

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings from
Tales from the Man who would be King
Volume 09 – Dec 2017 through Nov 2018

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Introduction

When I decided to start a blog, I wrote the first three installments and let them “bake” awhile before I posted them and announced the creation of the blog. I wanted to get past the romantic aspect of dreaming something up, jumping in and doing it, and then, later, finding out it wasn't sustainable. Now, more than 11 years later, looking back, not only was I able to deliver a substantive posting each month for 132 months, I have 16 of the 24 postings for the next two years already written, and ideas for the remaining eight mapped out!

On a semi-regular basis, over a home-made [café-au-lait](#), I read an old posting, and I'm very happy to say that *I'm not embarrassed by any of them!* It surely has become a labor of love!

Over the years, a number of regular readers have suggested that I publish the postings in some sort of printed book form. Having written numerous technical books, many articles for technical journals, and a newspaper column, I am well aware of the formal publishing process, and the work involved in getting what I might consider to be a perfectly good manuscript into a shape that a publisher would accept. Regarding writing books, my financial return was probably far less than the minimum wage! Of course, I could self-publish, and, in fact, I have access to a facility to do just that at a very reasonable cost. After serious consideration and putting my ego aside, I decided that I would indeed re-publish the first 11-years-worth of installments, but in an electronic book form, [PDF](#). And I would do so, 12 installments (that is, one year's-worth) per Volume.

To make it worth having these Volumes available for downloading instead of readers simply going to the website for installments one at a time, I've added some small value to the Volumes. Here are the enhancement and/or changes I've made:

- Did some light editing: corrected spelling mistakes, improved punctuation, and tweaked some grammatical constructs
- Corrected factual errors
- Updated outdated information
- Added an occasional bit of extra relevant information as an aside
- Added *many* more links, primarily to [Wikipedia](#) and [Wiktionary](#)
- Added a few photos. [I write installments using MS Word, which easily allows me to arrange embedded photos. However, when I export the result to my blog (which is hosted by the freely available BlogEngine.NET), the result is far from pleasing. As such, after some early experimentation, I have included very few photos.]
- Added forward pointers to relevant installments that came later

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- Regarding links to other installments, links to destinations that are in the same Volume resolve to the corresponding chapter in that Volume; otherwise, they resolve to the blog web site.

Lastly, a very big “Thank You!” to my reviewers, good friends John Tew and Tom Plum, who have been with me from the beginning. Now I say “good” friends. There is a saying, “Friends help you move, but good friends help you move bodies!” I have not yet asked either to help in such a manner, but for now, I’ll give them the benefit of the doubt.

Happy reading,

Rex Jaeschke, April 2021.

1. December 2017, "Travel: Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all"

Three days after getting home from Prague, Czech Republic, it was time to leave again; however, this trip was for a vacation, to Austin, Texas, and the area to the west and south known as the Hill Country. Jenny's school system had a week off for Spring Break, and we'd decided to head south to warmer climes. It had been 20-odd years since I was last in Austin, and Jenny had never been. [Our home state of South Australia and Texas were both founded in 1836. They are sister states, and their capitals, Adelaide and Austin, are sister cities. While South Australia became a new state of Australia in 1836, Texas became an independent country after the war with Mexico. Texas joined the U.S. as a state in 1845.] I cashed in some of my Frequent Flyer miles, so the total cost of the two airline tickets was about \$10.

[Diary] It rained quite heavily in the morning, and the skies were dark; however, by lunchtime, it was very nice out, and the trees by our house were in full bloom with white and pink flowers. It was early April.

Jenny came home early from school, around 3:15 pm, just as I was winding up work for the day. We packed a few things and had a late lunch. At 5 pm, friend Cathy picked us up and drove us to Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD).

The overnight flights to Europe and non-stop flights to the west coast had departed, so the airport was very quiet. We checked-in, went through security, and were in United Airlines' Red Carpet Club in double-quick time. There, we read newspapers, snacked, and phoned friends. Our flight was due to depart at 7:05 pm, but a delay was announced until 7:20 and then again to 7:55. As it happened, there was bad weather in the northeast and our in-bound plane was delayed.

As we waited at Gate 26, I chatted with the flight crew, which was led by a young woman captain. Finally, we boarded flight UA7281, a 67-seat jet. It was a full flight. Jenny and I had aisle seats opposite each other. The young woman sitting next to me had started out in India, flown to Frankfurt, then to IAD, and, finally, to Austin. She had had a very long day! Finally, at 8:30 pm, we raced down the runway and headed west and south.

The flight took 3½ hours, during which we were served drinks. We both napped at least a little. We landed at Austin (AUS) at 11 pm, quite some distance from the terminal, so it took a while for us to taxi there. We must have been one of the last flights in for the night, as the terminal was almost closed down.

1.1 Austin

Our luggage arrived in minutes and we made our way across the street to the express car rental desks in the parking garage. The young lady there tried to "do me a favor" by upgrading me for free to a large Sports Utility Vehicle, but I knew it would be a gas guzzler, so I politely insisted on the mid-size sedan I'd reserved. She produced a bright red VW Jetta, which, although it was a little tight for one so tall, was adequate.

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We headed out to the freeway and it was a straight 20-minute run to our hotel on the northwest side of town. Having been a frequent guest with Marriott Hotels over the years, I cashed in some points and got a free room for the one night. We checked in about 11:45 pm, and got a room on the top floor. It had a full kitchen and all the comforts of home. Breakfast was included as was high-speed internet access.

As I had gone back to working part-time, I planned to travel more on personal trips. I needed to be in touch with business associates on a regular basis, but my large laptop and gear was too big and heavy to carry around on vacation, especially if I was using a backpack. So, I'd recently bought a netbook, a small computer with a 10" screen that folded into the size of a large hardback novel. It was able to run everything my business desktop could do, just at a slower pace. I christened it Mini-Me, from the Austin Powers movies. I hooked it up to the hotel system, and, voila, it worked perfectly, which meant I'd be able to send and receive email and use my internet phone. I had also recorded a number of my favorite music CDs onto it, so I had music on demand.

[Diary] *We were both awake at 7:30 am, at least an hour short of sleep. After hot showers, we went down to the front desk area to get the complimentary breakfast supplies of juice, bagels, cream cheese, blueberry and banana muffins, and energy bars. Back in our room, we ate and drank hot tea while listening to Vivaldi's "Four Seasons;" not your typical Texas breakfast, I'm sure.*

Jenny lay on the bed for a bit, and was soon fast asleep. I worked on this diary and then looked over her plans for our time in Austin, and used Mini-Me to get information from the internet and directions to our host. After an hour's sleep, Jenny awoke, and we packed and compared notes. I phoned the host family where we were to stay for the next two nights. It turned out they lived only 15 minutes from our hotel, so, after we checked out at noon, we drove to their house.

Karen was 40 and a Doctoral student in some sort of Russian studies/education field. (She spoke Russian, Czech, French, and Spanish.) John was a 55-year-old retired U.S. Air Force pilot who had flown B52 and B1B bombers. One of his hobbies was model railways. They had a daughter, Kathryn, who was seven, and two cats, both with Russian names. We spent 90 minutes getting acquainted and making a plan for the two days we were to spend with them.

Around 2 pm, Jenny and I drove to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Gardens, a project she started in the 1980s. (She was U.S. First Lady when her husband, Lyndon, was President, from 1963–1969.) It was 90 degrees F when we arrived, and we'd neglected to take sun screen. Fortunately, there was plenty of shade and water, and we took our time wandering around the exhibits. It was very interesting, and we took a walk along a trail through the brush and cactus. Quite a few flowers were in bloom, including the state flower of Texas, the bluebonnet.

[Diary] *Around 10 am, we drove south to the downtown area to the University of Texas campus. Housed there in its own building was President Lyndon Johnson's library. We started with an orientation film that was most informative. Then, for the next three hours, we wandered through the exhibits reading, listening, and watching. Although many people remember him primarily for the Vietnam War, he did a lot of good things for the country during his five years in office, which he assumed when President Kennedy was assassinated.*

From there, we drove closer to the center of the city where we visited the State Capitol. We had a tour and then wandered around on our own for some time. We saw both the house and senate chambers. I was pleasantly surprised that there was no security check to get in the building. (I did chat with a Texas State Trooper on duty there. Officially, the troopers are part of the State Department of Public Safety, and the Texas Rangers are the detectives for that branch.) On the marble floor of the Capitol under the dome were depictions of the six flags that have flown over Texas: Spain, France, Mexico, Texas as an independent country (1836–1845), the United States of America (1846–1861), the Confederate States of America (1861–1869), and, again, the United States of America. We walked across the grounds to the Visitor's Center where we looked at some interesting exhibits and chatted with one of the guides.

Late afternoon, we headed back to our hosts, stopping off to buy them a bottle of Australian wine. John BBQed chicken, and Karen made salad and hot vegetables. Karen's parents lived right next door, and they joined us for some good food and conversation. They were both retired Protestant preachers who had lived most of their lives in Wisconsin in the northern part of the mid-west.

At 7:15 pm, John joined Jenny and me on a trip downtown. About 30 years ago, major renovations were done on the Congress Street Bridge over the Colorado River. In the months that followed, Mexican free-tailed bats, which migrate to the area each season, discovered the gaps between all the concrete supports, and moved in to all those dark and dank spaces. Since then, they had become a major tourist attraction from March until September each year. It is estimated that 750,000 bats fly up from Mexico with most of them pregnant. They have one pup each, so there are more than a million when they fly south for the winter. We arrived around dusk to see the colony start to come out from under the bridge and to fly east. Each night, they consume vast quantities of insects that would otherwise eat the commercial crops in the area.

[Diary] *We had a light breakfast while chatting with John and, later, Karen. John had already taken Kathryn to school, and Karen left to teach at the university around 9 am. We packed our bags and headed off at 9:30. It had been a great visit, like the vast majority we'd had with Servas International hosts.*

1.2 Johnson City

Although the speed limit was 65 mph, I set the car on cruise control at 55, and kept in the slow lane letting the world race by. It was sunny, but quite cool, so much so, that I had the heater on. We drove west an hour before arriving in Johnson City, the place where President Johnson's ancestors settled. There, we toured a Visitor Center and watched a 30-minute video on Lady Bird Johnson.

1.3 LBJ Ranch

Thirty minutes to the west, we came to the LBJ Ranch, which was handed over to the National Park Service on the death of the President in 1973, provided they pledged not to charge admission and to keep the property a working ranch. Lady Bird lived there until her death in 2007, after which the President's "Western White House" office was opened to tours.

After a look around the visitor center, we toured a working farm that operated on the old-time principles of self-sufficiency. From there, we went on a self-guided driving tour of the ranch using the audio CD we'd borrowed from the Visitor's Center. The ranch had its own concrete airstrip. The hangar

had been converted into an orientation center. From there, we had a guided tour of the President's office. In his five years in office, he spent nearly 25% of the time working from the ranch, so senior staff, cabinet members, military advisors, and foreign dignitaries came and went on a regular basis.

1.4 Fredericksburg

From the ranch, we headed further west to the town of Fredericksburg, where we arrived late afternoon. We settled on a newly built hotel, which came with microwave, fridge, and wireless internet connection. There, we rested up, watched some TV news, and I worked on this diary.

Fredericksburg was settled by Germans in the 1840s, about the same time the German-speaking Lutherans settled South Australia. And there was still a strong German theme throughout the town. We went to a restaurant that served a number of German dishes. And although the food was good, the servings were enough for at least two meals.

[Diary] *We had a substantial breakfast in our room using the leftovers from dinner the night before, accompanied by cups of boiling hot tea. We ventured out at 11 am.*

Fredericksburg was the birthplace of U.S. Navy Admiral of the Fleet Chester Nimitz, who was a major player in the Pacific theater during WWII. As a result, a large museum complex had been built around the old Nimitz hotel his grandfather had run. And 40,000 square feet of new exhibition space was under construction. We spent three hours looking, listening, reading many of the exhibits, and touring the Japanese peace garden. One outdoor exhibit honored the U.S. Presidents who had served in the military from WWII on. From there, we went a few blocks to another part of the museum to a recreation of a battlefield on a small island in the Pacific. (Several times a year, there are re-enactments.) Our volunteer tour guide was a WWII veteran who had served in Europe.

We walked in the nice afternoon sun up and down the main street for several blocks. Back in our room, we rested up. (Being a tourist can be hard work!) I had some work to do, so I spent several hours on that.

At 7:30 pm, we went to a little restaurant, "The Buffalo Nickel," we'd discovered on a side street, and had a light meal. For me it was a bowl of fiery chili with pieces of bison meat. For Jenny, it was a burger. We both had tall glasses of lemonade. Built-in to the top of the bar were quite a lot of Buffalo Nickels, the 5-cent coin issued up until the mid-1930s. For dessert, we shared a very nice serving of bread pudding and vanilla ice cream.

[Diary] *My 5:55 am alarm woke me from a deep sleep. (Don't you just hate that when that happens?) Although I was on vacation, the sun never sets on the Microsoft Empire, and I had a 2-hour business teleconference to attend. So as not to wake Jenny, I set up my laptop in the bathroom and shut the door, then connected to the meeting by phone and video link using my computer. Then I sat (reasonably comfortably) on "the throne" while using my mouse on a mouse pad on the bottom of an up-turned trash bin. (Let's just say I've had worse improvised offices.) The meeting only ran for 1:15 hours, and I thought I was wide-awake, but, as I lay on the bed, I discovered I still had some sleep left in me, so back to bed I went until 9:30.*

We took our time packing, and I got my last email fix. We checked out at 10:45, and were soon at the Denny's restaurant a few blocks away. We ordered our food and read the national newspaper while we waited for our meal. Soon, side orders of bacon, sausage, English muffin, and biscuits and sausage gravy arrived, and we "dug in." It was a relatively light meal designed to tide us over until our early afternoon snack break.

1.5 The Town of Comfort

We headed south out of town on Highway 87 towards the town of Comfort. We had decided not to go on to San Antonio. We'd been there before to see the famous site "The Alamo," and were ready to have a rest day. We drove in the slow lane watching the countryside go by at a leisurely pace. In Comfort, we stopped by the Visitor's Center and chatted with the ladies volunteering there, and got information about places to stay and eat, and things to do. The town was a major stopping-off point for early settlers heading west, and had more than 100 buildings built before 1900. Now, it was sleepy with a lot of antique shops.

We settled on the "Meyer Bed and Breakfast" establishment high up on the bank of Cypress Creek. It was a complex of 30-odd cabins, cottages and rooms spread over several acres with swimming pool, hot tub, hammocks in the shade, picnic areas, and all kinds of gardens, and two resident cats. In the pasture next door some cattle grazed. We looked at a cottage and several separate rooms, settling on a room with an old-style metal four-poster king-size bed with a small sitting room and bathroom. The cost was \$110 plus tax, and included breakfast. Outside the office, a pair of swallows flitted about and three hummingbirds competed for sugar water at a feeder. A very red cardinal flew off as I walked up.

Jenny got comfortable in a chair on the porch in the shade while I moved to a screened-in porch on the end of our building. There, I found a table just right for my computer, and a wicker chair on which I piled cushions so I could reach the keyboard. Each time I looked up from working on this diary, I had a 270-degree view around the garden down to the creek. About all I could hear was the sound of birds calling. We had wanted a little bit of Paradise for our rest day, and we'd surely found it. And it even came with free wireless internet access. No sooner had I set up my computer than I received mail from our rental property manager regarding a major plumbing problem. The joys of home ownership and being connected while on holiday!

Late in the afternoon, we went for a walk down by the creek. A small road had been cut out going down on both sides, and a number of large stones had been placed in the water, so we could get across. Up the other side was a strange contraption that contained corn kernels, with the whole thing hanging down from tall metal poles. Underneath was a device that when turned would eject kernels out the bottom. I figured it would be activated by large animals (such as deer) using their noses. The 25 acres of land on that side of the creek also belonged to the B&B, and supported quite a few pecan trees. (Can you say, "pecan pie?")

I started a Cold-War spy novel, and soon got into that. About 7:30 pm, we drove around the town looking for somewhere to eat. There were few choices, and, finally, we stumbled on a place that looked the least likely. It was made of rusty corrugated iron sheets and odd bits of flotsam and jetsam, and was called "Guenther's Biergarten-Grill." As the waitress said, it was quirky. Anyway, the menu was adequate, and they made me some fresh-squeezed lemonade. I had a small salad and some quesadillas

(tortillas filled with cheese and hot peppers). Jenny had fried catfish and coleslaw. By the time we got back to our B&B, it was well after dusk; however, we could make out three deer grazing down by the creek.

[Diary] *It was a beautiful morning and I stopped to chat with a number of retired couples who were having a reunion over a few days stay. Some 20 deer were gathered near the corn feeder across the creek. Then, all of a sudden, I heard a mechanical noise, some corn was ejected, and a squirrel went racing down the bank. I thought the squirrel had been trying to get at the corn and had triggered the device. As it happened, it was battery powered (the feeder, not the squirrel), and at 8 am each morning, it "went off," and scared the squirrel in the process. As soon as the deer heard the noise they raced over; I counted about 30 in all.*

About 8:20 am, I went into the group dining room and made a cup of hot tea, and chatted with other guests. A buffet breakfast was served at 8:30 am, and we found a table in the sun overlooking the creek. We got chatting with a couple and invited them to join us. Rachel was Irish and James was American, and they lived in Ireland. Their three children were staying with grandparents in Texas while the parents had a holiday. Shane, the owner of the property joined us for a chat. We ate and talked until 10 am, at which time, we went to the office to extend our stay another night. Instead of one rest day, we'd have two. (Don't you just love that when that happens!)

I read a few chapters of my novel, but started to fade, so I found a spot in the shade by the creek and tried to nap. There were chirping birds of various species. That didn't work out, so I went up the hill to a large hammock. I heard the town fire siren announce 12 noon before getting 45 minutes' sleep. Then it was on to more reading and some snacking.

Around 4 pm, I set up my laptop computer on a large picnic table under a tree 25 yards from our room. From there, I worked on this diary, handled some email, and made some phone calls, reminding friends that I was holidaying in Texas and they weren't! Meanwhile, Jenny went in search of a Post Office, and to look around the shops.

The hot day quickly gave way to a cool evening as I sat on the verandah reading until late, by which time it was almost cold. After dusk, several deer ventured over to our side of the river and grazed 40 yards from where I sat.

[Diary] *It was another beautiful morning, cool and fresh. We had breakfast in a different room of the dining cottage, and there seemed to be quite a few new guests. Once again, the owner, Shane, dropped by to chat and to thank us for staying an extra night. As checkout wasn't until 11 am and we had no place to be, we took our time packing, and sat and read our novels for a while.*

We headed out of town around 10:45 am taking the back roads to the northeast in the general direction of Austin. We found a gas station on a main highway and filled up, and then went back to the local ranch roads. We stopped in a large town, Wimberly, which had a lot of artsy shops, and there we walked the streets. We also drove some distance following a very rocky creek.

Back on a ranch road, we were driving at only 40 mph and a Sheriff's Deputy came up behind us. Unfortunately, no passing was allowed for some distance, so, after a bit, I pulled over to let him and

another car pass. Instead, he pulled over behind us with his lights flashing. He was very polite and asked if we were lost. After a short conversation, he was satisfied we weren't a threat to the security of Texas, or the U.S. and he headed off to catch some real criminals.

1.6 Austin

We found a shady spot off the road in a tiny village, so we pulled up and read for a good while. Then, it was on towards Austin and the real world of freeways and traffic. After stopping at several hotels to get prices, we finished up at a Super 8. It was obviously a new facility, but I hadn't stayed in one for many years, and, back then, they were cheap and basic. We took a room there and, to our surprise, it was quite up-scale, and had a microwave, fridge, free hi-speed internet, and we were given a bag of snacks and drinks on arrival. And, the TV had a built-in video tape and disk player. Many movies were available on DVD at the front desk, all without charge.

Soon after 4 pm, we settled down to our first movie, "Charlie Wilson's War," starring Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts. Then came the WWII epic "Australia" with Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman. Both films were decent.

[Diary] *By 8:30 am, we were in the breakfast room having a decent meal that was included in the room rate. On TV, CNN blared out a constant stream of mostly bad news, something I hadn't missed for the week I'd gone without TV. By the way, the waffle maker made waffles in the shape of the state of Texas, no doubt as God intended!*

At the airport, our CRJ 67-seat jet arrived, and we boarded, on time, at 11:35 am. Flight UA7436 took off to the north and I had a nice view of the downtown area of Austin. The flight home was uneventful except for five seconds in which we hit some turbulence and the whole plane twisted violently and dropped some altitude. That certainly got everyone's attention and wishing they had listened to the earlier safety demonstration.

We touched down at IAD just after 4 pm, local time, after turning our clocks forward an hour. The skies were clear, but it was way cooler (mid-50s) and there was water on the ground from a recent shower. As we had flown some distance north of Texas, it was not surprising that spring was not quite so advanced. It took quite a while for our luggage to arrive, but, as soon as it did, we caught a taxi and headed home.

1.7 Conclusion

We thoroughly enjoyed the break, the home stay, the historical places and the civics lessons, and the unexpected stay at the B&B in Comfort. Of course, Texas is a very large state, and we'd only sampled a small piece of it.

2. January 2018, “Having a Plan B”

For many years, I've had a rule that goes, “Always have a Plan B, **even** for Plan B!” Occasionally, I get to C or D—and sometimes even to F or G—before I find success.

What we're talking about here is dealing with the unexpected, and this often comes with situations where you don't control all the variables. Basically, this pretty much means any time you leave the house. You are immediately subject to the weather, traffic, and people, all of which can be unpredictable, and in the case of people, irrational.

To be sure, you can and should plan for success (see my essay from [May 2011](#)), but variables outside your control can quickly throw a wrench in the works. I've seen many people ruin their own day and that of those around them when something doesn't go according to their plan. As yelling, screaming, and generally having a tantrum are unlikely to resolve the problem, far better that you sit down, have a piece of chocolate, breathe deeply, and count to 10. And if that doesn't work, count to 100 (then 1,000). Then come up with a Plan B.

In this essay, I'll describe some of my last-minute plan changes, many of which involve travel. I'll also mention several instances in which no alternate plan was possible; it was just a matter of accepting the situation and not worrying about things over which one has no control.

2.1 The Ticket that Was then Wasn't

In mid-1979, my wife and I left Australia for an indefinite period to work and travel. After some months of planning, we booked airline tickets from Adelaide, Australia, to Washington DC, with stops (going east) in New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. The trip would take two weeks. On May 25th, [American Airlines Flight 191](#) crashed in Chicago. What made that significant was the plane was a DC-10, the type of aircraft we were going to fly across the Pacific with Air New Zealand. Immediately, all DC-10s, worldwide, were grounded; however, we didn't realize the impact on us for a good while, by which time, the alternate routing options were gone, and we were left with tickets that could not be used.

When next we went back to our travel agent, we had no Plan B. However, sitting on a desk in the office was a globe, and as I was spinning it around, I noticed that one could get from Australia to Washington DC by going west. Yes, it was a longer trip, but at least it didn't compete with all the passengers trying to rebook flights across the Pacific. And we didn't have any need to go east anyway. By the end of that meeting, we'd pinned down a viable alternative with tickets from Adelaide to London with unlimited stopovers and up to one year to complete the trip. The rules were based on distance travelled. [We'd buy a ticket to Washington DC once we were in London.] At that time, Adelaide airport did not have international flights, so we'd planned to leave the country via Sydney. As luck would have it, if you look on a globe, the following cities are pretty much in a straight line: Sydney, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Mumbai (called Bombay at that time), Athens, Rome, Geneva, Paris, and London. We included all those on our tickets and added a side trip to Hong Kong as well, for an extra 15% cost. [En-route, we skipped Athens, and we took five weeks to get to DC.]

The result was that after months of planning and my globe spinning, we had a chance to do it all over again, factoring in all the things we'd learned thus far. And we visited many more places and took longer. So, Plan B can be just as good as Plan A—and maybe even better—if you don't obsess with Plan A.

2.2 Lost Luggage

I traveled to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, for a conference, and took my wife and son with me. As it was cold, we'd packed winter clothes. From there, we flew to San Francisco, but our luggage didn't make it, and the weather was very warm. As we'd planned a driving trip down the coast, and had no planned itinerary, there was no way our luggage could catch up with us, so we arranged to pick it up when we came back some days later. We bought a few toiletries and some socks and underwear and headed off, enjoying the weather.

On another occasion, I flew home, but my luggage didn't come out on the belt. As it happened, it was standing outside the plane in the rain and got somewhat wet, and was delivered to my house 24 hours later, after I'd already left on another trip. The challenge was to come up with a whole other case as well as toiletries and clothing in the meantime.

When I taught seminars, I carried boxes of heavy overhead transparencies and other gear, all of which fit in a large lockable attaché case. I was headed home from San Francisco and boarded the car rental bus for my terminal. I put my case upfront on a large pile of luggage. However, when I got off, my case was gone, with no clue as to where it was. (Apparently, it had fallen out the door when another passenger pulled their case out of the pile, and the driver hadn't noticed!) Minutes later, an agent from an airline other than mine arrived in her bus to find this unaccompanied, locked case lying at the curb. She saw my business card luggage label, and contacted me to tell me she had it. She then put it on a flight—at no charge to me—and sent it home to me. I got her name and address and sent her a reward.

The good news is that after two million air miles over 40-odd years, I have never lost any luggage permanently. And of those few times when my luggage has gone astray, it has almost always been on the flight home, which is nowhere near as bad as on the flight out.

Certainly, one should not put critical or valuable items in checked luggage. And in my case, I never lock my checked bags. Security personnel have a right to inspect them, so no point in having them damage the locks by gaining entry. By the way, on each trip, I put a printed copy of my flight itinerary inside my checked luggage.

2.3 Money Troubles in Uruguay and France

At the Montevideo international airport in Uruguay, I met a Dutch woman. She had no traveler's checks or cash, just a cash-machine card. Unfortunately, she couldn't get the cash machine to work, and its being entirely in Spanish didn't help, as she spoke no Spanish. As I arrived, she was in tears with no Plan B and feeling very sorry for herself after a long flight from Europe. I too failed to get money from the machine, but I did have US\$100 in \$20 bills, so I went to the airport bank. Unfortunately, the bills had been printed/cut off-center, and the bank said they looked like forgeries, and refused to

change them. I pleaded for a bit and, finally, they relented and changed \$20. With the proceeds, I bought two bus tickets to the city center, and took my newly acquired Dutch friend with me. There, I found a cheap hotel and paid for two rooms. In the main street, I found a moneychanger who happily changed the remainder of my “funny looking” bills and my friend found a cash machine that she could understand. With that, she was able to pay me back.

With the increasing proliferation of cash machines around the world, it was our first time traveling without travelers' checks. We were in [Strasbourg](#), Alsace, France. Now US telephone dials have long had letters as well as digits, and this transferred to keypads, and was in common use on cash machines all over the US. Not so in Europe, however, but there was I standing at a cash machine in France, with my card, but not knowing how to translate my alphabetic PIN to the corresponding digits on the keypad! It took me some effort to locate a business that had letters on a keypad, so I could see the letter-to-digit correspondence. [As a result, I have a letter-to-digit table stored in my pocket computer and laptop, but, of course, I've never needed it since, as international keypads now have letters as well.]

2.4 The Cancellation of a Play

A German friend met me in London, and after much discussion about the plays on offer, we bought half-price tickets for a performance of Noel Coward's "[Blithe Spirit](#)." As that started at 7:30 pm, we went off to have a leisurely supper. At 7:30, an employee of the theater announced that “Due to technical difficulties, tonight's performance is cancelled, and you can get a refund at the box office.” I grabbed my friend and raced out to get at the front of the refund line. The good news was that most plays started at 8 pm, so we had a chance to go elsewhere. The bad news was we didn't have a second choice! However, as we exited the theater, across the street was another one, with a show about which we had no real knowledge. From the brief description given to us by the usher, we bought tickets. After all, we had planned for theater that night, and theater there would be, damn it! Well, don't you know, we very much enjoyed the performance of "[Stomp](#)," which involved a percussion group using their bodies and ordinary objects to create a physical theatre performance using rhythms, acrobatics, and pantomime. [More than 10 years later, it is still playing in London.]

2.5 A Poke in the Eye with a Blunt Stick

I'd arranged a 2-week trip with business in [Copenhagen](#), Denmark, and visits with friends in that city and the island of [Fyn](#). Two weeks prior, on a Friday evening, dark spots started floating across one of my eyes. I'd recently moved to a new county and had no eye doctor, so I had to find one. Then, they were not open on weekends, the following Monday was a holiday, and the doctor didn't practice on Tuesdays, so it was Wednesday before I got to see him. He very quickly diagnosed a torn and partially detached retina, and insisted a specialist make room for me that day. Within hours of that visit, the problem was fixed with laser surgery, but I was grounded for at least two weeks. No flying for me any time soon! Of course, I had to cancel my trip and handover my meeting secretarial duties to another committee member.

Although I'd very much looked forward to seeing good friends again, that was not an option, so there was no point dwelling on what might have been. You need to “Just get over it!”

[BTW, the section title is from a sarcastic Aussie saying that goes, "That was better than a poke in the eye with a blunt stick!" which translates to "It wasn't very good at all."]

2.6 A Turn-Around in Flight

In September 2015, I departed Beijing, China, for Newark, New Jersey, and Washington DC. I was minding my own business in Business Class, watching an interesting movie, "Interstellar," waiting for my supper to be served. Well, don't you know, my time in Paradise was interrupted by an announcement from the cockpit that "Due to a mechanical problem, we are returning to PEK." In all my years of airplane travel, that had never happened to me before. We were an hour out of PEK, so it took another hour to get back. The airline company planned to dump fuel, but apparently could not get Chinese permission to do so, and we landed with near-full tanks. However, we were assured that it was not an emergency, so there was no cause for alarm.

We landed back at PEK, but not even the crew knew what would happen next, so we all stayed in our seats parked out in the midfield some distance from a terminal. Unfortunately, the crew cut the power to the audio and video system, so I didn't get to finish my movie. An hour later, ground crew arrived, and we walked down stairs to waiting buses that took us to a terminal. Assistance was sporadic and insufficient. Eventually, we found ourselves at the backside of passport control, where staff let us back in to the country and put a "Cancel" stamp over our "Departed" stamps in our passports. By the time I caught the train to the baggage area my bag was on the carousel, and soon I was out on the street at bus stop 11 where we'd been told to wait for pickup. Right in front of me was a bus with a sign UA88, the flight I'd been on and that was cancelled. I boarded it to find one other passenger there. After 20 minutes, we were the only ones, which we thought was most strange, when a bilingual passenger joined us and found out from the driver that it was a bus for the crew. Our (unmarked) passenger bus was nearby. We boarded that along with five others and soon headed out to the airport Crowne Plaza hotel.

We arrived at the hotel at 8:45 pm to find 25 fellow passengers in line ahead of us being "processed." Our passports were photocopied, and we were given a room key and details of the rescheduled flight going out at the same time the next day. I went to my room to find a very elegant setting, in which I would not ordinarily stay otherwise. I had trouble connecting to the internet and difficulty understanding the front-desk assistant who explained I needed to pay about \$20 for 1-day of connection. Bugger!

Down in the dining room, we were given a meal coupon for the evening meal, which I can assure you was *not* the beef I'd been anticipating in BusinessFirst on UA88! In fact, the offerings were pitiful and none of us were inspired to eat much at all. Of course, numerous dishes contained shellfish (to which I am allergic), and none was identified! As a number of fellow passengers came together at one table, I dubbed it the Gilligan's Island table.

Back in my room I found email from United Airlines telling me I'd been booked on the same flight the following day, but if I'd like to see my alternatives, I could do so. Knowing there was a direct flight to IAD, where I really wanted to be, I looked for that, and lo and behold, it had space available. Although I'd be home a day late, I'd arrive an hour earlier than planned and would not have a stopover. The

ironic thing is that I'd wanted to go on that direct flight both ways when I booked the ticket, but it was \$2,500 cheaper if I had a stopover in each direction, yet now I was going home on that very flight without paying extra.

2.7 A Train Strike in NW Italy

It was May and humid, and I was in Italy. I rode a train north from Rome to La Spezia, my plan being to spend time visiting the five towns of Cinque Terre and hiking the paths between them, before going south to Lucca, Pisa, and Siena. On arrival in La Spezia, I discovered that due to a workers' strike the regional train service was intermittent or non-existent, depending on one's destination. Fortunately, I had no confirmed accommodation reservations that needed to be cancelled or changed. Now I'd already changed my original plan, so was on Plan B, but as I spoke to a very helpful assistant at the tourist office, Plan C materialized.

I walked about 1 km through the town to a bus stop for a number of routes. Within five minutes, my bus arrived, and I boarded. It was crowded with standing room only; however, someone got off at the first stop and I was able to get a seat. I filled the one luggage rack with my backpack and daypack. The 11-km journey along the coast involved many tight turns and I felt some motion sickness, but managed to hold on to my lunch.

We pulled into the small town of Porto Venere where the bus route terminated. It was the end of a number of major hiking trails that came south from Cinque Terre, and given the beautiful weather, it was no surprise that the hikers were out in force. I walked 100 meters into the town where I found a friendly young policewoman who spoke passable English. She gave me some directions for the tourist office (which didn't open until 16:00) and some accommodation tips. I dropped by a nice hotel right on the waterfront, and although it wasn't too expensive, I went off in search of alternative places.

I soon found my Shangri La, the hotel Genio. It was built up a steep hillside with lots of steps and terraces that overlooked the main plaza. The friendly Russian front desk assistant, Igor, was happy to give me a very good rate for two nights if I paid cash. Breakfast on the terrace between 08:00 and 10:00 was included as was high-speed internet access at his desk. And all for €65 a night. Igor took me to see Room 6, way up the back with its own little garden under fruit trees. It was a very nicely appointed double room with en-suite bathroom, all quite modern and spacious. I accepted his offer and went down to check in. By the time I unpacked and settled in it was 15:30. A church clock chimed at 15-minute intervals.

I have to say that this unplanned diversion was one of the highlights of the trip. It also reinforces my usual style of travel, to have as much flexibility as possible. As such, I don't lock in a lot of accommodation, and I don't do plan-well-in-advance guided tours. The odds are very high that on such a tour I'd want to stay longer at some places and not at all at others, but that is not possible. [This is a major difference between being a *traveler* versus a *tourist*!]

2.8 When the INS says "Jump!"

In 2007, my wife and I applied for US citizenship, and after we were fingerprinted, we sat back and waited for our interview to be scheduled. That happened 13 months later when we received a letter

from the then INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) telling us where and when to report. Unfortunately, the date was right in the middle of a 2-week trip to Croatia and Slovenia we'd planned months before. Well, one does not negotiate such things with the INS. When they say "jump," one replies, "how high, Sir?" So, we cancelled our trip.

I am happy to report that I passed the written and oral English-language test, I was made a US citizen, and I finally got to Croatia in 2012 and again in 2016, and to Slovenia in 2016. (See my essay from April 2010, "[The Road-to-US-Citizenship](#).")

2.9 A Non-Visit to a Castle

I've been to [Prague](#), Czech Republic, numerous times, and love that city. On one visit, I decided to visit the famous [Karlštejn Castle](#), which is just a short train ride out of the city, and to take a friend with me. We walked from the station into the little village to find that this was the one day of the week the castle was closed. Don't you just hate that when that happens! The good news was that later in the week, a business colleague took us in his car for a drive around the countryside, and not only did we visit the castle, but we got into its off-limits inner sanctums, through a "friend of a friend." It was an impressive place to visit.

Sadly, this was not the first time I've shown up at a place to find it's "the closed day," and it probably won't be the last.

2.10 The Striking View from the Top

It was December, and after business in Paris, I visited Normandy. From there, I went to Avranches from where I visited [Mont Saint-Michel](#). I dropped by the tourist office to get a small map and brochure. There was no fee to enter the walled town and no English guided tours were available, so I was left to make my own plan. The many tourist shops were opening, and the patisseries were setting out their freshly baked goods. It seemed to me a good idea to find a nice warm place and a hot drink. *Auberge Saint Pierre* looked as good a restaurant as any, so I went in and in my best French ordered a large hot chocolate "si vous plait."

The narrow main path meandered up a steady incline through the little town between the shops and restaurants. However, when I got to the entrance of the famous [abbey](#) near the top a sign informed me that it was closed just for the day. And all because of a monument/museum workers strike. Don't you just hate that! Well, they say that something good comes out of everything and, in this case, I saved the €8 admission charge. I chatted with some disgruntled tourists, which included a busload of Japanese. [I'd never seen Japanese get angry, but in this case, they were! This was to be a highlight of their trip and they wouldn't be able to "come back tomorrow" as was suggested by one of the picketing workers.]

As for me, Plan B involved walking around the town's ramparts taking photos of the church on the rock above and the mudflats exposed by the low tide. At sea level, I walked several hundred meters along the causeway to get a good photo of the whole island, which was about 1 km around. Then I walked out on the mudflats near the base of the fortifications. A sign warned of [quicksand](#), so I made sure I followed the footsteps of the people ahead of me, that is, right up until the footsteps disappeared!

2.11 Let's Stop for some Fuel

There I was minding my own business on a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Washington DC, when I noticed on the large flight map on the front wall of my cabin that we were flying a figure-eight over the New England states of the US. The power grid over New York City had gone down and air traffic was stopped from flying over that corridor. However, we circled around for so long, the pilot decided to stop off at Boston to refuel. Unfortunately, no-one there was ready for us, and we were on the ground for some hours before we could continue. Some passengers were actually flying back to Boston from DC, and after they made such a fuss, they were let off the plane, but their checked luggage would have to catch up with them later. Fortunately, my ride home was arranged when I landed, so apart from being a few hours late, I was not otherwise inconvenienced.

2.12 Landing at the Wrong Airport

Washington National Airport ([DCA](#)) has a nighttime curfew. I was flying there on a delayed flight, but the pilot was told that he could not land there. Now at the time, I lived near Washington Dulles Airport, to the west, but did they divert there to make it convenient for me? No, they sent us to Baltimore Washington International, and then bused us to National and Dulles. Don't you just hate that when that happens!

2.13 Chaos in Orlando

Pan Am airlines had pretty much gone out of business, and a cruise line had taken over its operations. My wife and son and I were on a flight home from Puerto Rico, which stopped in [Orlando](#), Florida. Things were so disorganized with flights being cancelled or delayed that the passengers were about to mutiny, I kid you not. A young mother was so abusive, she was arrested, and her small children were taken into protective custody. Airport police appeared riding mountain bikes, and tried to maintain order. I knew that it was not a safe place to be and that the chance of our flight leaving soon or at all was minimal, so I quietly took my family back out to the main check-in desk. The good news was there was only one customer in front of me, but she was so obnoxious and gave the agent a hard time that once that passenger was processed, the agent needed a mental-health break, and left the counter for 15 minutes. When she returned, she was composed, I treated her nicely, she got us on a flight the next day, and we unexpectedly stayed overnight near the airport.

2.14 Moving to Utah

Early in 2017, a friend announced that she was moving to Utah. In a fit of madness, I offered to drive her and her possessions there in a rental truck. After we'd each slept on the idea for a week, we decided that it might even be fun. The most direct route would be to go north a bit through Maryland and Pennsylvania, and then west on Interstate Highway 70 (I70) through West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, and on into Utah, and then north on state highways to Park City, the location of her new home.

Despite all our planning, Mother Nature had other ideas. First, a major winter storm was forecast for the Northern Virginia area, our starting point, and another was already in progress in the Midwest, through which I70 ran. As a result, I quickly pulled together a new plan to avoid any ice and snow. Our

final route was south through Virginia, and across the country on I40 through Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. And we drove an extra 700 miles. But hey, when you are sitting in a moving van driving at 70 miles/hour, you don't have much time to check out the view. Besides, it allowed us to have a great visit to the [Arches National Park](#).

2.15 No Trains Today!

After a very pleasant week in [Alsace, France](#), my wife and I fronted up to the Strasburg train station to buy tickets to Mainz, Germany, for that morning. But, *au contraire mon ami*, that turned out to be impossible because the train workers were having a little sit-down with coffee and croissants! There would be no trains today, monsieur!

We needed a Plan B right then and there! Nearby was a car-rental counter and "Yes, perhaps we have a car available; just let me look as soon as I have finished my coffee and croissant." [The agent was marginally friendlier than the grouchy train agent had been.] Anyway, we got our car, loaded up our bags, and headed north. As we were no longer required to follow a route, we took advantage of the flexibility and stopped off to visit the [Marginot Line](#) along the way. [This never-completed fortified wall was built after WWI to stop the Germans from invading again. Unfortunately, they made an end-run through Belgium where there was no wall, tricky Devils!]

Eventually, we got to our host family in Mainz where we stayed one night instead of the two we'd planned. As we were eating breakfast the next morning, the news broke that the Gulf War invasion had started. As a result, there would be extra security around all flights by US carriers.

2.16 Conclusion

When confronted with unexpected situations, try to take advantage of them. Be open-minded. Ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that can happen if I don't get to follow my current plan?" Remember, it's the journey, not the destination. In any event, pack a novel, a deck of playing cards, and maybe some ear plugs, just in case you have to sleep overnight at an airport, bus station, or ferry terminal.

3. February 2018, "Signs of Life: Part 11"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from trips to the US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan.



An unexpected sign at the Denver, Colorado, airport, pointing to the (supposedly reinforced) toilets!



A bear-proof locker in a US National Park.

The yellow sign says, "Be bear aware. If it smells to a bear; Please, take care. Lock it up! Food Storage Required."



Of course, “A Cut Above” implies “Better than Average,” but this hairdressing salon was, in fact, upstairs!



This menu was in a restaurant some 10,000 feet (3,000+ meters) up a mountain, next to a chair lift. Personally, when it comes pizzas, I’m more familiar with “vegetarian” and “meat lovers,” but herbivore and carnivore also work.



To have a “bun in the oven” is to be pregnant. So, this store sells new and used maternity and baby clothes.

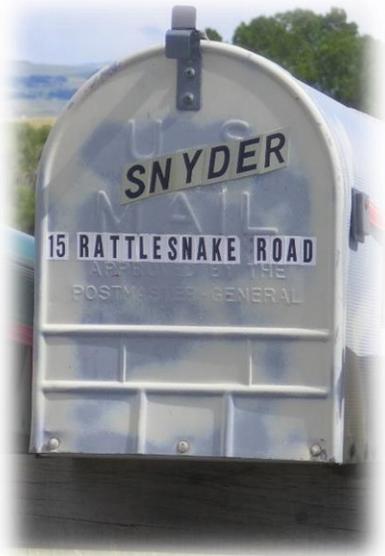


After first seeing this in a chemical toilet at a state park, I've since also seen it on an airline on an international flight. For those people used to eastern-style toilets, over which one squats, western-style toilets can be a challenge.

Click [here](#) for details of toilet-related injuries and deaths.



A typical set of mailboxes in rural Montana.



On closer inspection, we can see that the fifth mailbox from the left is for the Snyder family. I have no idea, however, if there are any rattlesnakes on their road.



While this sign doesn't seem so interesting on its own, it makes sense if you see the more common one at restaurants, that says, "No shirt, no shoes, NO SERVICE!"



Pray, Montana, is a small town on the road leading north from Yellowstone National Park to Livingston.

It turns out it was named after a man whose family name was Pray, and is not suggesting you should say your prayers, as you go through.



This country store had all the things your average teenager might want!



Now I've heard that the Koreans are hard workers, but until I saw this in the window of a restaurant in Seoul, I had no idea their days were so long!



As I walked through the neighborhoods of [Kamakura, Japan](#), I kept seeing signs like this. They tell you how high above sea level you are. Unfortunately, it's up to you to know if that's high enough in the event of a [tsunami](#)!



Interestingly, I saw this sign in Japan. As to why it was written in English remained a mystery.

4. March 2018, "Travel: Memories of the Dalmatian Coast"

My first trip to Croatia took place in 2012, when I had 10 days of "fun in the sun" along the Dalmatian Coast of the Adriatic.

4.1 Split

[Diary] After an overnight flight across the Atlantic with a change of planes in Vienna, Austria, I landed at the airport in Split (SPU), Croatia. I went through passport control, got my luggage, picked up a city map, and figured out how to get to the city by bus. At a cash machine, I coaxed out 1,600 kuna (US\$265) in 200-kuna bills. [Croatia adopted a new currency in 1994, known as the kuna, with the international symbol being HRK where HR is the abbreviation for Republika Hrvatska, the name Croats call their own country. The kuna has 100 lipa, and, according to Wikipedia, "The word kuna means marten in Croatian, since it is based on the use of marten pelts as units of value in medieval trading." So, hang on to your marten pelts as they might be worth something!]

For 30 kuna, I rode a minibus to the city; it took 30 minutes. I had no idea what to expect of the countryside, but it was not at all what I expected, if that makes sense. It was quite hot and humid with desolate rocky hills up to the Bosnian border.

I'd booked an apartment via the internet, and it was a 15-minute walk around the waterfront. It was in a quiet neighborhood. Unfortunately, the 2-D map I'd seen online didn't indicate the 45-degree slope or the need for oxygen! (Of course, I kid; I didn't need too much O₂.) Suzi, my landlord for the next three nights, got me acquainted and took 400 kuna in advance (about \$65/night). Apart from a nice, hard bed in a separate bedroom, I had a fully equipped kitchen, dining room/lounge, and bathroom. There was also a wifi connection. My private garden had a table and chairs. After dumping my gear, I went off to the local supermarket to get the usual milk, juice, canned fruit, and chocolate.

Back in my apartment, I had a long hot shower followed by a long cold one. After that, I felt almost human. I started up my netbook computer and the world promptly found me with new email. Soon after, my landlady received a phone call for me, from some Australia friends who were in Split. We arranged to meet for supper. I had several hours to kill, so I unpacked, sorted through all my travel info, and put on the A/C.

At 6:45 pm, I walked to the center and caught a taxi to the Radisson Blue Resort hotel. I met friends Robert and Dawn in an outside bar, and we moved to an outdoor table at the adjacent restaurant for a 3½-hour dinner. It had been six years since our last meeting, so we had some catching up to do. [Dawn was my 3rd-Grade teacher way back in 1961!] At 10:30 pm, we said our farewells and I took a taxi back to the center. I walked home, and after a cold drink, I crashed around 11 pm, local time, 28 hours after I'd left my house to begin my trip. It had been a tiring day with a great evening.

[Diary] I eased into the day, heading out around 1 pm. It was quite warm, and I started perspiring as soon I got out in the open sun. Split's most famous attraction is the retirement palace complex of the Roman emperor Diocletian. There, I climbed the church tower, walked the narrow alleys, and saw many dozens of restaurants and shops full of mostly touristy stuff. I spoke to several fellow travelers who gave me good advice about visiting the islands nearby. Next, I dropped by the ferry agent to get a

schedule for several trips I was considering.

I was home after three hours feeling tired, but determined to stay awake. I resuscitated myself with a snack of ham, cheese, bread, juice and milk, and potato chips. Then I planned the next day's activities as well as a roadmap for the three days after I'll leave Split. A nice breeze blew in the evening, so I sat in my private garden sipping coffee and eating some of Walkers finest shortbread cookies.

At 7:30 pm, the church bells rang out a lengthy peal. Soon after, I headed out for a very pleasant stroll around the waterfront. The outdoor restaurants and bars were doing a roaring trade. Wall-to-wall stalls sold diving trips and cruises, jewelry, religious artifacts, popcorn, grilled sweet corn, fried potatoes, and henna tattoos. A clown made balloon animals. Two men dressed in the full costume of Roman soldiers—complete with spears—were “on patrol.” A group of local seniors sang traditional songs accompanied by a guitar.

I walked down to the main ferry terminal where a number of car ferries were loading. The bus and train stations were also busy. Although I wasn't particularly hungry, the smells coming from the street vendors got to me and I found just the right place from which I rescued a large rectangular pizza “cut” (slice, that is). It was every bit as tasty as it looked. I sat and ate that at a plaza in the Palace complex while I listened to two guys playing guitars and singing.

I headed home around 9:15 pm, walking some back streets. Back in my room, I had a cold drink, got my email fix, and put the lights out around 10 o'clock. It had been a good first full day in Croatia!

4.2 Trogir

[Diary] *After breakfast in my room, I went out into another brilliant day and headed for the waterfront. My ferry departed on time, at 9:45, with half a load. The ticket was only 24 kuna (\$4). I moved upstairs into the pleasant breeze where I chatted with an Aussie now living in London. Then I took a seat at a table occupied by a retired French-Canadian couple. They were most interesting, and we chatted for much of the 1-hour trip. We made one stop along the way. We disembarked on the island of Čiovo. Quite a few Aussies were on the same boat. Nearby, a bridge crossed over to the quaint island of Trogir, my destination. [From my guidebook, “Trogir: Set on its own island, this perfectly preserved old city shimmers churches, palaces and one of Europe's most striking cathedrals, whose beauty is recognized by UNESCO.”]*

I climbed to the top of an old fortress for a great view over the islands and boat marinas. At the top, a Polish couple from Silesia asked me to take a photo of them, and we chatted for a while. I also had a lengthy chat with a Finn about Finnish history, especially the Winter War with the Soviets. I circled the island and crossed a footbridge to the mainland to wander the local market.

Back on Trogir, I found a seat in the shade by the water and had a semi-cold drink as the small boats bobbed up and down in the breeze. Every 10–15 minutes, a plane came in low overhead on its way to Split's airport. It was definitely a place for tourists. I stopped in at a real estate office to check out the price of owning an apartment, and found it quite reasonable.

I came across the main church, and paid my admission for the short tour. As I was leaving, I saw the

steps up to the bell tower, so thought I'd make the trek. Well, it certainly was hard work going up the steep pigeon poop-covered stone, and then steel, steps. As I climbed up, a young girl coming down was counting the steps in Spanish. In Spanish, I asked her where she was from, and she replied, "Venezuela!" At the top, I rested and put my heart back in my chest. The view was great. Two young Latvian women asked me to take their photo, and we chatted a bit. There was no bungee jumping! At the bottom, I needed a long rest.

Next, I meandered through the narrow alleys all of which had flagstone floors polished by hundreds of years of foot traffic. Although there were restaurants everywhere, I was looking for a small snack, and I finally stumbled on a little hole-in-the-wall place that made me a nice grilled ham and cheese sandwich smothered in mayonnaise, with lettuce and tomato. I found a seat in a cool place where I ate, people-watched, and worked on this diary.

Around 2:15 pm, I wandered back to the boat dock just in time to see the ferry arrive from Split with a new lot of tourists. We departed at 2:30, and I sat upstairs in the open chatting with a retired couple from Oxford, England. A stiff breeze blew, and the sun was behind the clouds much of the way making it very pleasant.

4.3 Hvar

[Diary] *By 9:30, I was at the ferry office where I bought a one-way ticket. Back home, I packed my gear, said goodbye to my landlady, and then walked to the waterfront to sit in the shade. Next to me was a Canadian couple from Saskatchewan. We chatted until we all joined the line for the ferry to Hvar Town, on Hvar Island.*

The trip on the huge catamaran was very smooth and I was inside in air-conditioned comfort. I sat with a young couple from England. As I disembarked, women were everywhere offering rooms for rent. I approached one and she was delighted to have me stay for two nights. Once she answered all my questions, we walked to her car and drove up to the steeper part of town to her place. She was Bosnian, married to a Croat. My room had two long single beds, a large fan, wardrobe, and fridge. A share bathroom and toilet were right next door. Everything was clean and tidy, and the windows and shutters sealed out noise and light. The total cost was 120 kuna (\$20/night), a third of what I paid in Split, but the two places were considerably different. I stripped down and walked several hundred yards to the local supermarket where I stocked up on a few things. Back in my room, I had a late lunch of wonderful black bread smothered in ham-flavored cream cheese, and Coke.

As I went to leave, I met my neighbors, two young women from Finland. I walked into town with them being careful to note how I'd find my way home again. It took less than 10 minutes, but it was all downhill, which meant I'd have to work a bit going home.

I walked along the waterfront for some distance as it wound along the coast. I also stopped and chatted with a variety of people. I booked a bus ticket to Dubrovnik for several days later. Then I found a cool place to sit and bring this diary up to date. It got quite hot, and I perspired heavily. The walk up the hill back to my room surely was hard work. And to make it even harder, I took a wrong turn and after climbing many steep steps, I discovered I was in the wrong place. My set of steps was 20 yards further along the main road. Bugger! However, all that work made the ice-cold milk taste even better.

The cold shower felt pretty good too. I spent time with a young Aussie couple staying on the floor above me, and we shared some food. I stayed in for the evening sitting in front of the fan. After some time on the internet, I read until lights out at 9:15 pm.

[Diary] *I left home around 11 am under cloudy skies, a lower temperature, and low humidity. Back in the US, it was Labor Day, the end of summer and the start of the new school year. But here in Hvar Town it was just another glorious day! People were out in force eating late breakfasts or early lunches.*

My first order of business was to buy a ferry ticket, which I did, and then to find a place to store my luggage the next day prior to my evening ferry. I ran into my Finnish neighbors who were moving on to another island.

I decided to rent a scooter, and 15 minutes later was racing away on my 50-cc charger. It was a great day for riding, and I took the new coastal road, occasionally stopping to look at things. There were many fields of grape vines and olives, and as I climbed higher, forests of pine, which gave off a pleasant smell. Inside the 1 km-long tunnel I got very cold. 30 kms later, I pulled up at the waterfront of the pretty little town of Jelsa. I got a map from the tourist office and walked around the natural harbor. At 1 o'clock, I took a seat in the shade in a nice park next to the water. Huge pinecone-laden trees towered over me.

Next stop was the neighboring town of Vrboska, a delightful place on a long, narrow inlet, which made a perfect home for the yacht club and marina. Some 200, sleek craft were tied up and bore flags or signs from Gibraltar, France, Germany, Norway, UK, and USA. A man was washing his shiny 1200-cc BMW motorcycle, and I noticed it had Norwegian license plates. He'd ridden from Oslo, using a ferry across to Germany, and he was going on to Albania. I spied a branch of my favorite bakery chain, and rescued a piping hot ham and cheese croissant. As I sat in the shade, a nice breeze rustled through the fronds of the date palms along the waterfront. I could easily imagine spending an extended period there, lying in a hammock by the water, napping, drinking café au lait, and reading.

The large town of Stari Grad was up next, but it hardly compared with the two places I'd visited earlier, so I didn't stay long. I decided to take the old road back home. Instead of having a tunnel, this one went up and over the mountain. My scooter's little rubber-band engine gallantly hauled me all the way up. The views from the top were impressive: down into steep valleys, over to the mainland, and out over numerous small islands. The weather was exactly right for riding.

I managed to locate my room by road, so stopped off for an hour to rest and to have a snack and drink, not to mention 40 winks as I sat on the patio. I headed out again for one last ride along some coastal roads before stopping at the one and only gas station in town to fill the tank. I'd done about 75 kms. I returned the scooter and while I'd ridden motorcycles over the years, a scooter is different. As I told the young women running the rental place, except for stopping, starting, and making sharp turns, I'd just about mastered it!

A few raindrops fell and sheet lightning appeared at a distance out to sea. The sun had set, and the waterfront area was bristling with activity: kids playing, families strolling with baby carriages, and people eating outdoors. A light, cool breeze blew over the plaza where I sat eating a pastry next to a street musician playing an accordion. All was right in this corner of the world.

A bit further along I came across a window through which a young man was serving hot drinks, so I treated myself to a steaming cup of chai latte. I sipped that while sitting on a bench on the waterfront right opposite some large private yachts whose passengers were enjoying dinner alfresco. As I was right under a streetlight, I started my first novel for the trip: "The Negotiator," by Frederick Forsyth. Just as I was getting into that, the lightening sheets got bigger, thunder sounded, and the wind got very strong and cold. A storm was heading my way! I thought that one thing worse than having to walk home up that steep path and steps was to do that in pouring rain. So, I headed out at a quick pace. As I made it to my long set of steps, some rain drops fell, then some more, and then even bigger ones. However, I made it home, and the rain didn't start in earnest for another 10 minutes.

[Diary] *I said farewell to my landlady and took it easy walking into town. At least it was downhill all the way. The rain had stopped, and the sun was out in force, so much so that I put on sunburn cream and removed my trouser legs. At the waterfront, I sat on a bench in the shade of a date palm and watched the world go by. Behind me, tourists chatted over late breakfasts. It was noon, and I had six hours to kill.*

After some reading, I was ready for action, but first I had to get rid of my luggage. I found just the place at a cost of 35 kuna. And as the storage facility was also a laundry, I asked about getting my clothes washed as well. While the price was a bit high, I agreed.

The previous evening, I'd ridden my scooter high above the town and found a great spot for a photo; however, by that time, the light was poor. So now, in a fit of madness, I decided to find a stone path up the steep hill to get that photo. Unfortunately, near the top, my path dead-ended in someone's garden, and I had to go back halfway down the hill. [Don't you just hate that when that happens!] I made it on my second attempt, but was perspiring heavily. That said the view was impressive.

Back at sea level, I found a shaded seat in a small park right on the waterfront. A succession of people joined me on my bench. First up was a young German couple from Halle, near Leipzig. She was studying a master's degree in linguistics and he was in medical school. Next was a couple from London, who asked many questions about President Obama and the up-coming US Presidential election. Third, was an older couple from Vienna, Austria. As they spoke no English, I had to work hard to have a conversation in German.

Around 3:30 pm, I started to think about eating, specifically, spaghetti and meatballs, so I went in search of just the right restaurant. I found it and a great waiter as well, and it had free wifi, so I checked my email while I waited for my food. The couple at the next table struck up a conversation with me; they were from the oldest town in Norway. After my pasta and custom-made milk coffee, I decided to have a small dessert. However, my order for a single scoop of vanilla ice cream was served as four scoops topped with whipped cream! I must say that it was decadent, but I suffered in silence.

At 5 o'clock, I was back in the shade reading my Cold War novel. At 5:45, I went to pick up my laundry, and found it neatly folded in a plastic bag, zipped in a compartment of my luggage. What service!

A line was forming at the ferry terminal, so I joined that soon after, chatting with the Canadian couple from Vancouver who were ahead of me. The 6:10-pm catamaran from Split pulled in right on time and people started disembarking. A rather drunk Brit staggered off and stopped to ask me, "Where am I?" I

asked him where he wanted to be. He said he'd gotten off because everyone seemed to be doing that. I told him that this stop or the next was all the same; both places had plenty of beer!

4.4 Korčula

[Diary] Exactly five minutes after the ferry arrived, we were off to the island of Korčula, to the town of the same name. I found a spare seat with table, upstairs, facing forward. No sooner had I sat down, but I had visitors: Ollie and Phoebe from England, with whom I'd sat on the ferry over from Split two days earlier. It was a very smooth ride, and we made a stop along the way. I read my travel book to make a rough plan for my four days/nights based in Dubrovnik. Then it was back to my novel, which was so interesting I had to concentrate. Fortunately, the complete cast of characters was listed in the front matter, so I could remind myself just who was who!

We arrived in Korčula on schedule by which time it was quite dark. A whole host of young and old women were waiting there with "room for rent" signs in four languages. I homed in on a little lady near the back, who turned out to be 69 years old. She had a double room with bath three minutes away, with fan, but no fridge. We haggled a bit before I accepted. Well, we hadn't gone 40 steps and we were at her front door. Unfortunately, my room was on the top floor, which was just in the clouds! The wooden stairs were very steep and were made for leprechauns; I kid you not! The bathroom was very nice, and the room was decent with a queen-size double bed. There was even a wide-screen TV. The window looked right over the dock with my ferry parked 50 yards away. There were bars and restaurants all around with loud music blaring. And there were no curtains to keep out the light. Hmm. But then I looked out the window and found heavy shutters. When I closed them, and sealed the inner window, it was dark and rather quiet. And with the fan on all night, I wouldn't hear the street noise. So as Shakespeare wrote, "All's well that ends well."

After my orientation, I paid my rent and asked about buying juice and milk. In response, my landlady walked me to the supermarket. I took careful note of all the turns we made and the alleys we passed through, so when she left me on my own, I could find my way back. I managed that without any wrong moves. Back in my room, I freshened up and had a big drink of milk. And since I had no fridge and the temperature in my room was 86 degrees F, I drank the whole liter.

[Korčula claims to be the home town of Marco Polo. However, this is disputed by several other cities around the Adriatic.]

[Diary] Just before 9 o'clock, an agent led us down to the waterfront where we boarded a small, covered boat. We crossed over the channel to the mainland where our driver, complete in pink shirt and pink/grey tie, met us in his nice 18-seat Mercedes bus. We had a full load and headed out for Dubrovnik in light rain. The skies were heavy and quite dark. The road was narrow and followed the coast before climbing high into the mountains. The only agriculture was small patches of vineyards near towns. Winemaking seemed to be the only industry. The driver played some nice, local, easy listening music.

4.5 Dubrovnik

Due to the heavy rain, it took us nearly three hours, but by the time we arrived, the weather had cleared, and we drove in to the old town, which looked exactly like the classic picture in all guidebooks.

The final stop was at the travel agency's office where a young man was happy to answer all my questions. He said that as it was still high season, accommodation was tight, but he knew a woman who just had a cancellation, so she might have a room for me for four nights. He checked with her, and she did, and it was 25 paces up the street and around the corner. It was a full apartment with queen-size bed, lounge area, kitchen, bathroom, A/C, TV, and fridge, but no wifi. And the view out two windows was right over the entrance in the fortified walls of the old town, 200 yards away. After she gave me my key, she said to pay her later that day or the next.

I headed off to the supermarket nearby and laid in the essentials, and coerced 2,500 kuna from a cash machine. Back home, I paid my rent for four days and put the kettle on to boil. Brunch consisted of black bread, cheese, cucumber, and Earl Grey tea. It was pleasant out and a light breeze came in all my windows.

After several attempts to nap, I succeeded and slept for two hours after which I had a late afternoon tea. Around 5 pm, I walked across the street and through one of the entrances to the massive city walls. Boy were they impressive! At up to 70 feet high and 20 feet thick, my guess is they were built with nonunion labor. After a short walk, I found a seat in a sunny place and settled into a long read of my novel, occasionally watching the tourists walk by and the tour boat traffic at the waterfront. When it was too dark to read, I had a small excursion around some plazas and alleyways. I came across a young man playing classical guitar, so I stopped to listen. It was a glorious evening outdoors.

Although I was not all that hungry, I came across an interesting place that tempted me in with the smell of its pizza. I sat and had a slice and a cup of milk coffee. The people at the next table were from the Washington DC area. Afterwards, I had a lengthy chat with the young cashier about her dream to travel and sing. Next up was an ensemble with sax, bass, and guitar, which played a long set of tunes that Louis Armstrong made famous, accompanied by an appropriately gravel-voiced singer.

Just before 9 pm, I was looking at the program of a string quartet concert that was about to begin when I got talking to a young Aussie couple, Chris and Sam, and we sat at the big fountain. They had quit their jobs, gotten rid of much of their stuff, and were traveling for an open-ended time. Although they were 30 years younger than me, we connected on so many levels that before we knew it, nearly three hours had passed. On the walk back to my apartment, I stopped off to listen to a sax player. Back home, I closed the windows and put on the A/C. Lights out at 12:30 am. My first impression of Dubrovnik old town was extremely favorable.

4.6 Mostar, Bosnia

[Diary] I left my place at 7 o'clock for the short walk to a hotel where a tour bus would pick me up. Several others joined me there. At 7:30, we left to pick up others. The guide spoke in two languages: English and Flemish. (She was from Flanders, and had moved to Croatia in 1994. She'd married a local.) It rained lightly as we drove north up the coast.

The neighboring country Bosnia and Herzegovina has a 12 km-wide stretch of land that runs down to the sea, separating the Dubrovnik province from the rest of Croatia. We crossed the border and then after a pit stop, we crossed back into Croatia. At the River Neretva we turned north passing through a former mosquito-infested swamp that the Austro-Hungarians had drained 100 years ago. Now, the

area was a 1,000-acre agricultural basin where citrus (primarily mandarins), stone fruits, melons, and salad vegetables are grown. We followed the river to the Bosnian border where our passports were scanned, and a border policeman came on board to look us over. We made a short stop in a village with a mosque and tourist trinket stalls. It was nearly five hours since I left my place, and I was fading.

Right around noon, we rolled into Mostar, the focus of the trip. A local guide took us English speakers on a walking tour. The first stop was the Turkish House, an authentic residence of a wealthy family from the Ottoman period. After that, we stopped by one of many parks that were turned into cemeteries to bury the 5,000 dead from the 1990's war. (A main street divided the warring factions and there was heavy house-to-house fighting.) Next, we walked down steep cobblestone steps through the bazaar and there before us was the famous bridge whose destruction in the war made headlines around the world. I browsed around a few shops and galleries before crossing the bridge and sitting in the shade on a cool stonewall to write these notes. A PA system on one of the mosques sounded the call to prayers. I found a path down to the river and took some photos of the bridge from below. At the tourist office, I chatted with a young woman whose English was excellent. Then I rescued some chocolate milk from an assistant in a small shop and asked her if I might buy a set of Bosnian coins. She obliged me. (All merchants in town accepted Croatian kuna and euros, so ordinarily day-trippers would never get any local currency. The currency is the convertible mark, BAM, which is divided into 100 fenings. Both names come from the corresponding German money.) I had an hour before my bus left, so I found a shady spot and read my novel.

We departed on time at 3:45 and reversed the process coming home except that we had fewer stops. I tried to sleep, but my seat didn't recline much, and my legs were just too darned long! The late afternoon sun streamed in my window and I watched the coastline all the way home. The weather had held the whole time we were outside the bus. I was home 12 hours after my bus had departed, and I was very tired.

4.7 Dubrovnik

[Diary] I made a substantial snack and cup of boiling tea, and sat in the breeze at the window overlooking the city gate nearby. Once I got done with that, a long shower breathed a bit of life back into me. As I brought this diary up to date, a sax player played some mournful tunes down on the gate bridge. However, he was interrupted by drums when a procession of soldiers dressed in ceremonial costume, complete with pikes, marched across the bridge and into the city. As soon as they passed, he resumed. Lights out at 9:30.

[Diary] By the time I ventured out, it was quite hot, so I kept to the shade. Inside the old city walls, it was wall-to-wall tourists (pun intended). I set out to make a complete trip around the inside of the wall, which I estimated was 1–2 miles around. As I was too cheap to pay to go out on top of the walls, I looked for back alleys that got me as close to the wall as possible. No sooner had I started that I was faced with 100+ steep steps, and I was perspiring before I was halfway up. I was going to need a vacation from this vacation! However, it got me to a great vantage point from which I could take some photos out over the orange-tile rooftops. Behind me was the small mountain from which the Serbs rained down artillery shells back in the 1990's. One can clearly see where they hit given the new, replacement roof tiles scattered among the old. Several thousand steep steps later, I'd gone full circle and was back at the bottom on the main street, Strodun. I found an internet place and setup my

netbook. I'd been offline more than 72 hours, and 60+ emails were waiting for me, most of which actually needed reading. A quick scan showed that only a few needed serious consideration right then, so I took care of those before disconnecting, as I was paying by the minute.

After three hours, I headed back to my place leaving the throngs to their shopping, eating, and drinking. And, don't you know, it felt like snack time, so I made a small meal and ate while I read more of the Economist issue I'd brought along for just such occasions. After that, I sat on my comfortable lounge by the window where the cool breeze swirled around me, and I read more of my novel. Next, I rescued a bowl of peaches in syrup from my fridge and smothered it with a container of vanilla pudding. After all, I had been good all day, so a treat was in order. By that time, the sun was down, the lights were on, and the tour boats in the harbor below my window were tied up for the night.

I went back into the old city and strolled about people-watching. I finished up at the plaza I'd discovered the first night and found the same guitar player strumming away, so I listened a while. Then it was off back home to read until lights out around 11 pm.

[Diary] *Mid-afternoon, I packed my bag and strolled into the old town to the internet café. There I sent a bunch of email and received another pile. I stopped by my favorite eating-place for a snack and a chat. A young Chinese couple from Hong Kong asked me to take some photos of them, and we chatted for a bit. Several weddings took place in the church off the main plaza. On my way home, I spoke to the driver of a taxi at the taxi stand about taking me to the airport very early the next morning. He said he'd be delighted to take me, and set an alarm on his mobile phone call for the appointed time.*

[Diary] *Needless to say, my 4-am alarm came all too soon. I ate some fruit and finished off my milk. I was down in the street by 4:20, and it was a very nice morning, weather-wise. I walked 200 yards to the taxi stand where I'd negotiated the previous evening to be picked up at 4:30 am. There were many more people waiting for taxis than there were taxis, most of them going home from partying all night. My cab arrived 10 minutes late, and it was a different car and driver than the one I'd booked. C'est la vie! The driver was about to go off shift after a long night, so he was not at his most alert. However, that didn't stop him from speeding, tailgating, or using his mobile phone the whole way to the airport! (It definitely reminded me of Toad's Wild Ride from the book, Wind in the Willows.)*

Dubrovnik international airport (DBV) looked new. Although the line for the flight was long, it moved steadily and after 20 minutes, I was checked in and through security. I stopped off in the duty-free shop to see how much Milka chocolate with hazelnuts I could buy with my leftover Croatian money. All the prices were in euros, so it took me a bit to figure out especially as I wasn't yet firing on all cylinders. I got five extra-large blocks, which left me with a dollar's worth of change. The business lounge was small, but had the basics and it was comfortable. The lights were turned very low. From the snack bar, I replenished my emergency rations with chocolate, peanuts, and potato chips.

Croatia Airlines Flight OU418 boarded just after 6:30 am as day broke. I was first across the tarmac and up the stairs onto the A320. My window seat 11A was decent. After takeoff, I scanned the impressive airline magazine. A breakfast snack was served, which I washed down with some coke. I managed a short nap en route to Frankfurt, Germany.

4.8 Conclusion

Although I saw only a small part of Croatia, I was very impressed, and vowed to return. [I did in 2016, when I spent 12 days, starting in Zagreb and ending on the Istrian Peninsular.]

Bucket List: To rent an apartment in Dubrovnik for a couple of weeks, and to visit neighboring Montenegro and Kosovo from there.

5. April 2018, “These United States”

I stole the title of this essay from the very popular and long-running Readers' Digest column, “Life in these United States.” I stole the format from the USA Today newspaper, in which each issue has a 1-page snapshot of news from each state, and sometimes a territory. [To paraphrase Picasso, “Great men steal; lesser men borrow!”]

In my 38 years of living in the US, I've visited 48 of the 50 states, and three of the six inhabited territories (in which I include Washington DC, although that might properly be called a Federal District instead). For an overview/map of the states and territories of the US, click [here](#) and [here](#).

For each state, I'll write a few notes based on my knowledge and/or experience. The commentary will be brief, whimsical, possibly biased, and/or incomplete! How's that for “truth in advertising?”

5.1 Alabama

I spent a few hours there one Christmas on a driving trip from New Orleans going east along the Gulf coast. They claim to have a top-notch college football team, the Crimson Tide. It's very likely that I knew of the popular song, “Oh! Susanna” even before I moved to the US. Although it contains the line, “I come from Alabama with my Banjo on my knee,” to this day, I have not met anyone coming from Alabama with a banjo on their knee! BTW, the country music band Alabama does indeed come from that state. Think Mobile, Birmingham, Montgomery, George Wallace, and Hank Williams.

5.2 Alaska

It's by far the biggest state (even bigger than Texas, if you can believe that!) and it has the smallest population. If you want to see pristine country, tundra, glaciers, snow-capped mountains, and lots of wildlife (some of which can kill you), go look. My first experience in a motor home was from Anchorage to Fairbanks via Mount Denali, and across Prince William Sound to Whittier on an 8-hour ferry ride. I got to stand on a glacier. This was some six months after the infamous Exxon Valdez oil spill. A huge earthquake occurred on Good Friday in 1964, causing damage along the coast and in Anchorage, and a subsequent tsunami went all the way down the west coast of the US to Antarctica. Oh, and then there is former governor, Sarah Palin, who ran as a Vice-Presidential candidate!

5.3 Arizona

Very hot, often very flat, and part of the Wild West; think Tombstone and its Boot Hill. I very much enjoyed a visit to Biosphere 2 near Tucson (a city whose pronunciation I never quite correlated to its spelling; just drop the “c”). The Titan Missile Museum near Green Valley is worth a visit. It's not every day you get to go into a decommissioned underground missile silo from the Cold War. Back in WWII, US Navy battleships were named for states. The Arizona was sunk during the attack on Pearl Harbor, and still lies in full view under the water at the memorial built over it in Hawaii.

5.4 Arkansas

Looks like it rhymes with “Kansas”, but the “sas” is pronounced “saw” or even “sawa,” if you care to have extra syllables in your words (as in shi-i-i-i-i-t). It was my 48th state to visit when I stayed overnight and then drove across it in a moving van in half a day. I saw rice farming, billboard

advertising, heard about all the chicken farms and processing plants, and I met several women who had *not* been intimate with [Bill Clinton](#) when he was state Attorney General or Governor! The world headquarters of the [Walmart](#) chain of stores is in Bentonville.

5.5 [California](#)

Well, it's really more than a state; in fact, it's a whole other planet! I seem to recall that if it were an independent country, it would have the 5th largest economy in the world. Think [Hollywood](#); [Disneyland](#); earthquakes; fires; droughts; the universities [Berkeley](#), [Stanford](#), and [UCLA](#); [Silicon Valley](#), and the former Governor, [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), who will *not* be back! [Ronald Reagan](#) was also Governor. The state capital, Sacramento, is worth a visit, as is the small museum at [Folsom Prison](#). Because of the proliferation of the right kind of eucalypt trees, numerous zoos there can keep [koala bears](#). The beautiful city of San Diego is about the same latitude north as my home town in Australia is south, and I just love that climate; none of that hat, gloves, coat, and cold crap!

5.6 [Colorado](#)

Has lots of very tall mountains, forest, snow, and winter sports. The capital, [Denver](#), is called the Mile-High City, 'cos it is! The state has a perfectly rectangular shape. The town of [Pueblo](#) (Spanish for *town*) is a common address for mail-order product (and other) post-office boxes. In Spanish, *colorado* means red/muddy, as was the Colorado River.

5.7 [Connecticut](#)

Drop the second "c" and you have the correct pronunciation. Of course, part of it is really the eastern suburbs of New York City. The capital, [Hartford](#) is the world capital of the insurance industry. And just in case you are in the market for a new or used submarine, the [Electric Boat Corporation](#) in [Groton](#) is the place to shop.

5.8 [Delaware](#)

Known as the First State, as it was the first of the 13 original states to ratify the U.S. Constitution, in 1787. Unfortunately, the [Dover Air Force Base](#) is well known as the place to which military dead often return to the US. There are far more chickens in the state than people. A popular beach spot (for both chickens and people).

5.9 [Florida](#)

In Spanish, *florida* means "place where old people go to die, before, during, or after, a hurricane!" Actually, it means *flowery*. Think [Disney World](#), [Kennedy Space Center](#), the [Florida Keys](#), the [Everglades](#), hurricanes, Cuban immigrants, [St. Augustine](#), [Miami Vice](#), and very high humidity in summer.

5.10 [Georgia](#)

Think peaches, [Atlanta](#), peaches, [Ted Turner](#), peaches, [Jimmy Carter](#) (his brother, [Billy](#), and mother, [Miss Lillian](#)), peanuts, [1996 Summer Olympics](#), peaches, [Masters golf tournament in Augusta](#), and one of my all-time favorite songs sung by Ray Charles, "[Georgia on My Mind](#)".

5.11 Hawaii

A very valuable piece of land that we “stole” from the natives. I’ve visited the main island of Oahu, Maui, and Hawaii (known colloquially as *the Big Island*). Think Honolulu, surfing, Pearl Harbor, active volcanoes, huge dormant volcanos, the Elvis Presley movie Blue Hawaii (complete with English actress Angela Lansbury as Elvis’ overbearing mother, and speaking with a southern accent), a great place to go in winter, the Parker Ranch, Captain James Cook’s death place, and the Kona triathlon Ironman World Championship. Home to my good friend Tom (and his wife Lana), long-time reviewer of the essays in this blog.

5.12 Idaho

Think mountains, potatoes, forests, potatoes, paper companies, potatoes, wild rivers (as in the Snake), a town called Moscow, and Craters of the Moon National Monument. Oh, and potatoes!

5.13 Illinois

Although its nickname is “Land of Lincoln,” ‘cos Honest Abe practiced law in the capital, Springfield, he really was born in Kentucky. The biggest city is Chicago, which was my first home in the US, for a year from late 1979. Think Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox baseball teams; Wrigley chewing gum; Mayor Richard J. Daley; the 1968 Democratic Presidential Convention; prohibition, Al Capone, and Elliot Ness; International Harvester; Lake Michigan; O’Hare International Airport; the movie The Blues Brothers; and home of the future Barack Obama Presidential Center.

5.14 Indiana

Think Indianapolis 500, Notre Dame University, and a town called Santa Clause.

5.15 Iowa

The name of its capital, Des Moines, is French for *The Monks*. This state is the first to hold caucuses during each presidential primary cycle. Think farming: corn, pigs, and soy beans.

5.16 Kansas

Think Wild West, as in Wichita and Dodge City. According to Wikipedia, “In response to demands of Methodists and other evangelical Protestants, in 1881 Kansas became the first U.S. state to adopt a constitutional amendment prohibiting all alcoholic beverages, which was only repealed in 1948.” Home to Leavenworth military prison. And no, the famous Kansas City is not in Kansas; it’s in Missouri. Go figure!

5.17 Kentucky

Think bourbon whiskey, KFC (Colonel Sanders was a Kentucky Colonel), Louisville Slugger baseball bats, Kentucky bluegrass, moonshine, coal, bluegrass music, and tobacco.

5.18 Louisiana

The name of the capital, Baton Rouge, is French for *red stick*. Think New Orleans; Hurricane Katrina; Mississippi River; Cajun people, food, and music; Dixie Land jazz; the Battle of New Orleans and Johnny Horton's hit record of the same name.

5.19 Maine

"The rain in Maine stays mainly in the plain." No, wait a minute, that's Spain, *not* Maine. Over a 15-year period, I made some 75–100 trips to Millinocket, a paper-company town in the center of the state near the end of the Appalachian Trail. I even climbed to the top of the mile-high Baxter Peak along the knife-edge. Think lobster, moose, potatoes, rugged coastlines, forests, hunting, and Mount Desert Island. One informed local told me that when on the top of a mountain, you could see so far, it took two of you to look! While long-term residents are properly called *Mainers*, the term *Maniacs* is also used.

5.20 Maryland

I lived there briefly, twice, both times in suburban Washington DC. I **love** the state's flag. Think Baltimore and its Orioles baseball team, Chesapeake Bay and crabs, Andrews Airforce Base (home to Air Force One), Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and a town called Accident, a resident of which is called an "Accidental."

5.21 Massachusetts

I've flown in and out of there more than 200 times, for two reasons: to service a computer company consulting client, and to change planes to Bangor, Maine, to service another client. Think Boston, proper English, the Kennedys, Harvard, MIT, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Woods Hole, The Mayflower, witches of Salem, Paul Revere, and the Bee Gees song, "(The Lights Went Out In) Massachusetts."

5.22 Michigan

The state whose main part's shape is a glove, and that has a second non-adjointing part called the UP (Upper Peninsular), whose residents are known as yoopers! I canoed the Au Sable River and snowskied at Traverse City. Think Detroit (which, when pronounced in the original French, is *day-twa*, which sounds far more sophisticated) and the US auto industry; Henry Ford Museum; Greenfield Village; Great Lakes Huron, Michigan, and Superior; Kellogg's Cornflakes; and Isle Royal National Park.

5.23 Minnesota

Think the 3M company; Minneapolis/St. Paul; source of the mighty Mississippi River; original home of Cray Super Computers; Duluth; and International Falls, where each winter, for more than 100 days, it gets *colder than a witch's tit*! Lake Wobegon is the fictitious town for the long-running radio program, A Prairie Home Companion.

5.24 Mississippi

I drove across the southern coast and spent a night. Think Mississippi River, Civil War battle of Vicksburg, Oxford and William Faulkner, Ole Miss University, and Tupelo (birthplace of Elvis Presley).

5.25 Missouri

Think St. Louis and its Cardinals baseball team, the Gateway Arch, Branson, meeting place of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, Kansas City, Mark Twain's boyhood home in Hannibal, and the Ozarks.

5.26 Montana

I've visited the Bozeman and Billings areas a number of times. It really is Big Sky Country! Think Crow and Cheyenne tribes and the Battle of the Little Big Horn with General Custer, northern and northwestern entrances to Yellowstone National Park, Three Forks, July 4th rodeo at Livingston, ranching, and wide-open spaces. *Montaña* is Spanish for *mountain*.

5.27 Nebraska

Think Omaha (home to Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway), Union Pacific Railroad, Gallop Polls, beef, corn, and soybeans.

5.28 Nevada

Spanish for *snowy*. Home to Las Vegas (sometimes referred to as "lost wages") where one can have a drive-through wedding, and then drive to Reno for a quickie-divorce. From there, I took a helicopter to the western rim of the Grand Canyon. Think desert, Colorado River and Hoover Dam, desert, Valley of Fire State Park, desert, Area 51 and UFOs, and the quaint state capital of Carson City.

5.29 New Hampshire

The "Live free or die" state. Think Mount Washington and the White Mountain National Forest, Manchester, Nashua, no sales tax or personal income tax, the first primary in the U.S. presidential election cycle, and Dartmouth College.

5.30 New Jersey

Think Atlantic City and its casinos and Boardwalk, Newark Airport, western New York City suburbs, Princeton University, Rutgers University, Trenton, former Bell Research Labs in Murray Hill, American Revolution and George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River, and Thomas Edison (the Wizard of Menlo Park).

5.31 New Mexico

This was the 47th state to join the Union, and it was the 47th state I visited. Coincidence? I think not! Think desert, Native American tribes (including the Navajo), Los Alamos and atomic bombs, Carlsbad Caverns, Roswell and UFOs, White Sands, Santa Fe, and a town called Truth or Consequences.

5.32 New York

If you want to visit a busy place and to sit and people-watch, Manhattan is the place to be. Just like in the movies, it's never dark or quiet; the police, ambulance, and fire sirens do run all night! Think New York City (whose metro area has a population about the same size as my birth country!), Long Island, the Rockefellers, the Vanderbilts, Lake Placid and the winter Olympics, Hudson River, Hyde Park (FDR's home), Niagara Falls, and West Point.

5.33 North Carolina

Think tobacco, Raleigh/Durham and the Research Triangle, Biltmore (the Vanderbilt estate), a town called Cherokee, Nags Head, Duke University, the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, the movie "Nights in Rodanthe," and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

5.34 North Dakota

I refer to this state on a regular basis when in meetings. When a speaker asks if there are any questions, I sometimes say, "Yes, what's the capital of North Dakota?" Of course, my question has nothing whatsoever to do with the topic at hand! The scenario is borrowed from the movie "The Muppets Take Manhattan," in which a hostage-rescue plan is described, and the speaker asks if there are any questions. Think Fargo, the Great Plains, energy (natural gas, oil, and coal), Native American tribes (including the Sioux, the Blackfoot, and the Cheyenne), sugar beets, and honey.

5.35 Ohio

I once spent a most enjoyable day at the Ohio State Fair in Columbus. Being an old farm boy, I just had to check all the livestock exhibits to see if they'd been judged correctly! However, when I came to a huge area with 5,000 rabbits, after looking at the first five or six, I couldn't see how judges could pick one over the other. Think tires/rubber, Cleveland and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Olivia Newton-John's recording "Banks of the Ohio," the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Kent State shootings, Cincinnati, Toledo, and Lake Erie.

5.36 Oklahoma

Oklahoma was created specifically as a home for Native American tribes, and is currently occupied by 39 of them. Unfortunately, many of them were forcibly relocated from as far away as Florida, Delaware, California, and present-day Ontario, Canada. (For one such sad relocation example, see Trail of Tears.) Unlike other states that have Indian reservations, each tribal area in Oklahoma is considered a Nation. Think the musical Oklahoma!, Tulsa, Oklahoma City and its infamous bombing, and serious tornados.

5.37 Oregon

Think Oregon Trail, ranching, ponderosa pines, potatoes, Portland, Bend, forest (for lumber and paper-making), high-tech companies, the Columbia River, and Nike.

5.38 Pennsylvania

As I was getting ready to leave Australia for Washington DC, news broke about the Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown. When I looked on a map of the US, I found that location was not too far from where I was headed, which wasn't a pleasant thought. Think Philadelphia, Quakers, Pittsburgh, Penn State University, Standard Oil and John D. Rockefeller, the Amish in Lancaster County, steel, and a town called Jim Thorpe.

5.39 Rhode Island

The state's official name is a mouthful: *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. For quite some years back in Australia, my only knowledge of this term was as the chicken breed Rhode Island

Red. Think Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Providence, Newport and sailing, The Breakers, and the movie High Society,

5.40 South Carolina

Think Myrtle Beach, Charleston and Fort Sumpter, Hilton Head, tobacco, cotton, an assembly plant for Boeing's 787, and Clemson University.

5.41 South Dakota

During a very pleasant motor home trip, I visited the Badlands, the Black Hills with Mt. Rushmore and Chief Crazy Horse, Deadwood (the final resting place of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane), Rapid City, Ellsworth Air Force Base (which was an active SAC base at the time), Custer State Park and its huge bison herd, Wind Cave National Park, the Mammoth Site at Hot Springs. And if you drive along Interstate 90 Highway, you'll soon get sick of, or intrigued by, seeing a sign for Wall Drug every mile! (Surprise, it's in the town of Wall.) I understand that the Corn Palace is worth a visit.

5.42 Tennessee

One year, I took my family on a trip to Dollywood in Pigeon Forge (Dolly Parton's amusement place) and the Great Smokey Mountains. Think Nashville and country music; Memphis, Graceland and Elvis; Mississippi River; the Oak Ridge Boys; the Tennessee Valley Authority; Oak Ridge; and Jack Daniel's.

5.43 Texas

Think Dallas/Fort Worth, the TV series "Dallas," President Kennedy's assassination, oil, cattle ranches, Houston we have liftoff, LBJ, Judge Roy Bean, briefly an independent country (created in 1836 just like my home state of South Australia, it's "sister state"), and The Alamo.

5.44 Utah

Settled by the Mormons, and home to salt flats where world land-speed records have been set. Think Salt Lake City, Sundance Film Festival, skiing, spectacular rock formations and National Parks (I visited Arches in 2017), Brigham Young University, the Osmonds, and the 2002 Winter Olympics.

5.45 Vermont

Think Burlington, skiing, Lake Champlain, Ben & Jerry's ice cream, Senator Bernie Sanders, maple syrup, and dairy farming.

5.46 Virginia

The first state settled in the US (1607), and my home state for the past 37 years. It has supplied the most US presidents, eight, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Woodrow Wilson. Also, home to my good friend John (and his wife Molly), long-time reviewer of the essays in this blog. Think Shenandoah River, CIA HQ at Langley, the Pentagon, Richmond and the Civil War, Norfolk Navy Base, University of Virginia, and Arlington National Cemetery.

5.47 Washington

I've visited Seattle many times. Think Olympic Mountains, Microsoft, Boeing, Spokane, forests, Mt. Rainer, Space Needle, and the eruption at Mt. Saint Helens. Unfortunately for Washington state, too many Americans confuse it with Washington DC!

5.48 West Virginia

It has lots of things to see and do, especially outdoors. "West Virginia, Mountain Mamma, take me home, country roads" indeed! Think Wheeling, coal mining, Harpers Ferry and John Brown, and Appalachian music.

5.49 Wisconsin

Think Milwaukee and beer brewing, the Green Bay Packers football team, Harley Davidson motor cycles, Oshkosh and its airshow, Senator Joseph McCarthy, cheese, milk, butter, Evinrude and Mercury marine engines, and Briggs & Stratton engines.

5.50 Wyoming

After visiting Yellowstone National Park, in Cody I rafted and took in a rodeo. I also spent time in the Grand Tetons and Jackson Hole. Think cowboys, Laramie, and Cheyenne.

5.51 Territories

The inhabited territories are as follows: Washington DC; Puerto Rico; the US Virgin Islands (USVI) of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix; Guam; American Samoa; and Northern Marianas. I've done most touristy things in DC. I've visited Puerto Rico many times, and flew through there early in 2017 on my way to St. Croix in the USVI. Since then, both were heavily damaged by Hurricane Irma.

5.52 Conclusion

I have yet to visit the states of North Dakota and South Carolina, and the territories American Samoa, Guam, and Northern Marianas.

By the way, the capital of North Dakota is Bismarck.

I'll finish off with a little conundrum: If Mississippi wore a New Jersey, what would Delaware? Answer: Idaho, Alaska. And if you are having trouble understanding that here's the English version: If Mississippi wore a new jersey, what would Dela wear? I don't know, I'll ask her.

6. May 2018, "Signs of Life: Part 12"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from trips to Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.



It certainly was a surprise to see this sign in [Vienna, Austria](#), especially when Australia really doesn't have any distinctive food.

For an explanation of the word *billabong*, click [here](#).



Come have a chocolate dream in this amusement park in Vienna.



A Chinese-restaurant menu in German!
Why not?

This place (at which I ate) specialized in dumplings (*teigtaschen* literally is *dough bags*). Home-made (*hausegemachte*) dumplings, indeed!



Ok, here's a place to get your shoes repaired and your keys cut.

What struck me as odd was the use of the German word for *service*, *dienst*, in the context of keys, yet the English word *service* for shoes.



Sign on a prefabricated public toilet building in Vienna. No dogs inside, don't leave any trash (I think), don't leave any drug paraphernalia, and no vandalism.

In a public park in downtown Vienna.

I was especially interested in the “No Camping” and “No fires,” until I thought about the possibility of homeless people trying to live there. That said, the park was walled and had gates that were locked after hours.



Please put my poop in a bag!



Dog Area!

A fenced-off area in Vienna inside which dogs may run free while their owners sit, chat, read, or find dates.



Most people looking at this “very pretty flower garden” in front of a statue of Mozart failed to see the treble clef note pattern until I pointed it out to them.



A sign in the window of a Viennese restaurant.



From a restaurant awning.



An interesting combination of offerings.



On the verandah of a Buddhist temple in Seoul, Korea.

As for the microphone, my guess is that was to prohibit tour groups whose leader used one to explain things to his/her group.

At one entrance to a Buddhist temple.



While touring Seoul, Korea, I came across a most interesting place for a light lunch. It mostly served a wide variety of drinks with a little food on the side. I had a bowl of spaghetti with beef bits and tomato sauce along with a cup of grapefruit lemonade. Now when I say *bowl*, I mean *toilet bowl*! Yes, Dear Reader, the serving dishes (and coffee mugs)

were china in the shape of a toilet bowl, not something you see every day.

And in the same restaurant, a urinal used as a flower pot.

What will they think of next!



One of a set of 12 statues of the Chinese signs of the Zodiac, as used in Korea: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig.

7. June 2018, "Travel: Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, and Napa Valley"

7.1 Central California and Northwestern Nevada

From April 2005.

[Diary] The Sacramento, California, airport (SMF) is a manageable-sized airport, with only two terminals. My luggage came after a short wait, and I caught the bus to the car rental depot. I settled into a nice new Ford Taurus, and headed down the freeway to a cheap motel I had booked on the Internet. Along the way I picked up some emergency rations and then settled in for a good night's sleep, wanting to take advantage of my 3-hour time gain coming west.

[Diary] I was up early, showered, and packed. (Shaving was suspended recently, in preparation for my four weeks hiking in England, so I am now sporting a distinguished looking salt-and-pepper beard and moustache, with the occasional patch of red/brown.) I was on Interstate 80 (I80) going east by 8:30 am. By 9 am, I had located a Denny's 24-hour restaurant, where breakfast is available at all hours (none of this "we can't fry an egg after 10:30 am" nonsense). I settled in to a big trucker's breakfast of pancakes, sausage, bacon, scrambled eggs, and sundry other things, all for \$5.50. Of course, I knew I couldn't eat it all, but they do provide "doggy bags" to go. While eating, I read the national newspaper. The sun was shining, the food was great, the waitress friendly, and I wasn't working. What more could I want?

It took an hour at 65 mph to reach the mountains, and pretty soon I was up at 7,000+ feet surrounded by snow-covered evergreens. I went through Donner Pass and down to Donner Lake for a look around. (The Donner Party of explorers of long ago was stranded there one harsh winter, and the story is that the survivors cannibalized those who didn't make it. Hey, what are friends for?) I started shooting video and stills once I crested the mountain.

At the town of Truckee I turned off toward Lake Tahoe, the well-known summer and winter resort area. The road followed the Truckee River, and I stopped quite often to look at it and shoot video. I passed through Squaw Valley, which has hosted at least one winter Olympics. I parked at the waterfront in Tahoe City and had a look around, stopping to talk to some women and kids playing in the sand. Then I drove northeast along the shore, settling in at King's Beach. I found a nice parking spot in the sun, had a nap, ate more of my breakfast, did some work, and listened to the radio. It was a relaxing four hours, and I even got paid for some of it. I drove back to Truckee on a different road, and rejoined I80 going east.

Pretty soon after, I crossed the California/Nevada state border and headed on into Reno, the second biggest city in Nevada. (While there are many casinos there, I am happy to say I didn't go in any. I also learned that Nevadans refer to Las Vegas as "Lost Wages.") At 6 pm, I pulled up at the house of my first hosts. They were Donica and Scott, who taught geography and journalism, respectively, at the university, two of their three children, Alex and Kate, and Hakan, an exchange student from Turkey. The chocolate lab dog was named Mud, and the cat Mo (Moses). We got acquainted over dinner then Alex and I chatted into the night. (He spent a year in Argentina as a student, and the whole family lived in the Basque region of Spain for some months.)

[Diary] I was up at 7 am and joined the family for breakfast. Afterwards, I went shopping to get ingredients for my Chinese dinner. Back home, I took a nap on a lounge chair in the back yard. Then it was time to check my email and do a few hours of work. The parents had a university function to attend that evening, so it was just the three students and me for dinner. I really liked working in the large open kitchen. There were plenty of leftovers. Dessert was loquats with ice cream.

[Diary] After an early breakfast, I spent some time with Scott discussing a number of things, including their religion, Christian Science (not to be confused with Scientology). He also gave me some tips for my drive later that day. I was packed and heading south from Reno by 10:30.

First stop was Carson City, the capital of Nevada. It's a pleasant small town, named for Kit Carson. I toured the museum, which was formerly the mint in which Carson City Silver Dollars were made during the heyday of silver mining in the region. I also looked in on a small American Indian museum next door.

Down the street was the State Capitol, a nice building set in some pretty grounds. Security was minimal and I wandered around shooting video. I dropped in to the state Treasurer's office and asked his receptionist if she had any surplus cash. She said that, unfortunately, she didn't, and that like most other states, they had a shortage, but if I'd like, she could give me a tour of the Treasurer's office. I accepted. Then it was on to the Department of State where I enquired if they had any major crises happening that day. They did not, which, I suspect, is par for this part of the world. Finally, I poked my head into the Governor's office reception area to take a picture.

Next to the Capitol is a large park containing a life-size bronze statue of Kit Carson on horseback, some modern sculptures, and a memorial to fallen law-enforcement officers. I took a look at that, and a grounds man stopped his mower, came over to me, and gave me an impromptu history lesson about the memorial.

Then it was on to the state Legislature, a new building constructed 30 years ago. The senate is in one wing, and the assembly in the other. The front desk security officers were most helpful and friendly and told me to wander wherever I wanted. The legislature meets for 60–120 days every two years; however, they only get paid for the first 60 days, so they have some incentive to not mess around. (One local wag told me that it would be better if they only met for two days every 120 years!) They were currently in session, but break for the weekend at noon on Fridays. However, the assembly was running late, so I sat in their session watching them amend some bills. It was very interesting.

I had lunch across the road at a small restaurant, at a table right next to one at which some state senators were eating and discussing the current session.

I headed south on US50 and then west to Lake Tahoe. It was indeed a beautiful drive, and I stopped and shot video along the way. I crossed back into California and went up the west side of the lake in search of the Stream Profile host Scott had advised me to visit. Unfortunately, it had not yet opened after the winter, so I drove on to see Emerald Bay, a very picturesque spot. Then it was back to US50 heading west again. I stopped along the way looking at the mountains, rock formations, and streams, especially the American River along which the highway ran.

I drove down out of the mountains around 5 pm and took the first exit into Folsom. Soon after, I pulled up at the home of my colleague Joel's house, which he shares with his wife, Catherine, and their two babies (black cats, that is), Malcolm and Izzy.

[Diary] *After a restful night we drove back up US50 in light drizzle for lunch at "Z Pot Pie, America's answer to Aussie meat pies," they claimed. Mine tasted mighty fine and was accompanied by coffee. Then we had a short hike in the mountains nearby, and visited a local orchard, where we bought fruit and vegetables picked fresh from that and nearby farms. On the way home, we bought supplies for our Chinese dinner the next day. We bought some new season's sweet corn for dinner, and it was very good considering the season has hardly started. Then we settled into watching Sideways, a new movie about two guys traveling the California wine areas for a week. We all enjoyed it.*

[Diary] *After a light breakfast, we stopped at a deli to get some rolls, and then set off on a 5–6-mile hike. Well, things got out of control and we finished up covering 12 miles, up and back along the American River (which goes west to join the Sacramento River in Sacramento). We walked, talked, and had our lunch over a 5–6-hour period. I also shot video.*

We were all happy to be back home with our boots off, but it was enjoyable, and almost certainly good for me. (As the German philosopher Nietzsche once said: "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger.") I then started preparing the Chinese food, advising my apprentice, Joel, on the proper technique for chopping and food presentation. He paid close attention and showed considerable promise. They had a nice big skillet and wok, so cooking was a breeze, and it was definitely one of my best efforts to date. There were two dishes: Kung Pao chicken with vegetables in a spicy sauce, and pork fried rice with other vegetables. The food was well received. We ate dessert while watching the movie "The Astronaut's Wife" starring Johnny Depp and Charlize Theron. Most enjoyable.

[Diary] *I was up by 8, said goodbye to Catherine as she left for work, and was packed by 10 am. I left Joel working at home, and drove across town to the (in)famous Folsom State Prison, where Johnny Cash recorded an album many years ago. The original prison is now called "Old Folsom" while the new one next door is "New Folsom." Each has about 3,500 prisoners (all men), mostly for serious crimes and long sentences. The approach road was through rolling hills and forests, with wild turkeys crossing, like the entrance to an exclusive country club. Exclusive yes; however, I doubt the prisoners think of it in that way. I toured the prison museum, watched a video, and took pictures of and near one of the main gates in the very thick stone wall. At 11 am, my next host met me there. Helen was retired, but taught meditation classes at the prison each week, and was there on business that morning.*

We drove back to her house near downtown Sacramento, the state capital of California. We had some of my left-over Chinese food for lunch in the back garden. I went off to do some grocery shopping for a dinner I was to make the next day, and then I rested in the shade and read the paper. Helen's husband, Terry, an arborist, came home about 6 pm, and he and I headed for the American River where we launched two kayaks. It was my first time in a kayak, but I soon got the hang of it. Soon after starting, we saw a beaver surface and splash its large tail. Then I saw two river otters just ahead. We also saw three different kinds of heron. There were some very minor rapids, just enough to give me a slight sensation. It was an evening of firsts, and was most enjoyable.

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings: Volume 09 – December 2017 through November 2018

[Diary] I slept in a bit and had a casual and light breakfast before heading off on a walking tour. The streets were simply covered by large deciduous trees, and there were gardens and trees everywhere. First it was McKinley Park with its playing fields and rose garden. Then it was on to the Capitol Park Vietnam War memorial and the Firemen's memorial. The gardens around the Capitol are great, and even include orange trees.

I entered the Capitol building from the eastern side, passing all my camera gear through the metal detector. I stopped to look at a state police exhibit and got talking to a trooper (from CHiPs, the California Highway patrol). He told me how to get something special down the hall. About 20 yards in from that entrance was a large doorway guarded by another trooper and flanked by the US and Californian flags. This was the entrance to the governor's office suite. As directed, I went into the receptionist and asked for the Governor's business card. She smiled and gave me one. It said "Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor, State of California," along with his office address and phone number.

Arnold declined the salary for being Governor, and he himself pays for the top two floors of the hotel nearby: top one for him and the one below for his security people. He flies home to his wife and four kids in the LA area on weekends. This job is probably a lot more work (and certainly more frustrating) than being a movie star.

I went on a 45-minute guided tour, which included the senate and assembly chambers, which were empty at the time.

Then it was on to the Governors' Mansion, now run as a state park. Ronald Regan was the final governor to live there (in 1967), before it was vacated for good. It had been declared a fire trap in 1941, but they kept on using it. The guide on the tour told us that the reasons Ron and Nancy Reagan only stayed there three months were many. They included: the road alongside was a major interstate route with heavy traffic and noise, a gas station was across the street and every time a car drove in each tire rang the bell when it ran over the rubber hose, there was no safe place for their young son Ron to play, and, above all, the formal dining room seated only 10! Then to top it all off, on the third night they were in residence, the fire alarms went off. The governor's bedroom had an emergency exit out the window down a metal stairway, while the fire exit from the first lady's bedroom consisted of a rope down a trapdoor in the floor! Anyway, California is one of only six states that does not provide a residence for its governor. The house is restored to the time of its last fulltime family, Governor "Pat" Brown, his wife and their daughter, Kathleen, who later held a state office. Son Jerry, who became governor after Ronald Reagan, never lived there as he was already in college when his father took office. Another well-known governor was Earl Warren, California's only 3-term governor, who became associate and then Chief justice of the US Supreme Court.

Back home, after a rest from walking, I made my secret "Hungarian Goulash, ala Rex" and had it simmering on the stove for three hours. We ate it at 9:30 pm, and hit the hay soon after, which ended two nice days in Sacramento.

[Diary] The alarm went off at 5 am; don't you just hate it when that happens! It was a pleasant morning, and I was on the road by 5:30, headed for the airport. There wasn't much traffic, and I had the car gassed-up and returned by 6 am. In the lounge, I got talking to a young Japanese man who was

flying to Tokyo to get married having been away from his sweetheart all of a week. I quickly used up my basic Japanese. Then it was on to my national newspaper and then boarding.

A minimal breakfast was served, and I had a short nap before starting in on some work. The ride was uneventful, but smooth, and we touched down a bit late, having been routed around the countryside by air traffic control as we neared the airport.

As always, it was good to be back home again. But not for long, as in less than two weeks, I'll be hiking the English countryside for four weeks. (See my essay from July 2011: [A Walk along the River.](#)) No rest for the wicked. I don't work that hard for money!

7.2 Napa Valley

In 2009, I was back in Sacramento, to visit friends and to have a short driving trip to the world-famous wine region, [Napa Valley](#).

[Diary] *After getting back from a vacation in Puerto Rico, my sleeping patterns had changed to short nights and long afternoon naps. So, after only five hours of sleep, I was wide awake. (Don't you just hate that when that happens!)*

Outside, it had been raining lightly but steadily for 24 hours. Fortunately, the ice that had been forecast did not eventuate, although other parts of the DC metro area did get enough to cause accidents and other traffic problems.

During the morning, I worked for a few good hours (you know, quality over quantity!), stopping around 9:30 am for a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs, fried tomatoes, and coffee. Then it was on to some household chores, packing my case, lunch, and a 1-hour TV show.

At 3:30 pm, my taxi arrived to take me to Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD). The driver was from [Uganda](#) and was well educated, and, on the way, we had a good chat about African history and politics.

*At IAD, check in went smoothly, but security was veeeeery slow. (Don't you just hate that!) I took the bus to the mid-field Terminal C. At United's Red-Carpet Club, I had two cups of French Vanilla coffee, some cheese and crackers, and carrot and celery sticks with ranch dressing while reading the *Financial Times* from London, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Between them, the news was pretty much all bad.*

At 5:15 pm, I made my way to Gate C17, to find that the in-bound flight had only just arrived. As a result, boarding was delayed, but only for 10 minutes, while the cleaners did their thing. Meanwhile, I chatted with the gate agent, a woman from [Peru](#).

I was first in line on the red carpet, so was first on board the Airbus A320 where my window exit-seat 11A had plenty of leg room. I had cashed in 25,000 of my airline miles in exchange for a free ticket, which cost only \$5 for taxes. So, the price was right. (Don't you just love that!)

It was still raining, and runway traffic was delayed. Finally, flight UA291 took off to the west, in the dark, some 20 minutes late. Once we were airborne I put my seat back and slept for two and a half

hours. (Don't you just love that when that happens!) When I awoke, I set my clock back three hours, to Pacific Standard Time (PST), GMT-8.

I summoned the flight attendant for a drink, which I had with the Scottish short bread cookies I had rescued from the Red-Carpet Club. Although the flight was nearly six hours, time passed quickly, and we landed at Sacramento (SMF) in light fog, right on time. My luggage arrived and I waited outside in the cold for 15 minutes until the rental car shuttle bus came.

[Diary] At 9:30 am, I loaded up my van, and headed for the highway with Duffy playing on the CD player. I headed west on state highway 50 towards Davis, the home of the University of California Davis campus. From there, it was north on 113 then west on E6 to Winters. The stands of huge eucalypts made me feel a little "at home." The land was flat with quite a bit of agriculture. The sun streamed down. I passed through some huge walnut groves and orchards of persimmons. Winters was founded in 1875, and I drove around the back streets to have a look at small town America.

From Winters, I went west on 128 and soon climbed into the green rolling foothills and then into some steep hills at the top of which was a reservoir and hydroelectric dam. It sure was windy up there with small waves being whipped up on the lake. By that time, I'd played Duffy's album twice, so I switched to a local smooth jazz radio station. I turned south into 121 and soon saw my first vineyards, both on steep hillsides and down in a valley to the east.

It was noon when I reached downtown Napa, and, eventually, I located the visitors' center where I got some maps and brochures. From there I headed north up the famous Napa Valley on Highway 29. However, as it was a freeway, I took the first exit and headed up along the foothills to the west through vineyard after vineyard, and, eventually, through ever narrower canyons. I passed through some small stands of magnificent redwoods. By the time I came back to 29, that was a 2-lane road.

At 1 pm, I reached St. Helena, where I stopped off at V. Sattui's winery, which had a big selection of wine, cheese and breads in its store, along with a picnic area under the trees. By then, it was quite warm, at least in the high 60s. I stopped at a convenience store to buy a copy of the national newspaper, USA Today. I also spied frozen rice puddings on a stick, so I bought one. Can you say "delicious?" By then, I was starting to fade, so I found a quiet side road where I parked in the sun, pulled out my pillow, laid back my seat, and had an hour's nap.

I woke reasonably recharged, and I headed north to Calistoga, which looked like an interesting town. On my third attempt, I located some accommodation at a price I was willing to pay. It was the Village Inn and Spa, an aging property on the eastern edge of town away from the main highway. The friendly clerk upgraded me to a king-bed room for the price of a queen. The room was so huge the TV looked pretty small way across the room from my bed! It came complete with refrigerator and microwave. The bathroom had a very large sunken tiled spa tub.

At 4:30 pm, I drove back into town and parked on the main street. Right then I needed a fix, and, fortunately, right there across the street was a bookstore. (Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I unashamedly admit to being a bookaholic, who is making no effort whatsoever to recover!) Their 50%-off sale rack out front produced two purchases. I browsed awhile before walking up and down the main street look at candidates for supper. The bookstore clerk assured me that when the locals wanted a good cheap

meal they went to Nicola's, and that's where I finished up. Having grazed all day with no specific lunch, I ordered supper at 5:15 pm. I chose one of the specials, meatloaf with mashed potato, carrots, and gravy. And after having been assured that it "was just like Grandma used to make," I paid and took a table at the window overlooking the main street. I read more of my paper until the food arrived. It certainly was good and filling.

Back at the hotel, I went to a conference room that had an internet connection, and received and sent some email. Apparently, the world was still functioning despite my having been disconnected for 10 whole hours. At 8 pm, I switched to the Fox network to catch the 2nd 2-hour half of the season opener for "24." It was most enjoyable. Lights out at 10:15 pm.

[Diary] *The hotel was on a quiet street, and I woke at 8 am, feeling quite decent. I lay in bed for 45 minutes reading one of my new books while the sun streamed in my windows. All was right in my part of the world. Then, after a long shower, I dressed and packed, and worked on this diary. There was no hurry, so I decided to make use of the nice facilities at hand. I got my morning email fix and checked out around 10:15 am.*

At 10:30 am, I was sitting at a window table at Nicola's waiting for my breakfast, a 3-egg omelet containing bacon, sausage, peppers, and mushrooms, with a good dose of cheese melted over the top. It was accompanied by four slices of toast and a boiling cup of Earl Grey tea; it was just the thing for a growing boy on vacation. Of course, it was way too much food for my first meal of the day, so I got a container "to go" and drank tea while doing some puzzles from the previous day's paper.

I eased back onto Highway 29 at 11:30 am, and stopped to pick up the daily paper. Then it was four miles up into the hills on a side road to see the petrified forest. They claim to have the oldest known petrified trees in the world. Some three million years ago, there was a big volcanic eruption in the area, and the blast felled the redwood forest for miles around, including that area. Some of the trees knocked down at that time were more than 2,000 years old. Due to the deep cover of ash and the subsequent weathering and water action, quite a few redwoods were petrified. They also had some very interesting live trees there, including one estimated to be about 650 years young!

A little further north I dropped in at the famous Old Faithful geyser (not to be confused with the one by the same name in Yellowstone National Park). Although I saw it erupt three times in 30 minutes, it really wasn't at all impressive; it probably shot no more than 20 feet in the air, with a fairly thin stream, and lasted for several minutes each time. After Yellowstone and the monster geyser I'd seen in Iceland, I guess my expectations were somewhat unreasonable. I visited the adjacent petting zoo and fed the goats, sheep, and llamas.

I followed Highway 29 into the hills and along lots of winding road. Pretty much as soon as I got started my low-gas warning light came on and it seemed to take forever to find a gas station. I had visions of walking or waiting a good while if I ran out completely. After driving through Robert Louis Stevenson State Park (he honeymooned there in a cabin and wrote a book about the area), I coasted into Middletown at 1:45 pm with a few thimble-fulls of gas left.

Soon I was out of the hills, and from then on it was flat as I hit agricultural country. I was surprised to see many hundreds of acres of rice fields, all harvested and brown. Then came lots of fruit trees. At

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Williams, I met Interstate Highway 5 running south from Canada to the Mexican border, and followed that. And although the speed limit was 70 mph, I stayed at a leisurely 60. I passed miles and miles of fruit trees, more rice fields, and occasional vineyards and some flocks of sheep.

About 10 miles short of the Sacramento airport, I came upon an exit in Woodland for a cheap hotel next to the freeway. They honored one of my discount cards, and gave me a very nice room with Queen bed, small lounge and work area, a refrigerator, and a microwave in the main office. It was a nice little "home away from home." At 4:15 pm, I was all settled in, sorting through my gear and working on this diary.

Around 5:30 pm, I took my left-over breakfast to the lobby where I heated it in the microwave oven. I also grabbed a cup of hot apple cider from the complementary refreshment counter. The breakfast was just as good the second time. I finished that day's newspaper while I ate.

[Diary] *My wake-up call came right on time, at 5 am. (Don't you just hate that when that happens!) After a cold wash to wake myself up, I dressed and packed my last few things. I checked out and grabbed another cup of hot apple cider. Continental breakfast ingredients had been laid out, but I wasn't yet ready to eat. Right next to my on-ramp for the freeway there was a gas station, so I stopped to fill up. It was pretty cold out. Right next door was a Denny's restaurant, my favorite, but I showed great restraint and passed it by. From there it took 15 minutes to get to the airport, and as I got closer the fog got thicker, so much so that I missed one of the rental car return signs and had to go "around the block again." The shuttle bus took me to Terminal B where I checked in and went through security.*

8. July 2018, “A Little Bit of Religion”

According to Wikipedia, “Religion is any cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, ethics, or organizations, that relate humanity to the supernatural or transcendental. Religions relate humanity to what anthropologist Clifford Geertz has referred to as a cosmic ‘order of existence.’ However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion.”

As best as I can figure out, a *belief system* is one that attempts to explain how the world came into being, and after that, why things are like they are. But could a belief system simply be an attempt to rationalize what happened and what exists anyway? That is, an attempt to explain creation and good and evil? In any event, I **don't** consider it possible to **prove** that any belief system is actually true, let alone its being *the* one true belief system!

According to what archeologists have uncovered, mankind has been fascinated for millennia about the night sky and heavenly objects (e.g., the Great Pyramids and their connection with Orion's Belt, or the Mayan observatories). The heliocentric view that the planets go around the Sun is relatively new, and until it was widely accepted, the church in Rome executed or treated harshly more than a few adherents. (Think Galileo and Copernicus.) The questions regarding the world being flat, and what causes floods, plagues, volcanic eruptions, eclipses, and so on, were all pondered by high priests of many faiths. Human sacrifices were often called for to appease the Gods.

Then along came Charles Darwin and his Theory of Evolution to challenge Creationism. (See also, Alfred Russel Wallace.) [Here in the US, this debate is still being fought vigorously in numerous school districts as to whether Biology textbooks should even mention evolution. According to them, at the very least, such textbooks should clearly state that “Evolution is only a theory!”]

8.1 Growing up Lutheran

I'm descended from German-speaking Lutherans who left their native Prussia in the 1840s to start a new life in the new state of South Australia. [Along with their religion, they brought grape vines; after all, you do need wine with your communion!]

For me, the process of becoming a Lutheran started with baptism, which took place in a cathedral-like Lutheran Church in my home town. Then came Sunday School, which involved religious instruction for pre-school and school-age kids. It mostly happened while the adults were in church. The next stage was confirmation. While some Christian faiths had a much-shortened version, we Lutherans prepared for this for about nine months. Around age 12, I and 15–20 others from my congregation attended 2½ hours of religious instruction every Saturday morning. *At the end of that time, we underwent a verbal examination, in public, in front of the whole congregation!* The next day was Sunday, and we walked down the church aisle in our black suits and white dresses to take our first communion of wafers and port wine. At that moment, we became full members of the church.

There was a Lutheran youth organization, but as I lived out of town, and was too young to drive, I never participated in its activities. Besides, I was “into” sports!

Throughout my five years of high school, each Friday morning there was a Religious-Instruction period, at which time, all faiths in the area could send a representative to the school to lead a group of students who were members of their faith. Although it was possible for parents to opt-out their kids from this activity, I don't recall knowing anyone who did. For many (most?) students, it simply was time away from academic classes, which was just fine with them.

I finished high school and left home when I was 16, and soon after that I discontinued any involvement with organized religion. In fact, up until that time, I'd never been a believer anyway; the whole idea behind Christianity just seemed quite unbelievable (and still does)!

In Australia, many Aboriginal tribes live on what are called *missions*, somewhat akin to American Indian *reservations*. These also exist in present-day Papua New Guinea. While some missions were overseen by government agencies, many were managed by the Lutheran Church. Two of my uncles and their families spent much of their lives at missions at Hermannsburg in Australia, and at Lae in what used to be called German New Guinea. I also have a sister who lived many years at several missions in Australia. During her time in Hermannsburg, I visited her twice, at age 15 and then again at 25. Apparently, at one time, my father had applied to work on a mission, but he never got approval. As you may know, Australian Aborigines have a very rich and complex dreamtime belief system. It is very likely that based on my visits to Hermannsburg, I started to dislike what I perceived to be religious-missionary "interference" with regards to native belief systems.

Now while there are numerous faiths within Christianity, due to schisms in established sects or new creations, some faiths split into competing camps. In Australia, we had the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA) and, yes Dear Reader, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (UELCA). The two branches merged in 1966 becoming the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA). However, many people in my home town still carry on like they are separate! [Once I'd moved to the US I discovered it too had two Lutheran branches: The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.] As a young boy, for five years I attended a UELCA church in a small country town. A family that lived quite close to that church was of the ELCA persuasion, so as we arrived at *our* church, they drove past to go to *their* church in the next town. Such schisms remind me of the Judean People's Front and the People's Front of Judea in the satirical film, Monty Python's Life of Brian.

Australia had (and still has) parochial schools. In my state, except for the greater metropolitan area of the state capital, Adelaide, the only faiths typically having their own schools were the Catholics and Lutherans. My home town had (and still has) a Lutheran Day School for Grades 1–7. I attended that for a bit more than two years. In the capital, various faiths had schools catering for Grades 1–12 with many boarding students from rural areas. In the US, more than a few universities started out as, and many continue as, parochial ventures.

8.2 Why Does a Person have a Particular Religion?

It seems to me that the vast majority of people having some belief system grew up with it. That is, they were born into a family that practiced it. The generation before them practiced it, and those before that did too. It was a tradition, and each generation was indoctrinated (and inculcated) in it. (Yes, I really do mean "taught with a biased, one-sided or uncritical ideology.") And if anyone questioned it, there were ways to "convince" them to conform. And in extreme cases, they were ostracized, banished

from the group, or even worse. (See *apostasy* below.) In fact, my father was excommunicated from his church, presumably for living with another woman “without the benefit of clergy!” Some years ago, when I discovered Quakerism, I was interested to learn they did not believe in Sunday School or child-indoctrination. One must be an adult to become a Quaker, at an age when one can make decisions for oneself.

For many, the indoctrination is so strong, that even if they have abandoned their belief system, they still turn to it in times of crisis, danger, or war. Yes, belonging to a group can have its comforts!

As I think about all the people I have known well, I can probably count on two hands the number who have taken up a first religion after having none, or who have changed from one religion to another. In contrast, I know *many* who have gone from their raised faith to having none at all! This raises the question of whether a particular religion can survive and thrive without child-indoctrination. [Obviously, Quakerism manages to survive, but I wouldn't say that it thrives.]

8.3 The Crime of Non-Belief or Conversion

Although I've long known about the general idea (having practiced it myself), it's only recently that I learned the term apostasy. According to Wikipedia, this “is the formal disaffiliation from, or abandonment or renunciation of a religion by a person. It can also be defined within the broader context of embracing an opinion contrary to one's previous beliefs. One who commits apostasy is known as an *apostate*.”

One of the best-known apostates was Martin Luther. Wikipedia states, “... the founder of Lutheranism was considered both an apostate and heretic by the strict definition of apostasy according to the Catholic Church. Most Protestants would naturally disagree, calling him a liberator and revolutionary.”

Under the Sharia Law practiced in certain Islamic countries, apostates can be punished by death. [Such a lack of tolerance can also be seen in countries in which it is illegal to speak negatively about the Royal Family or the head of the government.]

To learn more about religious conversion, click here; for religious intolerance, click here; for apostasy in Judaism, click here; for apostasy in Christianity, click here; and for apostasy in Islam, click here.

Some well-Known Belief Systems

There have been many such systems; here are some of the best known: Paganism, Animism, Native American, Monotheism (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, and Rastafarianism. Of course, once the Reformation occurred, over time, the resulting Protestants broke into many different faiths.

For a list of religions and spiritual traditions, click here. For details about state-sponsored religions, click here.

It is interesting how a new religion can co-opt some of the customs from its predecessors. Basically, rather than try to convert people to a whole new system, you keep some of the familiar bits of the old way. To that end, the Christian holiday of Christmas is celebrated on December 25th, a date from pagan

times (see [Saturnalia](#)) and around the northern winter solstice. [Scholars generally agree that the actual date of Jesus' birth is unknown.]

8.4 Theists, Atheists, and Agnostics

According to Wikipedia, "[Atheism](#) is, in the broadest sense, the absence of belief in the existence of deities. Less broadly, atheism is the rejection of belief that any deities exist. In an even narrower sense, atheism is specifically the position that there are no deities. Atheism is contrasted with [theism](#), which, in its most general form, is the belief that at least one deity exists."

Wikipedia also states, "[Agnosticism](#) is the view that the existence of God, of the divine or the supernatural is unknown or unknowable."

Also see [nontheism](#).

While such labels can be convenient from certain viewpoints, I doubt that *every* member of *any* religious group agrees on *exactly* the same things. (This is why I'm not affiliated with a particular political party.)

From a logic point of view, proving a negative has long been seen as being impossible, so I reject the notion that one can prove there are no gods.

8.5 The Great Religious Disputes

There have been, and continue to be, major—and very often bloody—disputes between religions and between sects of the same religion. The ones that immediately come to mind are: [Catholics vs. Protestants in Northern Ireland](#); the eviction of the Islamic Moors from Spain by the Christians, and the Jews caught in-between; the Romans and the Jews; the [Crusades](#): Christians vs. Moslems; and the [Shi'a vs. Sunni Moslems](#).

It is interesting, and very sad, to see how much blood has been shed over these disagreements.

8.6 So, what am I?

As I have written and stated numerous times, like [Spock](#) the character from Star Trek, I am a [Vulcan](#). That is, I "attempt to live by logic and reason with as little **interference** from emotion as possible."

The simple answer is, "Why do I have to be anything?" And when asked various deep philosophical or religious questions (such as "What happens after one dies?"), I often respond, "I don't know, and I don't care!"

I am deeply suspicious of the idea that the next life is way better than the one here on earth, but you are not allowed to get there early. That sounds to me very much like a man-made, clergy-dominated system that wants/needs to keep people in line. Do the things I tell you are good, and you'll go to a wonderful place, Heaven. Otherwise, you'll go to a terrible place, Hell!

[Reviewer John (who has two degrees in psychology), made me aware of [Sigmund Freud's](#) book [Civilization and Its Discontents](#). According to Wikipedia, "The second chapter delves into how religion is one coping strategy that arises out of a need for the individual to distance himself from all of the

suffering in the world. ... Freud, an avowed atheist, argued that religion has tamed asocial instincts and created a sense of community around a shared set of beliefs, thus helping a civilization. Yet at the same time, organized religion exacts an enormous psychological cost on the individual by making him or her perpetually subordinate to the primal father figure embodied by God.”]

8.7 Heaven and Hell

Numerous religions have the notion of Heaven and Hell, and the goal of their adherents is to make it to the former; the latter being for the truly unworthy.

What exactly do believers think these “places” are like? After all, they are trying to make it to one place, but not the other! I hear claims that in Heaven there is no war, no sickness, no pain, no famine, and really nothing at all unpleasant. And that Hell is a terrible place involving eternal punishment. However, all of these things only mean something in the context of our earthly bodies, which I hear are left behind when one dies. So, if I’m in Heaven and I don’t have a body, I can’t see a rainbow, I can’t hear a Strauss waltz, I can’t taste my favorite food or wine, and I can’t touch anything. So, how do I do anything, and just what exactly is there to do? And what exactly am I? Similarly, if I’m in Hell, what punishment can be inflicted on me if I have no body?

It seems to me that we mere mortals, who are constrained by our own experiences, and those we have reliably learned about, can have absolutely no idea what Heaven and Hell might actually be like. [I’ve long suggested that Hell may well be a telephone-support center for computer users!]

Finally, just where are Heaven and Hell located? If they exist, they must be somewhere, right? And even if they reside in some parallel universe, if our souls can get there, the scientific principles must exist for that to happen. [Think, the movie Contact.]

8.8 Odds and Ends

I highly recommend Karen Armstrong’s writings, especially the autobiographical titles about her becoming a nun and then leaving the order, and the church, and then reconnecting.

Take a look at some of the more-than-200 episodes of Robert Lawrence Kuhn’s Closer to Truth.

I read somewhere that under Islamic law it is forbidden to translate the Koran from Arabic for fear of getting it wrong. This in contrast with the Bible, which has been translated to/from numerous languages by many people, and over which scholars still argue that literal things like “40 days and nights,” might actually mean “many days and nights.” I’ve met people who actually believe the Bible was originally written in an earlier form of English!

I have a large, fold-out book that shows the supposed family tree starting with Adam and Eve. It also contains a floor plan of Noah’s Ark. [My question regarding that story is, “Did the Ark have koala bears on-board? After all, Noah supposedly had two of each species. And if so, how did he even know koalas existed, did he have time to go all the way to Australia to get them, and where did he get the right kind of fresh eucalyptus leaves to feed them each day? To me, taking some stories literally requires an extreme stretch of the imagination. That said, I have no problem with the idea there actually was a great flood, just not one that covered the whole earth!]

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[James Ussher](#) proposed that the time and date of the creation was “around 6 pm on 22 October 4004 BC according to the [proleptic Julian calendar](#).” For other information about the purported date of creation, click [here](#).

If you'd like some light science-fiction reading, I recommend [River World](#), a series written by Philip José Farmer. The basic premise is that when they die, all humans (and Neanderthals) who lived on Earth beyond the age of six go to a place called *River World*, where they live in groups mixed up over the ages. And people like Mark Twain, Sir Richard Francis Burton, King John, Alice Liddle, and Herman Goering, have interesting adventures. Some of them want to find out how the world works and who is running it.

Dan Brown's novel [The Lost Symbol](#), set in Washington DC, mentions a machine that can measure the departure of the so-called [soul](#) on a person's death.

Another of Dan Brown's novels, [Origin](#), provides food for thought as it deals with the origins of life on earth, and where our species might be headed. Reading this led me to read about the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), the breakaway [Palmarian Catholic Church](#), the [Miller-Urey experiment](#), and the [panspermia](#) hypothesis.

[Reviewer John wrote, “Almost all religions (‘belief systems’) attempt to deal with creation and some code of conduct/morality that revolves around what is good and what is evil, and they address what is called the ‘[eschatology](#)’ aspect to theology—meaning they also concern themselves with not just creation stories and the battle between what is determined to be good and evil, they speak to what death means, some kind of final judgment, and the fate of the soul (whether it is reincarnation, an eternal home in Heaven with Christ, an eternal holiday with 72 virgins, or a home in a fiery Hell or the like). One of the things Freud said was that the human need to have a view on eschatology is that there is terror in contemplating the utter, eternal loss of the self/ego or soul if you will. I think the most important part of a religious belief system may be the question, ‘What is going to happen to me when I die?’]

8.9 Conclusion

I understand the power of [prayer](#), but I view prayer as a mechanism to get oneself to do something rather than being helped by some supernatural entity.

Although I'm not looking for a religious home, aspects of Buddhism appeal to me. And I can say for certain that each time I enter the grounds of a Buddhist temple, I feel serenity from the running water, the wind in the bamboos, the orange paint, and the chanting of monks.

I've long known the saying, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” As it happens, the actual quote is, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” When he wrote that, I think [Karl Marx](#) was on to something.

[John also shared with me the following: [Faith](#) is the utter belief that something is true even in the face of no supporting evidence, or (more so) in the face of evidence to the contrary.]

I'll leave you with the following thought: **Just because you believe something doesn't make it true!**

9. August 2018, "Signs of Life: Part 13"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from a trip to Croatia.



To say that Zagreb, Croatia's capital, has a lot of museums and cultural places, would be an understatement.

A club in Zagreb.



A shoe shop in Zagreb.



A clever cross-stitch pattern sign.



The Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb, was a highlight of my visit.

It “grew from a traveling exhibition revolving around the concept of failed relationships and their ruins.” The exhibits were all articles that people had donated, along with their stories of relationships that went sour or ended in death. There were the usual teenage- and adult-breakup stories. One

woman had become a dominatrix, and while disciplining a new male client, realized he was an old boyfriend. He begged her to give him one of her stiletto-heeled shoes. She did, and eventually donated the other one to the museum. Another man’s girlfriend had run off with another guy, so the man got an axe and chopped up her furniture, one piece per day. He donated the axe. Another woman donated the suicide note her mother had left her.

How to win friends; NOT!



According to Wikipedia, a *boudoir* "is a woman's private sitting room or salon in a furnished accommodation usually between the dining room and the bedroom, but can also refer to a woman's private bedroom."

Just what this shop was selling was a mystery to me.



A souvenir shop next to the Bloody Bridge in Zagreb.

What caught my eye was the use of the word *bloody*, which in Australian English is often used to mean *very*.



A sundial.

So, just what time is it? I'd say, "It's time to replaster the wall!"

Short and to the point!

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Yeah, right!

BTW, I've heard it said that if you don't clean your house for two years, it doesn't get any worse after that! I'll let you know if that's true.



OK, it's a clock; so what? On closer inspection, we can see that it's a 24-hour clock; however, both halves go from 1–12 rather than a continuous 1–24.

Click [here](#) to read more about 24-hour clock faces.



At a quick glance, the cat and mouse appear to be best friends, but on closer inspection, I think we can see the beginnings of a strangle hold followed by lunch!

Marc O'Polo

An interesting take on the name of adventurer Marco Polo.

This is the Zagreb branch of an international chain of fashion stores.

Fast food, Italian style.

PASTA @ FASTA



In Pula, I went to the neighborhood supermarket to get supplies, and along the way stopped to listen to a violin concert by a 6-year-old girl called Anna. I chatted with her mother who was standing across the street. Anna practiced an hour each day and was quite professional in her approach. Passersby all clapped and put money in her violin case. I did too and added a piece of candy as well.

10. September 2018, "Travel: Memories of Puerto Rico"

Over the past 30 years, I've vacationed in the Spanish-speaking US territory Puerto Rico more than 10 times, and I've passed through its capital, San Juan, on the way to Venezuela and various Caribbean islands. [As I prepare this essay, it's October 2017, and the island has just been completely devastated by Hurricane Maria. And as I get ready to post this essay, it's a year later with a lot of damage still.]

10.1 Playa Caribe, Coamo, and San Juan

From a trip over Christmas, 2001:

[Diary] To while away the 90 minutes until flight time, we went into the First-Class lounge and enjoyed hot tea while sitting in comfortable chairs in a sunny window. Our flight left on time. The twelve of us seated in First Class certainly got excellent, friendly service. The extra room was appreciated. The food was rather exotic, but nicely presented. It felt a bit strange, however, to have linen napkins, and real silverware. Our scheduled flight time was 3:18 hours, and it was a smooth ride. We landed in San Juan 15 minutes early but had to wait for a gate. The 80-degree-F weather was quite an improvement over the 30 degrees back home.

We collected our rental car and set out for Playa Caribe, a small family-friendly hotel on the southeast coast that we had stayed at a number of times before. The local maps and road signs (or lack thereof) left much to be desired. First, we missed the exit to go south. Then coming back, we missed the exit, but, luck was with us, and, eventually, I found my way off one freeway, around a few streets and back on going in the other direction to finally head south. Finally, nine hours after leaving home, we were settled into our new home. The first thing we did was to take off the plastic screens that had been installed for the air conditioning, and switch off the A/C. Soon a very nice breeze had cooled the room. The crashing of the waves about 30 feet away was soothing and would help us sleep. It also drowned out any noise from neighbors.

[Diary] It was Jenny's 48th birthday. Her Majesty slept late, and apart from a shopping trip to a nearby town, spent the day sitting on the beach and lying in a hammock. As usual, I took over the kitchen, and served very adequate meals, which often involved salads. The day started out cloudy and rainy, but that soon gave way to partly sunny skies and 82 degrees. The breeze made it pleasant to be on the beach. There had previously been a fenced-off swimming area, but the current was very strong, and the ocean floor very rocky, so it really wasn't a place to swim. The new owner had put in a swimming pool and removed the enclosed area in the sea.

We quickly settled into a routine: sleep late, have a leisurely breakfast, work (I took my laptop), read, swim, chat with other guests, eat, watch news on TV (particularly the German channel Deutsche Welle, which had some informative programs in English, including reactions from the man on the street to the first day of using the Euro), and retire late. We met some very nice people: a couple from Atlanta and a honeymooning Dutch couple with whom we planned to keep in touch. [I am very happy to say that more than 17 years later, we are still in touch, and they have three delightful daughters. I've visited them several times in Utrecht.] One evening we had a potluck snack/dinner down on the beach. Three couples contributed food and drink, and we had four hours of lively conversation.

***[Diary]** One day, we decided to use the rental car and check out some accommodation in the northeast of the island, an ecolodge near the southern entrance to the rainforest. Years ago, a landslide blocked the road that went through the rainforest. We walked a short way along that road. A local was dropping off some hikers who were trekking six miles to a waterfall we could see from the road. He said it was eight miles to the landslide, but we weren't interested in hiking that far. The ecolodge didn't excite us much, so we didn't get a brochure. We did, however, visit a nice-looking inn with a spectacular view of the eastern coast. This place had possibilities for a future visit. We took the coastal road back to our hotel.*

The weather continued to be warm and mostly sunny. A couple of days were very windy, with many gusts over 20 mph. There was always a breeze, but not usually over five mph. Most days some brave guests swam in the sea. Every day keen surfers sought the best waves nearby. Jenny usually ventured into the ocean for a quick dip, and then swam in the pool for 30 minutes. One evening before dusk, we walked along the shore. Another evening we sat in chairs near the shore, enjoying the cool breeze and the sounds of the waves.

Another day, we revisited the hot springs at Coamo, about 25 miles away as the crow flies. A drive along part of the mountainous, scenic highway seemed like a good plan, but, again, we were tricked by poor sign posting. We missed the scenic route completely, but did enjoy winding through the mountains, even if we didn't really need to be there. We finally caught the freeway south and reached Coamo. The area was more built up since our visit nine years earlier, but the hotel still looked attractive. By 4 p.m. we were back at Playa Caribe.

One evening, we drove into Guayama for dinner to give the cook a night off. We ate pizza, which was a nice change from salads. We also shopped for the barbecue we were to attend Friday evening with a group of guests at the hotel.

On the last day, we drove into the town of Patillas where we picked up ice and a few more necessities for the group barbecue. About 15 people attended. We dined well on hamburgers, hotdogs, fajitas, salad, chips and salsa, and coconut layer cake. A most enjoyable evening was had by all.

***[Diary]** We rose early, enjoyed our last breakfast listening to the waves, packed and checked out. We set off for San Juan about 10 am. We had arranged to have lunch with the parents of a former teaching colleague. Norma was an ESL teacher at Terraset in Reston, but had married and moved to Istanbul, Turkey. She was visiting her parents who had spent a day with us at the beach on a previous trip. We enjoyed our visit, and Norma's 10-month-old daughter, Selin, was delightful.*

We got to the airport in plenty of time. Check-in went smoothly, and, although the line for security was long, it helped to pass the time. For no apparent reason, everyone was removing their shoes to be X-rayed, so we did too. We had exit seats, which gave us extra room. We had a good flight during which we enjoyed a very nice salmon dinner and saw a good film. Our trusty taxi driver, neighbor Joe, came to collect us from Dulles Airport. After unpacking, we joined him at his house for coffee and snacks.

This was a most enjoyable, relaxing trip. For me it was also very productive, as I worked about half-time developing a new seminar. Now we were back into the routine of home life. While it wasn't 85 degrees, at least it was milder than January can be.

10.2 Playa Caribe and San Juan

From a trip over Christmas, 2008:

[Diary] *Feliz Navidad! (That's "Merry Christmas" in Spanish.) Being a frequent flyer, I accumulate a lot of points, and the best way to use them is to fly even more, but for free. So, this Christmas, we decided to spend a week in the sun, in Puerto Rico, to the east of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. We've visited quite a few times before, but always during the Christmas-New Year break as that's when Scott was out of school. However, our previous visit was in April 2007. Now that Jenny was back teaching fulltime, once again, she was constrained by the school calendar.*

[Diary] *Our Airbus A320 departed, on time, at 8:15 am, pretty much full. It was a cold but clear day. We took off to the north then headed east over Maryland getting a great view of the whole of the Chesapeake Bay. We then flew south overland. Flying time was estimated at 3:45 hours. I advanced my clock one hour to GMT-4 time.*

The flight was uneventful, just like a flight should be. Although I was tired I wasn't able to sleep, so I read, worked on some puzzles and started this diary. Almost before we knew it, we were on approach to the capital San Juan, and the view out my window was of bright blue sea, beaches and, yes, sunshine. We touched down right at 1 pm, local time. Soon after we got to the baggage carousel our luggage arrived and we were out at the curb waiting for the Avis Car Rental shuttle bus. We were dropped off at our Hyundai, and navigator Jenny was pressed into service. The temperature was in the high 70s F, just like winter should be.

We headed east on the autopista (freeway) towards Fajardo. Since almost all the signs on the road and the shops and businesses were in Spanish, I switched to Spanish mode. And although they use the metric system for most things, the speed limit signs are all in miles per hour! The freeway system had been under construction for many years. As to when it will be finished, the answer is probably "mañana" (literally "tomorrow," but really "whenever," maybe "never"). Near the east coast, we turned south passed the old U.S. Navy base of Roosevelt Roads.

It took about 1:40 hours to get to our destination, Playa Caribe, a little piece of Heaven, and a small hotel at which we'd stopped five or six times before. Two friendly guys checked us in to our favorite block of rooms, 30 yards in from the pounding ocean. We were in a ground floor room with a king-size bed, cable TV, table and chairs, refrigerator, and mini kitchen. Outside on the verandah we had a table and chairs. Hammocks hung in the coconut trees. The first thing we did even before we unpacked was to take off all the plastic window screens (installed for the air conditioning), so the breeze could blow right through from front to back, or vice versa. No artificial air conditioning for us, thank you very much! Once we were unpacked and changed into beachwear, I made a pot of tea, which we had with some snacks. It was all rather civilized.

We managed to stay awake all afternoon and went to the hotel restaurant at 6:30 pm. Jenny had a very nice pasta, chicken, and shrimp dinner, and I had a great bowl of spaghetti and meatballs. We capped it with glasses of iced pineapple juice.

To wind down, we read, played computer games and listened to my newest album, from the young female Welsh singer Duffy. Lights out at 9 pm.

[Diary] After breakfast, we drove into Guayama, the nearest large town, where we shopped for groceries. The sun was very intense and we both remarked that if this was winter, how hot could it be in summer?

We had salad and sliced meat with glasses of passion fruit juice while sitting out on our verandah being serenaded by the crashing waves. After that strenuous effort, Jenny retired to a hammock with a novel.

We lazed away the afternoon, snacking whenever the mood took us, and watched several TV shows. Lights out at 9 pm.

[Diary] We were awake at 7 am after 10 hours of pretty good sleep. Her Majesty was served breakfast in bed, which she consumed while reading a novel. At 11 am, we started watching a series of TV shows, pausing to fix lunch and to allow the chambermaid to make our bed, change towels, and sweep the floor.

The afternoon was spent in much the same fashion, with reading, music (can you say "Duffy"?) and the crash of waves. Once again, we had a steady intake of calories throughout the day. I started a novel, the latest from J.D. Robb, "Salvation in Death." Then we watched a movie that was mildly amusing. Lights out at 11 pm.

[Diary] It was 8:30 am by the time we were awake. Once again, the butler delivered breakfast-in-bed to Princess Jenny, tea and cookie, with cereal and fruit. Then it was reading time until 10 am. It was sunny out, and a bit warmer than the previous day. Several lots of new guests came to sunbathe on the folding chairs under the palm trees. Some women even took off their tops. Well, I ask you! I marched right out there and gave them 24 hours to stop that behavior.

Before starting on some work, I made sure I really was ready, by doing a series of logic puzzles. As that went well, I set about making detailed plans for a business trip I'd be taking to Sacramento, California, soon after we got home.

We spent much of the day reading and snacking, following by snacking and reading. In short, we took it very easy. Jenny did some lesson preparation just in case she decided to go back home and to work.

Supper was a very casual affair, and we read until lights out at 10:30 pm. However, for me, my brainstorming continued until at least midnight, by which time, I was overtired.

[Diary] I was awake soon after 5 am. (Don't you just hate that when that happens!) Unfortunately, my brain kicked in soon after, and all attempts to get back to sleep failed, so, at 6:15 am, I got up and dressed. Day broke as I went north along the beach dodging the crashing waves. I walked more than a mile before the sun rose. It was a brilliant orange ball rising over the eastern sea. However, not long after, rain clouds moved over it and I could see heavy rain falling in the distance out over the sea.

Back at the hotel, I met some new residents, and chatted awhile with them. Then I gave the wireless internet connection one last try, and, lo and behold, I got connected. A bunch of email went out and, of the flood that came in, only two messages were of interest, and there was no new work waiting. Yes!

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At 8:30 am, Jenny stirred, so I made tea. We'd bought two very large Asian pears (sometimes known by their Japanese name "nashi"), and treated ourselves to one of them for breakfast. It was absolutely delicious. Then it was on to reading, listening to music (can you say "Duffy"?), and computer games.

We "vegged out," lying on the bed watching quite a few shows on TV. Basically, we took a holiday, and did things we don't ordinarily do.

Soon after 5 pm, we hopped in the car and headed off to the east taking a random local road deep into the mountains and through little villages. Once it got dark, it was hard to see all the sharp turns and narrow parts of the road, but that just made it a bit more exciting. And a few of the locals didn't believe in headlights. We finally emerged in the town of Patillas, and from there, we went back home on the main highway, arriving at 6:29 pm, just in time for our 6:30 pm dinner reservation. Jenny had a well-done steak with rice and beans, and I had catfish with rice and beans. Once again, we had ice-cold pineapple juice. Lights out by 11 pm.

[Diary] *Jenny's 55th birthday; holy Toledo! As with all the other days on the trip, I served her breakfast in bed. I worked solidly for about six hours, taking breaks now and then to stretch and snack. Jenny lay in the hammock and read.*

At 4 pm, I stripped down for Rafael, who gave me a full body massage for 75 minutes. Despite the fact that he was quite physical, I was so relaxed that I nearly went to sleep. He was a physical therapist who came to the hotel after work, on demand.

After supper, we went to the hotel restaurant for dessert; we shared pineapple flan and vanilla cheesecake. I had a cup of café con leche (coffee with milk), but it was very strong, and not quite how I expected it to be. (Don't you just hate that when that happens!) However, it didn't keep me awake.

[Diary] *After our usual light breakfast I planned to do some work, but I got distracted listening to music (can you say "Duffy"?), and playing computer games. Around noon, I finally got going, and put in a couple of solid hours.*

We snacked for lunch. New neighbors arrived, bringing everything a small army might need for a New Year's Eve BBQ and party. Late afternoon, we joined up with our immediate neighbors to talk, snack, and then have supper together on our joint verandah.

Jenny met a couple who had no car, so, after several days at the hotel they were ready to go somewhere, anywhere. So, at 10:30 pm, we headed out looking for a convenience store, so they could buy some supplies. As we found, almost everything was closed for New Year's Eve. However, as we approached Patillas, we found a place open, and it was very busy. We arrived back at the hotel at 11:50 pm, just in time to hear the New Year countdown by the partygoers and to see a man light up a very large string of pretty fireworks he had hanging from a palm tree down on the beach. After that, it was pretty anticlimactic; everyone packed up and went to bed, which was fine with us. Lights out at 12:15 am, and we were asleep very soon after.

[Diary] *New Year's Day; prospero nuevo año!*

We were awake at 8:15 am. We had a light breakfast, which just about used up our food supplies. I made a picnic lunch, and then got my last email fix before we packed our bags.

Reluctantly, we checked out at 11 am, and some fellow guests joined us. We stopped at a convenience store for some snacks before dropping the guests at a beach just outside of town.

We took our time driving back to San Juan. Being a holiday, traffic was very light. The weather was wonderful, and we had the windows down all the way. By the time we got to our hotel it was 1:30 pm; however, no rooms were available until 3 pm, so we had our picnic lunch in the shade by the pool. I'd found the Coqui Inn on the internet. It's near the international airport, had all we needed, and was quite cheap. It was painted in brilliant colors with nautical murals. (A coqui is a local species of frog. It is featured on all kinds of souvenirs.)

I sat in the foyer and worked on this diary while Jenny wrote some postcards and read. At 2:45 pm, our room was ready, so I moved our gear into room 218, on the second floor, way at the back through a maze of open corridors. There was a sizeable kitchen, which was a bonus. Right about then, we decided to forgo spending the afternoon in old San Juan in and near the old fortress. Instead, we found a second, larger pool near our room, and went there to sit in the sun. Rumor has it that I was even seen swimming, a rare sight. Although the water was mostly in the sun, it still felt cold, but I took the plunge anyway, and recovered fairly quickly. After some 10 laps, I'd gotten the exercise bug out of my system, and then I sat in the sun reading my favorite English grammar book, "Woe is I," by Patricia O'Connor. (I kid you not; doesn't everybody take a grammar book on their vacation?)

Back in our room I hooked up to the free wireless internet connection and got some New Year email from friends around the world.

At 7 pm, we went out to eat and buy gas. We ended up at a "traditional Puerto Rican place," Burger King. Lights out at 9:15 pm with the ceiling fan on all night.

[Diary] *The alarm was set for 5:20 am, but I was wide awake at 4:15 am. (Don't you just hate that!) We checked out of the hotel just before 6 am and drove the five minutes to the airport. The rental car shuttle bus air conditioning was so cold it was a shock to the system.*

We ran our cases through the U.S Dept. of Agriculture X-ray system, and then checked in. As Puerto Rico is a U.S. Territory there was no immigration check. We stopped off at a café for some empanadas and hot chocolate. The lines at security moved quickly, and soon we were at Gate 34 with 40 minutes to wait before boarding.

When traveling, I find it interesting to look at all the places flights are departing to and arriving from. At that time, these were Anguilla, Antigua, Bonaire, Grenada, Panama City, St. Croix and St. Thomas (U.S. Virgin Islands), St. Lucia, St. Maarten, Santo Domingo, Tortola and Virgin Gorda (British Virgin Islands), various cities within Puerto Rico, and a number of cities in the U.S.

United's flight UA972 boarded, and I was first on the Airbus A320. It was a full flight. We took off, on time, in very pleasant weather. The Captain told us that he expected a bit of turbulence during the 3:52-

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hour flight, and that the temperature at IAD was currently 32 degrees F with the possibility of light snow when we arrived. Right about then I knew it was a mistake to go back home!

As soon as we lifted off, my body cried out for sleep. However, after repeated attempts to get comfortable and to sleep, I gave up and just closed my eyes and planned my trip to Sacramento, the capital of California, the following week.

Back home, we unpacked, Jenny got a load of washing going, and I went off grocery shopping. Basically, life was back to the usual. However, we sure were missing that natural warmth.

Adios, mis amigos (goodbye my friends).

11. October 2018, "Living in Chicago"

In August 1979, after leaving Australia and traveling five weeks in Asia and Europe, and then spending a week in the Washington DC area, I arrived in [Chicago](#). Then, after a week in temporary housing, my wife and I moved into a 30-story apartment building. It was the first time I'd ever lived in an apartment, the first time I'd lived off the ground, and the first time as an adult I'd not had a car! It was our first place living in the US, and I was to start my first job there. It was also the first autumn after the [big winter storm of Christmas 1978](#).

Prior to leaving Australia, I'd told my visa sponsor, Harvey, that I'd be interested in working on either of the east or west coasts of the US, but *definitely not* in the [Midwest](#)! However, after not working for a couple of months, and eager to get started on something challenging, when I arrived in DC, he informed me that the best fit he had for my skill set was a project in Chicago. Despite my earlier lack of interest in that area, I accepted the position. After all, what was the worst thing that could happen there, right?

11.1 Staying at the Y

We rode the overnight train from Washington DC to Chicago. On arrival, the only place we could afford to stay was the [YMCA](#), right downtown. Were we broke? No, but we weren't too far from it, at least in terms of readily available cash! After our initial plan to travel from Australia to the US in two weeks went sour at the last minute, we'd replaced it with an open ticket that eventually took five weeks to complete. And while we saw and did a lot more in numerous countries, we foolishly had not made adequate financial-support provisions. While all the money from the sale of our house was Down Under in a bank account, we had no way to get at it. [Of course, this was well before the internet, on-line banking, and cash machines.]

As we needed more money to get started with our new life, Harvey gave me an advance against my first month's salary, and sent it in the form of a check in the first-class post. And that should have taken no more than two days to get there. While we were waiting, we went in search of a place to live, and we found a nice apartment that was suitable for a man whose name means *King* in Latin. The rental agent was very pleasant and understanding as we explained our *temporary* financial situation.

Well, don't you know, each day we went to the front desk for the check, and each day we were told, "Sorry; not yet!" Of course, we were getting quite desperate. Finally, we got the check; it *had* been delivered days earlier, but had fallen behind a desk in the office, so was mislaid for days, but it didn't know that. Don't you just hate it when that happens!

We finally had money, but only for a very short while. After paying the first month's rent plus one-and-a-half month's security deposit, we were back to having very little. On the one hand, we couldn't afford to stay at the Y any longer, but we almost couldn't afford to move into the apartment either! In hindsight, it was a ridiculous situation, but, hey, we were 25 and invincible!

[I can say with great certainty, that our week at the Y was nothing at all like the 1978 hit record [Y.M.C.A.](#) by the American disco group [Village People](#).]

11.2 North Pine Grove Avenue

The location of our new home was half a mile inland from the western shore of [Lake Michigan](#), near the intersection of Lake Shore Drive and Irving Park, at 4000 North. [In US cities, each block has up to 100 address numbers, so 4000 means *40 blocks*. But of course, some blocks can be longer than others, although in many grids they are about the same length.] We were on the northern edge of a “nicer part of town.” The building had 30-odd floors with about 1,000 residents. Clearly, that was more than the population of many towns!

The front entrance was manned day and night by one of several uniformed doormen. The doorman's job was to welcome people, help them with their luggage or shopping bags, and to hail a taxi with his whistle. I well remember Henry, the main guy on the day shift; he was very personable and was always positive.

Inside the expansive lobby sat one or more receptionists behind a counter, and they helped residents with issues, dealt with guests, and handled various administrative tasks. At the back of the lobby was a wall of mailboxes, of which there were more than 600. Packages that were too large to fit in the box were retrieved from reception. When I learned that the job of the mailman who served our building was to serve *only* our building, I was shocked. But when you think about it, sorting and delivering mail to 1,000 people at 600 addresses, six days a week (yes, mail was delivered on Saturdays back then, and still is today), certainly sounds like it could keep a person busy all day.

When I say that the building was self-contained, I mean, it was *self-contained*! There was a large indoor gym, table tennis rooms, meeting/function rooms, an outdoor pool, and several tennis courts. At ground-level, there was a [White Hen Pantry](#) convenience store, alongside a dry-cleaning shop. Underground were resident and guest parking garages and a gasoline pump. One could come home from work Friday night and not have to go outside again until the following Monday. And we did just that on a few very-cold-and-snowy weekends!

11.3 Home Sweet Home

Our apartment was on the 19th floor. Of course, we had elevators (AU: lifts), and I don't recall having to ever use the stairs up or down.

One entered the apartment through an entrance hall that had a large coat and storage closet. There was one large bedroom with built-in closets; a decent kitchen, complete with all appliances (including a refrigerator, which apartments in Australia often did *not* provide); a dining room connected to a large lounge room; and a bathroom with a shower over the tub, a vanity unit, some cabinets, and a toilet bowl. (Now that we were living in America, we could see firsthand why “going to the bathroom” usually meant “going to the toilet;” after all, the toilet *was* in the bathroom!) The place was tastefully carpeted. There were laundry facilities every few floors.

One thing I noticed very early on was that there was a phone jack in almost every room. In Australia, houses came with only one. What we'd heard was true after all, those Americans truly were decadent!

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Back in South Australia, people paid (and still pay) rent by the week, so when we were confronted with having to pay by the month, in advance, we were shocked. \$400 was a lot of money all at once! [We'd signed a 1-year lease that had a penalty for early termination.]

One lounge room wall was all glass, and it faced west. So, how was the view from the 19th floor? Ours was by far the tallest residential building in the neighborhood, so we looked down on everyone. The only trees we could see were at a cemetery way off in the distance. We were beyond the end of the landing path for one of the many runways at [O'Hare International Airport](#) (ORD), so at night we could see up to seven or eight planes on approach stacked up with their landing lights on.

[Ironically, that airport was significant to us before we knew we'd be living in Chicago. On 1979-05-25, [American Airlines Flight 191](#) crashed moments after takeoff from ORD, killing all passengers and crew. What made this significant for us was that the plane was a McDonnell Douglas DC-10, the type we'd initially planned to fly across the Pacific with Air New Zealand. As a result, all DC-10s around the world were grounded, indefinitely. It took us some time to realize the impact on us, and by the time we did, the alternate flights across the Pacific were taken, so we went via Asia and Europe instead.]

Although I worked long/odd hours, *not once* in the whole year I lived there did I ever meet anyone on my floor! And I only ever met one neighbor, and she phoned before coming to our door to be sure to not inconvenience us. What I learned was that one could live among 1,000 people, yet still be alone, unless one made it a point to engage those around one. In fact, one story told was of a tenant dying in their apartment, but it wasn't until some days went by, and an unpleasant odor wafted out into the corridor, that they were discovered. Is that sad, or what?

11.4 Starting from Scratch

Some four months earlier, back in Australia, we'd been living in our own house that was filled with furniture, and driving two cars and a motorcycle. And here we were literally starting all over again. All we'd brought with us to the US was a large suitcase of stuff and two pieces of hand luggage. [A year later, we had another mid-sized case of supposedly important stuff airfreighted over, and some five years later, we filled a container with stuff we had in storage, which came by ship. This included a 1,000-book library.]

In the first week after we moved into the apartment, we had a couple of cheap aluminum folding beds, pillows, blankets, a few kitchen things, and some bathroom stuff.

So, how to get some furniture. At that time, Australia had its own credit card, [Bankcard](#); Visa and Mastercard were not supported. Knowing that card would not be accepted abroad, weeks before we departed, we got an American Express card, and that's what helped us establish credit in the US. We went to [Wiebolts](#) Department store, and they sold us a queen-size bed with base, provided we paid cash-on-delivery. And as we didn't have any new cash for a month, we had to wait until then to take delivery of the bed. Once that happened, the store was happy to give us our own charge account, and we used that to buy a sofa-bed, a TV, a stereo, a dining table and four chairs, linens and towels, and several large indoor plants. Despite that, we kept the place rather [Spartan](#); for example, the bed never did get a base, and the stereo and TV sat on a pile of house bricks we'd scavenged from somewhere.

We also needed to set up a bank account, but there were no banks in our neighborhood. As I'd be in the city each business day, I decided to find one near my workplace. Well, don't you know, one of the biggest banks in the US, [Continental Illinois](#), was just around the corner, so I went there. [That bank went out of business in 1984!] I walked into this cavernous room with rows of tellers around several sides, each separated from their neighbor by a glass partition, and on top of each partition sat a brown plastic doe kangaroo, complete with joey in her pouch. Of course, it was a money box into which one could put one's spare change. And as a new customer I got one. [Thirty-nine years later, I still have it.] So why would a huge American bank have a kangaroo as one of its symbols? While on the one hand the bank served big business, on the other it served the little people as well, so it was a "a little bank within a big bank!" Surprise enough? Well, you might think so, but wait, there's more! When I asked about branches and where else I could make deposits or withdrawals, or do other business, they told me I could come to this head office, or to either of the other two branches the bank had. Say what? This huge bank had only three branches? Yes, and according to bank regulations at that time, while a bank could have branches, they had to be no more than 1,000 yards from the head office. Really! [In the US, banking in each state is controlled by that state's laws, and back then to stop big banks moving into small towns and markets, putting small and farmers-and-merchants' local banks out of business, there were severe restrictions. I don't imagine that is still the case today.]

11.5 Playing Tourist Around Town

As I worked very long hours, I didn't do a lot most weekends but rest. I did, however, visit the following: Opening Day of the baseball season at [Wrigley Field](#) to see the Chicago Cubs, a ride up into the clouds at the top of the (then) [Sears Tower](#), [Lincoln Park Zoo](#) in winter to see how the kangaroos were handling the snow, the [Chicago River dyed green for Saint Patrick's Day](#), [Water Tower Place](#), the [Chicago Art Institute](#), and [Michigan Avenue—The Golden Mile](#), lit up for Christmas with trees wrapped in lights.

11.6 Going Out of Town

We managed to take a few personal trips out of town: snow skiing in [Traverse City](#), Michigan; canoeing and camping on the [Au Sable River](#), Michigan; and a visit to Washington DC then driving back from [Detroit](#), where we visited the [Henry Ford Museum](#). I also travelled a bit on business: to Indianapolis, Indiana; Columbus, Ohio; Lansing, Michigan; Salt Lake City, Utah; and San Diego, California.

11.7 Race in America

Although Australia was a large and growing melting pot of immigrants when we left, for the most part, people of different ethnic backgrounds got along quite well. Certainly, there were people from many eastern and western European, and Asian countries. Chicago was also a melting pot, with large groups of Polish, Irish, and African Americans, with a sizeable Jewish community. And the Federal Government (for which I consulted) hired a lot of minorities.

Two race-related situations come to mind: Derek, an African-American colleague planned to paint his apartment one weekend, and I said I'd go there and give him a hand. As I got closer to his neighborhood, I noticed that I was the only white person on the bus and then in the whole neighborhood, and the locals were eyeing me suspiciously. Well, I got there and back safely, but other

colleagues told me afterwards they'd never even drive through that area for fear of breaking down and getting mugged!

The second event also involved Derek. We rented a car and I drove us to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where we stayed two nights with an uncle of his. The uncle was a very nice guy, and he took us to the neighborhood bar for a drink and some food. Of course, I'm the only white guy in the place, and after a while, I noticed how people at other tables were staring at me: "What's Whitey doing in *our* place?" Interestingly, all those people who actually came over to our table and met and talked with me became very relaxed and friendly, *once they found out I was not a white American!* Then, on the drive home, in suburban Chicago, the Police stopped us. We didn't ask them why, but we figured there were two likely reasons: We were driving a rental car, which happened to have out-of-state plates, and we were a black guy and a white guy traveling together, so we were probably up to no-good!

11.8 The Job

The US Federal Department of Labor had requested bids on a computer-related job, and as often happens, the lowest bidder won. Never mind that the client had no expertise with the winning hardware, operating system, or software! A large company had a contract to supply IT staff, and I worked through them. The client had been waiting for some months to find qualified people, and was happy to have me, even if I did speak a little funny!

Five-to-six days a week, I rode the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus to and from work downtown at the Federal building at [Kluczynski Plaza](#). [BTW, the original name of the popular rock band [Chicago](#), was *Chicago Transit Authority*.]

My first project was to design and program an application to track apprenticeships in a 4-state region of the Midwest: Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois. I also wrote a user guide, and traveled to each state to train users who connected using a video terminal via a phone line and modem. The system I delivered was very well accepted, and became the model for a national system, replacing an antiquated and unfriendly one. I worked very long days, and often rode home after midnight on the CTA along with some very interesting passengers, some of whom were arguing with themselves!

My second project was for the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration ([OSHA](#)), for a lab in Cincinnati, Ohio. It calibrated and repaired various kinds of instruments for Federal and State governments, as well as for private companies. They needed a system to track arrivals of equipment, the stages of the repair process, and the return shipping. They also dialed in over phone lines to use the central computer. That project also went very well.

For any old-time, computer nerds out there, here are the technical details of my computing environment: We had a Digital Equipment Corp. (DEC) [PDP 11-34](#) with 256 KB of memory, various small-capacity cartridge disk drives, a console terminal, [VT100](#) screens, a line printer, a 9-track magnetic tape drive, and some 300-baud dial-in phone lines to which remote terminals connected via acoustic couplers. The operating system was [RSTS/E V6](#), and the programming languages we used were BASIC-PLUS, [DIBOL](#), and COBOL. [Although I'd used RSTS as a student, five years earlier, it was only as a novice user/programmer. Now I was *The Man*, the person who installed and maintained the O/S!]

11.9 Accents and Aussie vs. American English

For the whole year I was on the job, each week, we'd have a staff meeting, during which the head guy would ask for status reports. And each week when I spoke, he whispered to my boss, "What did he say?" I found this amusing given that many of the people working in the group were from the south side of the city, and spoke out the side of their mouths. I often had trouble understanding *them*! It seemed to me that they just assumed that as I was a native-English speaker that they should be able to understand me without having to pay close attention. They made allowances for others whose first language was not English, but not for me.

One weekend, we were with American friends in our apartment building and the topic of Rhyming Slang came up as an Australian thing. For example, *bag of fruit* means *suit*, *trouble and strife* means *wife*, and *china plate* means *mate*. [The challenge is that often the rhyming words get shortened, so *china plate* is reduced to *china*, which had no obvious rhyme-association with *mate*.] One person asked, "Do you have any terms like that about Americans?" To which we smiled and replied, "Yes, Septic Tank, *Yank*, which is shortened to *septic*!" They didn't think that was at all funny. [Aussies think that's hilarious. Besides, the more an Aussie likes you, the more he insults you! So, if an Aussie is insulting you, he either *really likes you*, or he *really dislikes you*; you decide.]

11.10 Chicago Politics and Government

Perhaps the most famous politician in Chicago was the long-serving Mayor, Richard J. Daley. He famously said, "Chicago is a city that works!" The winter before we arrived, his successor, Michael Bilandic, was golfing in Florida when the superstorm referred to earlier, hit. It's unlikely he could have done more than was done to manage the crisis, but he was ousted at the next election by a feisty woman, Jane Byrne, who served during our stay. Her promise was to move the snow if/when it came! And she did, although it was a very mild winter.

I recall that one time, the Chicago Tribune newspaper provided detailed coverage of all the murders that had occurred in the past month. During our year there, the school system, which was run by the city, went broke. A crime ring was caught that had been stealing radio equipment from police cars and selling it back to the Police Department! Although I wasn't out in the community all that much, over the year, I only saw police in action once, from a window in a high-rise building nearby, going down an outside subway entrance to deal with an incident. I recall that many police were quite obese, and some rode on three-wheel motorcycle trikes. [At the time, there was a popular comedy sketch showing a police officer shooting a suspect **and then yelling, "Freeze!"**]

11.11 Some Miscellaneous Stuff

Several unrelated things come to mind:

- In Australia, FM/stereo radio existed, but there were almost no commercial stations allowed to use it. In Chicago, we had a wide range of such stations, with many specializing in a particular style of music. That suited us just fine! [BTW, Australia had, and still has, Federal-Government-run national radio and TV networks.]
- Unlike in Australia where the phone company was Federal-Government controlled (and formerly joined with the Post Office), in the US, phone companies were private although there

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were near-monopolies. The year or so after we arrived, deregulation of that industry went ahead full steam. We had also been used to state-controlled electricity, water, and natural gas supplies.

- Concrete beaches! Yes, large concrete slabs ran along the waterfront of Lake Michigan back up to where people sat “at the beach!”

11.12 Moving to the DC Area

As the end of our year was approaching, I made it clear to Harvey that I was ready to move on, and he found a great fit for me with an international IT company based in the planned city of [Reston](#) in Northern Virginia, 45 minutes from Washington DC.

Although we had arrived in Chicago with one case and two carry-on bags, we now had a 1-bedroom apartment full of furniture, household things, and numerous personal things. So, we rented a small moving truck and took three days to drive to the Washington DC area. However, the departure was not without incident. On moving day, I took the expansion leaf out of the dining table, and carried that table all the way to the freight elevator on our floor, where I left it to go back and get more things to fill up the elevator for the ride down to the truck. But when I came back, the table was gone. Unbeknownst to us, it was common practice in the building to leave stuff one didn't want any more near the freight elevator, so neighbors who wanted it, could take it. After some hours of panic and investigation, we found the guy who'd taken it and he gave it back to us once we explained the situation. Thirty-eight years later, I still have that dining table, complete with expansion leaf, although the chairs have long since been replaced. The queen-size bed is now my guestroom bed, and I think I still have some bath towels, cutlery, and cookware from that time.

11.13 Looking Back

After we moved, a replacement for me wasn't yet in place, so I agreed to go back to Chicago for a month, during which time I stayed in a very nice hotel downtown near the waterfront, and walked to/from work each day.

I can't say that I ever missed the city, but then I was so busy with work that I wasn't really connected to the place. In any event, I'm always looking forward to the next adventure, rarely looking backwards. However, from 1989 to 1996, I did return to the area on a regular basis for a week at a time. In each of those visits, I taught a computer-programming language seminar at the nuclear accelerator facility [FermiLab](#) in nearby Batavia, but only once did I stop over to re-visit downtown Chicago.

Although I try to use direct flights as much as possible, from time to time I've been routed through Chicago's O'Hare Airport on my way to somewhere else. It is the home of my main airline, United, whose gates occupy two enormous terminals, with an underground moving sidewalk with an art/color/light/sound show between them. If you are passing through those terminals, it's worth taking a look.

12. November 2018, "Signs of Life: Part 14"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from trips to Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.



From Fažana, Croatia, jumping-off point by ferry to the island complex of former Yugoslavia's President, Marshal Josip Broz Tito.

Who knew such a competition existed!

One of them there squat toilets.



From Pula, Croatia.

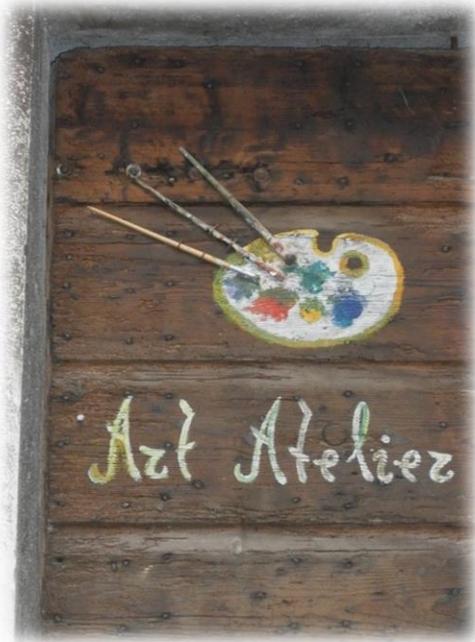
Basically, "No fun allowed at this waterfront".



I "discovered" naïve art in a museum in Zagreb. Then in Rovinj, I saw all kinds of galleries selling it.

According to Wikipedia, “An atelier ... the private workshop or studio of a professional artist in the fine or decorative arts.” It was a new word for me.

I saw many of them in Rovinj.



From a construction site during a day trip to Venice by ferry from Croatia.

“Pedestrians keep left!”. Interestingly, in the bad-old days, left-handed people were considered devils, and the Latin word *sinistro* (*left*) became the English sinister.





On the door of a compartment on the ferry from Croatia to Venice.

I finally decided that it was a stretcher. For the longest time, it looked like the end wall of a public toilet cubicle that just happened to have a human outline on it.



I thought this was an usual use of the word lush, which I've only ever used in the context of a garden.

The reflection in the window is just some Aussie/American tourist wearing an Adelaide Crows football cap.



On the back of the seat in front of me on a bus going from Croatia to Slovenia. “How satisfied are you with us today?”

Now, you may well ask, “Why is the sign written in German?” Because, the bus company was German—the former German National Railway company, in fact—and was (eventually) going on to Munich, Bavaria. The company serviced that route once each day in each direction.

DEVIL café & bar



One Hell-of-a-place to eat and drink in the famous Slovenian tourist town of Bled.



The good news was the Slovenian sign was also written in English. The bad news was I still had no idea what was downstairs in this castle/museum in Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital.

According to Wikipedia, "A lapidarium is a place where stone (Latin: lapis) monuments and fragments of archaeological interest are exhibited."



An innocent-looking sign, except for the interesting spelling of *Tuesday*.



Lo and behold, right there at the base of the castle-on-the-hill in Ljubljana was a "nursery under the castle".

Do all those kids have one or two artificial arms, or am I being too literal?



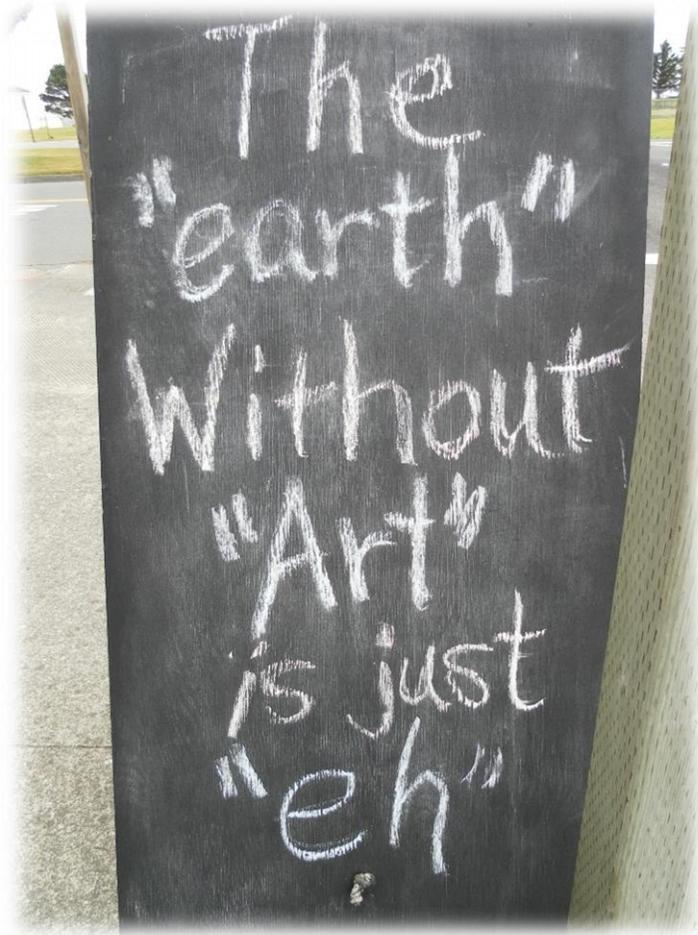
As best as I can tell, the green text says, "No God, no State, no Califate!" Then someone added, "And no correct grammar either!", apparently because one or more of the negated articles doesn't have the right gender.

As to why this graffiti in Slovenia was written in German is a mystery to me.



In Ljubljana, I learned about Metelkova, "a self-proclaimed autonomous neighborhood much like Copenhagen's Freetown Christiania." Having visited the latter, I thought I'd drop by for a visit. It was quite small, and most buildings were painted with interesting street art.

Very clever!



Annex A. Cumulative Index for Volumes 1–11

A.1 Postings in Reverse Chronological Order

Here are the essays posted thus far, with the most recent listed first:

A.1.1 Volume 11

- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #125 April 2020: [The REALLY BIG Picture](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)

A.1.2 Volume 10

- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #119 October 2019: [Washington D.C.](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #116 July 2019: [My Experience with Airbnb](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #113 April 2019: [Law Enforcement in the US](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)

A.1.3 Volume 9

- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.

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- #101 April 2018: [These United States](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #98 January 2018: [Having a Plan B](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)

A.1.4 Volume 8

- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)

A.1.5 Volume 7

- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #80 July 2016: [It's all Greek to Me](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)

A.1.6 Volume 6

- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)

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- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #62 January 2015: [Sockets, Plugs, and Cables](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)

A.1.7 Volume 5

- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #58 September 2014: [Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #56 July 2014: [Technology, Revisited](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #50 January 2014: [The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)

A.1.8 Volume 4

- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #47 October 2013: [Last Writes](#) — Leaving an audit trail for your executor and/or loved ones
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things
- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #38 January 2013: [Starting your Own Non-Profit](#)
- #37 December 2012: [Symbols and Marks](#)

A.1.9 Volume 3

- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)

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- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #32 July 2012: [Are You Getting Enough Vacation?](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)
- #30 May 2012: [Shooting and Editing Home Video](#)
- #29 April 2012: [Electronic Mail Etiquette](#) — Some of my pet peeves and observations about people who use email
- #28 March 2012: [How Committees Work](#) — My take on 40 years of committee participation, and how successful committees can and should work.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #25 December 2011: [Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program.

A.1.10 Volume 2

- #24 November 2011: [A Little Foreign Language Goes a Long Way](#) — The advantages of having some basic foreign language skills when traveling.
- #23 October 2011: [Starting Your Own Business](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #21 August 2011: [Teaching English as a Second Language](#)
- #20 July 2011: [A Walk along the River](#) — A look back at my 187-mile hike along the Thames Path in England.
- #19 June 2011: [Just Me and MiniMe: Traveling with Technology](#)
- #18 May 2011: [Planning for Success](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #15 February 2011: [Talk is Cheap. Write it Down](#) — I explore what I perceive to be the four stages of turning a dream into reality and why many people don't have what it takes to go beyond the first one or two stages.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.

A.1.11 Volume 1

- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.

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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #7 June 2010: [Australia and the U.S. – A Contrast](#) — A comparison of the following: politics and government, law enforcement, taxation, education, and changing light bulbs.
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)
- #1 December 2009: [Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's Off to Blog We Go](#) — The introduction to my blog.

A.2 Series: Travel

- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
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- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)
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- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)

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- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
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- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)

A.3 Series: What is Normal

- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)

A.4 Series: English

- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)

A.5 Series: A Little Bit of ...

- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
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- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things

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- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet

A.6 Series: Autobiographic Essays

- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.
- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.
- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.

A.7 Series: Signs of Life

- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan

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- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire