

Thursday Feb 20, 2014  
"Trip to the sun - and dental work"

Time to get a break from the rain & cold. Leave home 8:10 am. Meet our old work friend Loa Mize at George's Giant Hamburgers in Tigard, Oregon for lunch. Back into Portland to Powell's books to look for posters (of trees or birds or such - to replace our apple & pear posters) but they no longer sell them. However they did have a 35-years-newer version of my favorite bird book (Golden Guide). Cold & rainy in Portland so we hit the road to Newberg with time to spare. We figured we'd park somewhere, read, snooze, go for a walk before meeting Judy at 4:30. And just then - the Universe provided! The brand new Tualatin River Wildlife Refuge appeared just south of Tigard. We went for a lovely 2-mile walk (R/T) on a gravel path to a viewing area & saw Northern Shovelers, a red-tailed hawk up close, & a bright orange Fox Squirrel (beautiful, but invasive, alas). In an oak meadow we wondered about the potatoes in the trees, but

found out they were in fact oak galls. We arrived at Judy's shop (actually her daughter Jill's) a little after 4. Judy helps out selling the soaps & lotions her daughter makes. She & I chatted & I helped tie bows on gift bags while Grant took a short snooze. After a tour of her beautiful rented apartment above the shop, we had dinner at Taqueria Guerrero next door (5 stars on Yelp). It was noisy but delicious & friendly & very authentic food & atmosphere. Felt like we were in Mexico.

At 6:30 we hit the road & drove another 2.5 hours to a rest area just north of Roseburg. The Oregon & S rest areas we passed were smaller & noisier than Washington. All parking spots are right next to the freeway and we had a bright light shining in the window. But with earplugs I was able to sleep until 1:15, when I awoke with a start and realized we had forgotten our passports! We agreed to call Ian in the morning & ask him to overnight them to Yuma. (We briefly debated making the 14-hour round trip home to get them...) It was hard falling back asleep but

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we eventually did, and slept til 7. Rather than set up the stove to make hot water, we bought it at McDonalds (25¢ per cup). I called Ian & arranged to have him send the passports.

It's a mix of foggy & blue & so far there's no rain today. The scenery in southern Oregon is beautiful!

Siskiyou Summit bare & dry & blue sky. California looks drought-stricken - Shasta Lake is practically empty. Mt Shasta was gloriously visible today.

About 80 miles into CA, at exit 718, we pulled off for lunch. The sign said tent symbol & "no facilities." It turned out to be a Forest Service CG (closed for the season but day use open) on the Sacramento River called Sims Flat. It was warm & sunny! There was an old CCC suspension bridge over the river. And best of all, we watched two river otters fishing!

They were huge. We saw them eating fish, working their way upstream side by side, sometimes climbing onto a rock in the river. They were adorable! my first otters in the wild. (That I remember.)

Huge flock of red-winged blackbirds  
in trees at rest area - very loud!

Gassed up in Redding & it was 71°!  
We're warm at last.

We could see mt. Lassen in the  
distance & it reminded us of Linda  
Geslach, my cousin Michael's wife, who  
recently died of influenza at age 62 :-  
She & Mike lived next ~~to~~ to mt.  
Lassen Park & we visited them there twice.

I drove most of the day. The last  
two & a half hours were a little bit  
tough due to heavy traffic through  
Sacramento & Stockton.

We arrived at Caswell Memorial State  
Park (near Stockton) about 5:45, just  
before it got dark. Had a nice dinner  
of onion, potato, egg, cheese, & bacon.  
It's 50° at 7 pm. No fire because  
we want to be up early & on the  
road to Burbank. CG is nothing special.

## Saturday Feb. 22

Up at 5:30. Slept well though it was  
a bit chilly outside the covers. On the  
road at 6 - just getting light. Highway  
99 is ugly, but Grant says it's  
better than 1-5. The air is very  
hazy - looks like it hasn't rained in  
a long time. I drove the last 2.5 hours,

Arrived at my brother David's about noon. He & Annie were at work. We made lunch & hung out til David got back about two. He & I went hiking up on the hill behind their house. It's delightfully warm & sunny here. We had a yummy (late) dinner of bbq/baked chicken & caesar salad.

Sunday, Feb. 23

Slept soundly in the driveway & awoke about 7 to bright sunshine. Grant & I went to see David's office remodel (he owns Wonderland!, a graphic arts & e-commerce company). He's created a funky mid-century modern space. Someone ~~had~~ torched the dumpster outside his office & caught the garage next door on fire!

Then we walked around hip, happening new Burbank with lots of shops, restaurants, & character. Eclectic & fun.

Lunch back at the ranch & then David & I went hiking up nearby Stough Canyon. It was warm & steep, but nice. Hazy views again today.

Dinner at their favorite Mexican restaurant. Back to David & Annie's, then out to buy milk & bread.

They're all watching a movie I don't want to watch (*Girl With Dragon Tattoo*).

Annie is 7 months pregnant.

Monday Feb. 24

Nice walk in David's neighborhood (after saying goodbye to David, who headed off to work). A perfect morning, sunny but not too warm. Got back, had breakfast, said goodbye to Annie, & drove away about 9:30. Stopped for groceries then drove to USC, arriving about 11. Dan<sup>Erwin</sup> met us & took us to his office & labs for a fascinating tour.

Wind tunnels, vacuum chamber, rocket parts, students working on projects, milling machine, welders, 3-D printers. Very cool stuff! Then we had lunch at one of the dining halls & said goodbye.

Slogged our way east through mid-day LA traffic & endless drought-stricken urban sprawl for 3 hours to Joshua Tree Ntl. Park. Such a relief to be out of LA & a delight

to be in a NH Pk! It's a magical place, with Seuss-like Joshua Trees & stacked round granite boulders silhouetted against a blue sky. The CG is surprisingly full (Jumbo Rocks) but we got lucky & have no one nearby. We're in site 24. \$10. Picadillo & noodles for dinner. The sky is full of stars & it's very quiet. Saw a couple of thrashers - not sure which kind.

Tues Feb 25

Up with the daylight. Nice 1.7 mi hike on the Skull Rock trail. Breakfast at camp. Surprising to see clouds in the east half of the sky. Leave camp at 9 & drive south to the Cottonwood Spring park entrance. (34 miles)

Then across I-10 to Mecca & south on 111 along the east side of the Salton Sea. Pulled into one of the wildlife refuge units & saw lots of birds in the ponds along the dirt road, including what I'm almost certain were two white-faced ibis. Also saw hundreds of avocets, ruddy ducks, etc. Very beautiful wetlands. Lunch at a desolate picnic

table away from the wetlands. Toasty in the sun.

Arrive in Yuma about 2:30 & head to the FedEx office to get our passports. They weren't there! Further investigation by the very nice FedEx employee revealed that they were delivered to a home address yesterday - and left on the porch! At this point I am beginning to freak out, wondering how we're going to find them & whether the resident would be home or had sent them back to Ian!

The FedEx person was able meanwhile I called Ian to see if he still had the original paperwork. He had shredded it after I'd told him the shipment had arrived (I had misread the tracking website & thought it said it had been delivered when in fact it had been delivered to the Yuma distribution center, which is where I thought we were picking it up). Ian was upset & apologized profusely, but at that point we didn't know what had happened. I told him not to worry & that I'd call him as soon as I found the package.

The Fedex lady found the answer as

I was talking to the Kirkland FedEx to see if they had the paperwork. The package was delivered to 9<sup>th</sup> instead of 4<sup>th</sup>. They had misread Ian's 4. (I at first thought it was FedEx's fault but the FedEx lady said they never fill out the paperwork - probably for this very reason. Although I wasn't mean to her, I wasn't very serene - I was panic-stricken & felt hysterical inside.)

I raced out to the car & ordered Grant to enter the address into the GPS now! He calmly complied while telling me to take deep breaths.

I imagined arriving at the house & finding no one home & then what would we do?

In a series of small miracles, the house was only 5 blocks away, and when we rang the doorbell, someone answered. It was an elderly woman & on the chair behind her I saw the FedEx package! At that point I practically wept with relief.

She was very sweet - & very talkative! She chattered on about working in her yard & the workers next door &

the mailman brought the package yesterday & she didn't recognize the name or know what to do with it so she was going to wait & ask her son who would be coming tomorrow. We thanked her profusely & politely extricated ourselves.

After a wi-fi stop at McDonalds we drove to the border to reconnoitre for tomorrow's dental appointment. Turns out there is all kinds of free RV parking near the border. We packed everything out & were done by 3:30 so decided to drive to the free campground we'd found online, about 30 minutes north. It was a pretty drive through lush vegetable fields, but the CG turned out to be a dirt lot no nicer than the ones near the border, so back we went.

We're parked with 20 or so other RVs on a dirt lot next to the Los Algodones Road. We're on the edge of a small bluff & had a beautiful view of the blazing red sunset. Leftover picadillo & noodles for dinner. After washing all the dishes I dropped/spilled the water & they got all sandy. I swore. And then I picked them all up & cleaned them again. After a sponge

bath each we are now sitting outside looking at the stars. It's a perfect temp - just a sweatshirt.

Wed Feb 26

The big day of Grant's dental appt in Mexico. Awake at 6 to a beautiful sunrise, quarter moon & Venus. Pack our bags in case we spend the night in Mexico. Realize we probably need ice for the cooler. Drive to nearby casino which does not appear to have ice. Decide we can live without it if we wrap cooler in wool blanket. Didn't have time to drive to Yuma store. Plus, we realized that it might be one hour later in Mexico (in fact it did turn out to be, as Mexico is on Mountain time).

Drove to the Quechan tribal parking lot at the border. We told her we might spend the night in Mexico & that we'd like to pay accordingly. She got kind of intense & impatient & said "There's a difference between 'will' & 'might'." She then proceeded to explain that if we didn't pay for overnight & got back after 8 am, our car would not

be there. It was very confusing (even she admitted this) but basically if you're staying 1 or more nights you pay the \$10 ~~fee~~ & they put you in the overnight lot. You can then stay up to three days without being towed & you pay the extra before leaving.

At this point it was 7:30 in the parking lot (in CA) when it occurred to us that it might be 8:30 in Los Algodones. We asked another lot denizen & -yikes- it was. We quickly guzzled our coffee, I gulped my breakfast, we cracked all the windows, donned our packs, & joined the throng of gray & white-haired folks streaming toward the border, a stone's throw away. There's no border control at all - just a turnstile. Once in Mexico there is Mexican music playing. Touts line the pathway asking "Need a good dentist?" "Glasses?" Lots of trinkets for sale as well. This place is like a dusty Disneyland ~~far~~ with colorful buildings containing doctors, dentists, & opticians instead of shops & restaurants.

Luckily Grant had brought directions so we didn't have to take anyone up on their many offers to show us the way.

Not that I would mind paying someone a buck or two, but it's awkward when you're being bombarded by requests.

However, we did get a bit lost because we couldn't find a street sign, so we went into another dental office to ask directions. The man behind the counter was so nice. He said "Dr. Salazar is a good dentist." Then he came outside & showed us where to go.

Dr. Salazar's office is modern, clean, & well-appointed. Unfortunately, the fancy leather couches are uncomfortable. The place is hopping. The exam rooms are open, so I can see they have the latest modern equipment & digital x-rays with flat-screen display monitors. I can hear the dentist explaining to Grant the pros & cons of trying to redo the crown vs. doing an extraction & implant.

He uses Nobel Biocare implants.

He is very thorough at explaining all the options & reasons for each procedure. Unfortunately they can't place the graft or rod today due to untreated infection. They extracted the tooth & are making a cover plate. This takes about an hour so we walked around town. It's an

interesting place. Lots of trinket vendors, drugstores, & restaurants plying crowds with margaritas, beers, & ~~live~~ live American oldies. We walked beyond the core where it's just a regular town with houses, a school, people washing cars.

Lots of Canadians here. Turns out they don't have universal dental coverage.

It's warmer in the dental office (with AC on) than outside... wish I'd worn shorts!

40 minutes to walk through the border on the way out. Tons of vendors on both sides of narrow walkway. Out at 12:10. Grab a car snack & hit the road. It's quite toasty in the sun.

Hiway 8 to Gila Bend is pretty empty (way nicer than 10) & fairly scenic. No billboards, ~~desert~~ desert fairly green & yellow blooming.

nice Long-handled squeegee at gas station - lots of RVs around these parts.

Arrive at mom & dad's friends (Karl & Marta) at 16 pm. Heard a lot about them & been wanting to meet them. They are lovely - she from Chile, he from Austria.

They invited us to stay for dinner. Grant couldn't eat, but I enjoyed the yummy Austrian goulash. Karl showed us the digital memoir he created, which gave me some good ideas for organizing mine. Back to mom & dad's, where we're opting to sleep in the van. Grant is exhausted after his dental work & a long day.

Thursday Feb 27

Breakfast & a nice long walk with mom & dad on a trail to the library. After lunch mom & dad went to a doctor appt while I did laundry & cleaned up the van & Grant took a nap. A lovely lasagna dinner at Mark & Denise's with Casey too. I slept in the van but Grant opted to sleep inside because he thought he might be awake a lot in the night. He's still adjusting to his new "fake tooth" retainer & eating.

Friday Feb 28

Nice one-hour trail walk with brother Mark. After lunch we drove one hour north to Arcosanti with mom & dad & Mark. Arcosanti is an experimental town & bronze bell foundry started in the 70s by Italian architect Paolo Soleri. The one-hour tour cost \$10 & we got to see the art studios, common areas, & the outsides of the living spaces. It's futuristic & funky, with vibrant desert colors, big arches, round windows. A communal dining area serves healthy food. They grow about 10% of their food. The buildings are made of concrete. Lots of passive solar elements. About 60 people live there. Soleri's vision was to create a small city of 5000 that's pretty much self-contained. The surrounding desert & vistas are lovely.

Grilled chicken dinner & we watched the movie Nebraska (good story but boring...).

Rain in the night - the first they've had here ~~for over~~ since 70 days!

Sat. March 1 To Tucson

Mom & dad left early to go hiking. We showered & packed & hit the road about 9:30. Intermittent heavy rain all morning so far.

Eight miles south of Phoenix the check engine light came on. We were worried. We pulled off the first exit & into a gas station & read the user manual for the car. To our immense relief, the gas cap was simply not screwed on tight. Hooray for user manuals.

Back on I-10 south it began to pour. Torrential rain, low visibility, standing water on the road, sheets of semi spray. It was tense going for an hour or so. Just before Tucson it mostly stopped. It was funny seeing all the "blowing dust" signs in the pouring rain.

The highway interchanges in Phoenix and Tucson are so beautiful! Each is decorated with colored patterns on the ground & the structures.

Lunch at El Guerro Canelo in Tucson. Grant loved it but I was lukewarm. It started as a taco truck but has grown

into a cavernous cafeteria that's very noisy & feels almost industrial. They specialize in meats. My chicken was tender & flavorful. Before lunch we went grocery shopping.

After lunch we drove to nearby Saguaro Ntl. Park. The ocotillo have red blooms ready to burst. We drove a lovely dirt loop road & walked half a mile to see petroglyphs & a large view to distant mountains & patches of blue sky. No rain.

Next was the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, a must-see combination of zoo & botanical garden with a hummingbird aviary. We watched a hummingbird sitting on her tiny nest just a foot or so away. We watched a troop of five javelinas at close range. They snuffle like pigs, but it's also a purring sound like cats. We watched them rub their scent glands on each other & also saw a fight (it didn't last long). No rain here either, but it is cold & windy today.

We left when the museum closed at 5 & drove to nearby Gilbert Ray (Pima County) campground. It's \$10 for tent sites. It's a nice campground.

It was extremely windy<sup>58°</sup> while we were cooking dinner & quite cold. The sunset was spectacular. Eggs, potatoes, bacon for dinner. A few drops of rain. A full arch rainbow. The sky turned a fantastical shade of blue ~~to~~ to the east as the sun lit the mountains & turned the sky orange & pink. The wind stopped (hooray) & I washed dishes without shivering. It seems we brought Seattle weather with us on this trip to find sun & warmth! But at least we're not still in California, where they've had 2.5 inches of rain in the past 2 days.

A chorus of coyotes serenaded us for a few minutes. Haunting & magical. Lots of Gila woodpeckers here. We also saw a coyote at close range. He crossed the road twice & stared at us for a while. Cactus wren.

Old Tucson is just a touristy place like Rawhide.

Sunday March 2

Lightning off  
to the west.

Heavy rain in the night. 42° this morning. Blue sky & sunshine! The storm appears to be past. The wind is gone too. Leave camp at 8:30. Drive to Tucson

Norris trailhead in Saguaro NP. Steep but beautiful trail. Hiked for an hour. .3" of rain last night. Coyotes singing again this morning.

After stops in SW Tucson for wifi, gas, & fuses we hit the road for Organ Pipe Cactus Natl. Monument. Lunch at a roadside picnic table on hiway 86 on the reservation. 70°.

Arrive OPCNM 3 pm. Lovely campsite in the main campground. Relaxing with a beautiful view of the desert. Clouds are keeping the temperature comfortable.

Passed Kitt Peak Natl. Observatory today but didn't know anything about it so we didn't stop.

The masses of yellow flowers we've been seeing are Brittlebush. Lots of globe mallow & lupine blooming now. The ranger says the dry winter means the annuals probably won't bloom this year.

This area is swarming with Border Patrol.

Have seen several Phainopepla birds. Their name is exotic but they are fairly common in this area.

No campfires in this campground (or last night's either). \$12 includes free solar showers.

Bacon, eggs, cheese, potatoes for dinner (we love it). Another fantastically beautiful desert sunset. Getting chilly so we climbed in the van about 7, when it got dark.

Monday Mar 3

Blue sky, light breeze at 6:30. Nice 2.5 mile walk on Palo Verde trail. The sun is warm now - it's the perfect weather.

Wifi in Gila Bend. Decided the weather is too risky to drive north on the east side of the Sierras, so we're heading to the Salton Sea.

Lunch at a rest area on hiway 8. Gas & groceries in Yuma. Arrive at Salt Creek CG on hiway 111 at 3:30 California time. This primitive CG has an outhouse, picnic tables, & private sites just 100 feet from the water's edge. The lakeshore is thick with gulls, terns, shorebirds, & ducks<sup>pelicans</sup>. There's a light haze of clouds over the mountains to the west. It's sweatshirt weather. Except for the occasional car passing on the road 1/4 mile away, or roar of a military plane, it's peaceful & quiet. Just the gurgling & crackling of

the gulls & terns. There is the salty smell like the ocean plus the fishy smell of the dried tilapia carcasses that litter the beach. Their ground up bones are mixed with barnacles & salt deposits to create crunchy sand that sounds like walking on potato chips.

Forgot to say that we liked the town of Ajo on hiway 85 north or Organ Pipe. Several well-preserved mission-style buildings.

It is really beautiful here! From our chairs we have a view of the lake & hundreds of birds, with mountains beyond. The birds are bubbling & gurgling & squeaking. As the sun set the pelicans began streaming southward, gliding inches above the water, like stealth bombers with pot bellies. The setting sun stained the water & the filaments of clouds deep golden pink. A merest sliver of moon glowing in the sky. We lit a small fire & sat watching more & more stars emerge. Lots of freight trains going by - rumbling but no whistle blowing.

Salt Creek CG:  
come back here!

Tues Mar 4

Coyotes howling yipping & chattering in the early morning darkness. We're guessing they were hunting birds. Found fresh scat around our fireplace this morning.

Up at 6. 69° in car, 54° outside. Light clouds in the west. Sierras to the NW have a light topping of snow. Idyllic morning sitting in our chairs drinking decaf, watching the lake & birds. Then a short walk on the beach to spot pintails & shovellers and on the road by eight. Hard to leave this beautiful place. We definitely want to come back!

Took hiways 62 & 247 to Barstow to avoid 1-10, which is intense, scary, & exhausting to drive on. We enjoyed dry & barren 247 through the high Mojave desert. Wifi in Barstow, lunch at rest area near Boron on highway 58.

99 north is somewhat crazy with trucks but Grant says it's better than 1-5. The antibiotics are giving Grant intestinal distress.

The haze in the air around

Bakersfield is worse than it was 10 days ago when we came through. oppressive! Maybe it didn't rain there?

Farther north the sky is bluer, with some sun peeking through.

Stopped at a store to buy Grant some probiotic drink mix & he says he almost immediately felt better.

Near Madera, a bit north of Fresno, we took exit 155 (off hiway 99) to Eastman Lake State Recreation Area. It's 20 miles east through rolling green fields to the manmade lake in an open oak scrub forest. We are the only people in our half of the campground. Our site has a covered picnic table, firepit, & view of the lake & sunset. It's clean & quiet & lovely. It's worth driving a few extra miles to stay in a place like this. It's the destinations, not the journey.

Leftover chicken tacos for dinner. Beautiful sunset - the light lingered in the sky for an hour.

Wed Mar 5

Up at 5 for hot (free) showers - delicious! Just getting light. Nice stroll around CG. This is a very nice place. Saw acorn woodpecker. Birds abound. Lake is very low. 59°. Windows cracked all night.

Short walk around the CG and on the road about 7:30. Chubby cattle grazing on the lush rolling hills and a hawk on every tree top. Misty fog is slowly burning off.

Hiway 99 to Stockton & the cut over to I-5. Grant concedes that 5 is more pleasant traveling than congested, narrow 99.

Rain begins in Redding. Shasta Lake is way up.

Harrowing drive to Roseburg in pouring rain with semis darting in front of us & kicking up thick curtains of spray & hurtling around curves way too fast. I was practically in tears by the time we finally got off the freeway.

Dinner at Chi's Chinese. Excellent Mao shu Pork was enough for 4 people.

Drove another hour to Cottage Grove rest area. Rain had stopped but

lots of spray. We are exhausted.

It's 7:45. We'll read a bit, crash early, rise early, & head home in the daylight.

We slept well with earplugs & makeshift curtains to block lights. Awake at 5, on the road at 6. not raining. Stop for free hot water at a gas station.

Rain starts in Salem. Our mood is subdued. Heading home after a nice trip is an adjustment.

Rush hour traffic & heavy rain in Portland. Our moods are like the rain - a bit lashing.

Looks like we'll get home about noon.