Idaho (2 nights)
- Bear Den RV Park — Grangeville, Idaho (1 night)
- Gem State RV Park — Mountain Home, Idaho (2 nights)
- Massacre Rock State Park — American Falls, Idaho (1 night)
- Box Elder National Forest Service Campground — Mantua, Utah (2 nights)

- Mt. Timpanogos National Forest Service Camground — Provo, Utah (2 nights)
- Otter Creek Reservoir — Antimony, Utah (2 nights)
- Jacob Lake National Forest Campground — Jacob Lake, Arizona (2 nights)
- Railside RV Park — Williams, Arizona (3 nights)

And for those who want the totals:

- Arizona: 10 nights
- California: 10 nights
- Idaho: 31 nights
- Montana: 6 nights
- Oregon: 56 nights
- Utah: 12 nights
- Washington: 1 night

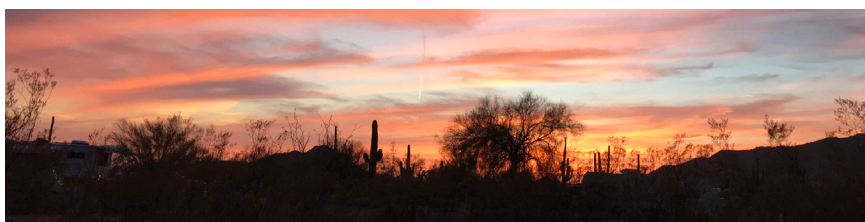
Eileen's Obituary

Eileen Marie [Carey] Prather passed away on July 11, 2025 after a long illness. She is survived by her niece, Amber Rollstin, along with her grandniece and grandnephew, and a collection of devoted long-time friends, many of whom consider her chosen family.

Born in upstate New York in 1955, Eileen attended college in Massachusetts before moving to Kentucky, where she met her husband, Charly. She eventually called Arizona her home in the late 1980s, carving out a successful career, first in marketing and later as a paralegal with a talent for legal editing. Charly passed away in 2007, and in 2017, Eileen sold her home and most of her belongings to embrace the full-time RV lifestyle that had been her dream for many years. Accompanied by her much loved dogs, Trax and Sally, she roamed the western United States, finding joy and freedom in nature's quieter corners. (She wrote about her travels at makintrax.com/)

When she first learned of her diagnosis in early 2020, Eileen and her dogs settled in Apache Junction, Arizona. True to her pragmatic nature, she faced the illness with courage and grace—defying expectations and continuing to work from home in a role she truly loved.

Eileen was preceded in death by her husband, Charly; by Charly's mother, who held a special place in her heart; and by her nephew, Christopher, whose passing deeply affected her.



Eileen will be remembered for her unshakable kindness, dry wit, and quiet strength. It is difficult to express what her absence means to those who loved her. In 2015, Eileen wrote: “Let’s not be like those old holiday lights where one missing bulb makes the whole string go dark. I believe that our loved ones would want us to keep shining brightly even in their absence.”

With immeasurable love and respect, we say goodbye. Thank you for your friendship, your laughter, and the light you shared with all of us, Eileen.

To honor Eileen’s memory, those who wish may make a donation to the pet charity she supported—Best Friends Animal Sanctuary (bestfriends.org/sanctuary).



