

NC SC FL Oct. 2025

Thurs Oct 2

Direct flight to Charlotte (CLT) left Seattle about 1:15 and landed at 9:15.

4'20" in the air. I was in the very back row, no recline, but aisle. Small easy airport.

Kelly picked me up in her orange & black Bronco. About 30 min. to her house on Lake Norman in Cornelius. Dark so couldn't see anything.

Chocolate lab Frankie is 10 months old but pretty chill. I ignored her and she jumped a little but didn't pester me.

Kelly made a vat of soup with chicken, corn, tomato, & beans. It was too late for me to eat. I had brought a sandwich on the plane plus a protein bar & they gave out pretzels & cookies.

As usual I'm already on local time. It's 8:30 in Seattle but I can barely keep my eyes open. I can hear crickets chirping outside. Their guest bedroom is deluxe. I've never stayed (slept) in their house before. We stayed in the van last time. I read that you can tell the temp by counting cricket chirps: chirps per 15 sec + 40. It worked! $18 \text{ chirps} + 40 = 58$, and my phone says it's 58° !

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Friday Oct. 3

Low 50s this morning. Blue sky. Slept until 7:30. Sat on the deck looking at the lake. Frankie is a pest but ignoring her mostly works. Sat on the dock reading - warm sun + breeze = perfect, but got sleepy!

Drove to cute nearby college town of Davidson. Lunch at the Toastery. Had a salad with chicken, goat cheese, pecans, & a small bucket of craisins. After literally picking out half a cup the remaining mix was delicious.

Walked around the campus, which was very quiet (1900 students, \$60k tuition). Went in a gift shop.

Back at Kelly's I replaced some of the strings on Levi's old classical guitar. Then I kayaked and Kelly paddle boarded to the bluestone quarry & back.

Chicken soup for dinner with cheese, sour cream, & tortilla chips. Watched This Old House on their giant TV. Upstairs at 9:15. Guest room is cold (have to leave door closed to keep dog out) but bed & pillows are

comfy. High today 73°.

Sat Oct 4

Up at 6:30. Coffee & sunrise on the porch with Frankie. Leave at 7:45 driving Kelly's yellow & black Bronco Sport. I felt very badass driving it. Two hour drive and two rest areas. Post-coffee, I needed both! Patches of fog in the mountains.

Arrived at 10 & parked in the College Street garage. \$4 for 3 hours. Walked to nearby main square, called Pack, where they were setting up for Octoberfest, with sound equipment on the stage & lots of craft & food booths.

I followed the Urban Trail walk of 25 historical plaques & sculptures. The town has a wonderful progressive hippie vibe. Lots of tie dye, pottery, jewelry. About the size of Kirkland. Elevation ~2100 feet. A bit chilly when I arrived but soon warmed up to a perfect 74° day. Fog burned off to clear blue sky.

Quite a few street people. Some talented buskers. Some beautiful gilded age Art Deco buildings.

Ham & cheese croissant for lunch from a bakery booth at the Saturday market.

Left downtown at 12:30. Kelly's car easy to spot in a parking lot!

Drove to River Arts District (RAD) on the French Broad River. The riverfront trail & low lying artist's studios were hard hit. Sections of the trail were washed out & studios are boarded up. Buildings higher up the slope were OK. There are nice condos going up, so the area is a mix of funky & gentrified.*

Left about 1:40 (I'm not a window shopper) and drove to the Folk Arts Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway (more local crafts) then to the Visitor's Center. It brought back fond memories of driving the BRP about 10 years ago. I started to walk on the trail by the VC but it ran next to the road and was noisy, so I headed back to Kelly's, arriving at 5:30.

Soup for dinner, then a sunset cruise on their boat. The sunset was spectacular, wisps of cloud radiating outwards in

* Transitioning from folk art to fine art.

Kelly's

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wispy tendrils, turning magenta then deep purple.

Sunday Oct. 5

Rob + I hiked in Lake Norman State Park, about 30 minutes from their house. We hiked about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles on a leaf-strewn trail through a peaceful deciduous forest. Saw a deer + a tiny frog.

Drove 30 minutes to Belmont to have lunch with Lewi + Autumn + see their new townhouse. They made Italian sausage soup. Their place is great, with lots of light + windows + trees. Their two black cats are very cute.

Stayed about two hours, then Kelly + I drove to downtown Belmont. Almost everything was closed on Sunday, but it's a super charming block of old buildings next to a big park with trails. Many beautiful old homes. It was a textile town.

Then we drove to Belmont Abbey + College + walked around the small campus (1700 students). It's the only college in NC affiliated with the Catholic Church. Beautiful old brick abbey^{basilica} built in late 1800s. Monks still live here.

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Kelly made salmon for dinner.
High today 78°.

Mon Oct 6

Leave Kelly's 9:30. Grab deli salad
& wraps at grocery store.

Windy day with on & off rain squalls.
Stop at SC rest area for lunch and
it was warm & humid.

The road is mostly a wide green
tunnel, not a lot of interest to see.

Arrive at Susan's 2:45. Wexford is
a wealthy gated community. Their
house is gorgeous, not huge, but
beautiful. I have a suite above the
garage. Ernie & Brandon are home. Brandon
is mostly in his room (not working today).

Went for a long walk to the harbor
area via the golf course (closed on
Mondays). The wealth here I find offensive.
Huge mansions, people who play golf,
tennis, or pickleball all day, and live
in a gated bubble. Reminds me of the
Gilded Age.

After a shrimp salad dinner we
drove to the beach to see a green

South Carolina

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turtle nest inventory. We drove about 10 minutes to Driessen Beach and joined 5 or 6 official Sea Turtle Patrol volunteers and a dozen others. (Susan is an auxilliary volunteer who helps with the website.)

During an inventory they wait three days after a hatching then dig up the nest and remove all of the empty shells, any live stragglers, dead baby turtles, and eggs that didn't hatch.

Out of 141 there were 5 stragglers, 1 undeveloped egg, & 44 dead babies. I think this is a bit more than normal. They collect DNA samples then bury the eggs & dead babies. ^{scientists don't yet know why some die.}

Then we got to watch them release the babies. They were about 3" long and so cute! They got tossed about in the surf but valiantly struggled on, their little flippers churning madly.

Every 8-10 years the town "renovishes" the beach by adding sand (presumably dredged from somewhere). Any nests laid in the project area had to be relocated, including this one.

Most nests are loggerheads, but this one was a green sea turtle. They can tell by the flipper pattern and the shape of the body pit.

Temperatures affect the gender of the turtles during incubation (hot chicks cool dudes).

Watched the Harvest Moon rise over the ocean. King tide tonight and there already wasn't much beach left.

A joy to watch a cluster of kids witnessing the nest inventory.

Back at Susan's we sat in her hot tub for an hour telling stories. No skeeters.

80° today & humid but a breeze kept it comfortable. A bit chilly on the beach after sunset.

Slept at 11 pm, late for me.

Tues Oct. 7

Sun rose late and I slept til 7.

73° and overcast. I am staying in the huge guest suite over the garage. King size bed, seating area, deluxe bathroom, plush bedding, very quiet.

The air is so thick with moisture that everything is sticky, and my glasses condense.

I went for a walk around the neighborhood. Susan's house is one of the smallest. Many/most are enormous. The wealth here is staggering. Kind of sickening, really. People adjust to wealth & it feels normal & justifiable.

Ernie has a sporty Mercedes that must

Hilton Head Island

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have cost a fortune. They live on the 11th tee of a golf course. Their gated community of Wexford has 400 homes. The view from their large screened porch is of their pool/hot tub/waterfall feature, the golf course, and many trees.

New homes must be built 13 feet above sea level. Their property is 7 feet, so the house is elevated 6 feet (but not the garage).

You can get insurance if you build to hurricane code. ~~The~~ Ernie claims the island is more protected than other parts of the coast that get hit harder by hurricanes.

There's a \$20/day entrance fee for workers to enter Wexford! Cost paid by homeowners of course. Maybe cuts down on the number of work trucks rumbling through? HOA fees must be exorbitant. They're spending \$12 million remodeling the clubhouse!

The island is shaped like a shoe. They live a little south of center.

Ernie & Brandon were both supposed to be gone while Kelly & I are here, but they're both around. Ernie watches a lot of TV (the TV & radio are always on). Brandon stays in his room if he's not in the gym or at work.

Moments of light rain all day, but mostly perfect weather, overcast, high 78°.

Drove to Shelter Cove to look for manatees. They have buoy trackers, but no sight of them today. We did see anhinga, white ibis, egrets, herons.

Lunch at the French Bakery. I had inedible French Onion soup (loaded with alcohol?) but the large piece of toast covered in melted cheese was great, & filling.

Walked on a nice boardwalk with views of saltwater marshes.

Back at the house I sat on the porch to read and heard three large trees crash to the ground in quick succession. Turns out they're building a new house across the golf course, not far from Susan's house. Chainsaw noise & backhoe rambling & digging.

They installed "frog ladders," floating platforms that hang over the edge, allowing frogs to climb out of the pool without drowning.

Went for my first bike ride in over 35 years (before Ian was born). A little nervous at first but got the hang of it pretty quickly. Rode to the beach and then a long way on the hard sand. My butt & hands got sore but it was wonderful

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to pedal along the shore. Stopped so the girls could have a drink at Pool Bar Jim's.

On the way back we saw an alligator lying on the grass - a medium-size ~~one~~ one.

Dinner at Hudson's, a casual place on the water. Drove through a historic Gullah neighborhood (signed as such) with trailers on all the properties. They are losing their land to greedy developers and high property taxes.

Saw dolphins frolicking in the distance.

Got bit by no-see-ums. I had coconut shrimp for dinner, good but greasy, and Susan shared her fresh, warm hushpuppies. Mom gave me money to pay for restaurants.

Wed Oct 8

Walk to locks and back. 69° & overcast, perfect walking weather. The weather here is staggering, but even the uber rich are apparently not immune to the roar of gas-powered blowers, mowers, trimmers, edgers, and golf course maintenance carts. It might even be worse for them because their yards are so large & manicured that it requires a large crew and a lot of time to tend them.

Wexford has its own lock so their marina is deep enough, and tide-free.

This area is semi-tropical, with live oaks, spanish moss, pines, and palms.

Kelly left about 8:30 Susan and I left a little after 9 to drive to Charleston. Kylie met us at Bartaco restaurant. I had two small fish tacos with slaw. Mom gave me money to treat everyone to restaurant meals.

Quite warm & humid, around 85°. Walked through City Market, then to the pineapple fountain, along the Battery, saw Rainbow Row (old pastel-colored row houses), ogled the mansions along the water, saw the beautiful campus quad.

Said goodbye to Kylie at 2:30 and walked back to the car via Marion Park. Street parking is \$4/hr, max 2 hrs at a time, and you can't add money remotely.

Left about 3 and got back to Susan's about 5:20. Traffic getting onto the island in the morning & off in the evening is heavy due to commuters who live off island.

Susan & Ernie have had a lot of

Hilton Head Island

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company lately & not much time to hang out. They went out to dinner & I hung out here to read, journal, do Facebook posts.

* nice boardwalks.
no spoonbills today.

Thurs Oct. 9

Cool rainy morning 66°. Drove to Sea Pines Forest Preserve & walked through the upland pine savanna and maritime forest. Rain held off.*

Back to Susan's for avocado toast (toasted Ezekiel bread with avocado, finely chopped arugula, olive oil, & salt. Delish.

Rained pretty steady until about 1, then we drove to Fish Haul Beach at the north end of the island. Raining lightly, strong wind, and high tide, so we went to Mitchelville Freedom Park, the first self-governed town of formerly-enslaved people, founded in 1862. No original buildings standing, but good photo displays.

At the free Coastal Discovery Museum we saw good info about sea turtles, including a cutaway of a (fake) nest. Nice seagrass basket displays, plus local history, culture, animals.

Saw a tri-colored heron close up, stalking food on its green-yellow legs. Walked out on two boardwalks into the salt grass marsh.

The live oaks here are huge, old, and dripping with Spanish moss (actually an epiphyte). Saw Carolina wrens. Palmettos.

Next we went to Binya's Gullah gift shop. The owner was out but her charming mom was there (the daughter was at a ~~neighborhood~~ leadership training in Charleston). The shop had some nice local craft souvenirs, but we didn't buy anything. They also had a produce stand with things from Georgia. Susan bought a giant beefsteak tomato.

Back to Fish Haul Beach about 3.

Rain stopped and tide was lower, so we could walk out a little. Still windy.

This is a more wild beach. No big birds, probably because of the weather, but some shorebirds, including piping plover. Hydraulic dredge parked offshore, apparently taking a break from beach renourishment.*

Picked up my Mitsubishi Mirage at Enterprise (near the beach) and back to Susan's about 4:30.

* In fact, the underwater pipe was feeding sand onto the beach around the corner out of sight.

To Florida

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Ernie made pecan-crusted pork chops and rice for a late dinner. Susan made salad and broccoli. They order in a lot, and they waste a lot of food.

Sat in the hot tub for a while. It's open top so they only heat it on demand. Heats up fast, about a degree per minute.

Ernie always has the TV on, often to sports, and the noise drives me nuts. Glad I have my suite to escape to.

Fri Oct 10

Woke up with a very sore back from four nights on a hard bed.

61° & windy. On the road at 7:30, Low tire pressure icon came on. Stopped at a rest area and called Enterprise. They said I could exchange the car near Jacksonville, but a little while later the light went off and never came back on, so I didn't exchange.

Started sprinkling when I entered Florida. 10:30. Deluging as I approached Jacksonville. Wipers on high, driving slowly to see the lanes, almost had to pull over. Kind of scary, but didn't last too long.

Car has bluetooth & displays my phone map.

11:45 met Amanda & Andrew at Grumpy's in St. John. She got an "apple crumble" waffle special that came with a piece of apple pie on top! I got a tuna meat and could only eat half. She is starting her fourth surrogacy (a sibling for a previous child). She gets at least \$70k - you get more based on experience. They only allow 6 total pregnancies, so this will be her last one. Andrew just retired from Navy & is job hunting.

We sat on the covered patio and the rain was deafening for the first half hour or so. But inside was too cold with AC.

Left about 1:30, during a break in the rain. Today is Aubrey's 8th birthday and they were heading off to buy a cake.

The route to Tampa took me on beautiful country roads. Rain on & off, lessening as I got farther from the ocean. Stopped for gas north of Ocala & ate the other half of my tuna meat for snack - too much food! Heavy traffic north of Tampa, only partly due to accidents. Only used 6 gallons of gas in 5 hours of driving. \$2.83/gallon.

Sunny in Tampa. Arrive Ellen Sanita's (my first cousin) at 6 pm. Longest solo

Tampa

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drive I've done, about 17 hours of driving time.

Ellen lives in a nice 3-bedroom rental house in a quiet neighborhood north of the city. It's 5 miles to a grocery store and her commute (three days a week) is well over an hour each way.

Her 24 y.o. son Dylan is living with her while job hunting. She made pulled chicken, rice, and veggies. Tasty, but I couldn't eat much after the tuna melt!

Sat Oct. 11

70° & overcast. High protein Ratio yogurt for breakfast - I liked it.

About 9:30 drove to Armature Works about 30 minutes away. \$10 to park. Former electric company streetcar barn built 1910 repurposed for eateries & event space. North end of Tampa Riverwalk. They were setting up for a Fall Festival.

We walked 2.6 miles to the south end of the Riverwalk at Sparkman Wharf & the cruise ship terminal. Free yoga classes in parks were well attended. Sat in some nice bench swings. Took pictures in the pumpkin patch early, before it

was crowded. Lots of fun Halloween decorations and a jetski Halloween costume parade was pure joy. Delightfully cool day with a light breeze. Ellen says they've had some hot days lately, so I got lucky.

Cuban sandwich & salad at Columbia Restaurant was delicious & only \$15 each (Mom paid!). Floating tiki bars on the river. Hop on hop off water taxi would be fun.

Walked back to Armature for a total of 5.3 miles. Fall Festival was in full swing, with music, food, & booths, as well as a petting zoo that including a 6-month-old baby kangaroo, & camel rides. The animals are from a nearby sanctuary & the money benefits the animals.

Got home at 3. Sitting on the porch watching a med-size gator snooze on the other side of the pond behind the house.

Little tiny lizards zipping around. Neighbors' AC units are loud, but turn on & off.

Ellen's 57-y.o. boyfriend died unexpectedly of diabetic complications 10 months ago, 7 months after her mom died, and 8 months after she lost her then job. So it's been a tough year & a half, but she's strong

To Trudy's

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and positive.

Short stroll before dinner. The many ponds in the neighborhood are for stormwater retention. It's a gated middle-income community - not sure why they need a gate. many homes have screen rooms - must be lots of bugs in summer. Saw a cool bird called a limpkin, like a cross between a heron & an ibis, brown with polka dots, striding across the road then down a grass slope into a shallow pond to search for snails. Also saw mockingbird, anhinga, ibis.

Watched Cleopatra's Final Secret.

Sunday Oct 12

63° and blue sky! Brisk walk around the neighborhood with Ellen, on the road at 10, arrive at Trudy's in Riverview at 10:30.

She lives right on the Alafia River on one acre in a charming bungalow surrounded by mega mansions. She's got a huge oak tree, palms, a papaya tree, a starfruit tree. She showed me her Tob trailer (she just returned from 4 months in Wisconsin, escaping Florida summer). She has a dock & a small boat.

She made salads with hummus & pita chips for lunch, followed by homemade apple pie. We toured her yard then sat on her dock watching bald eagles, red-breasted & pileated woodpeckers, a kestrel, great egret - she is an avid bird watcher.

Dinner was steamed corn, broccoli, squash, & potatoes drizzled with olive oil & soy sauce - delicious. She is vegetarian.

Trudy Erwin is Grant's second cousin. She's a retired surgical nurse & canvas seamstress. One child, Ryan, is about 37. He has two boys who are 6 & 8 (Stone & Ledger - not sure which one is older) → Ledger. Trudy's been divorced about 30 years. She's 71 and has some osteoarthritis.

She's been taking care of ^{the} property by herself all these years. She's very handy & capable. She & her former husband bought the property 36 years ago. She's shielded from high property taxes due her land being "homesteaded," plus a senior discount, plus a 3% per year max increase rule. She pays about \$2200 a year vs. over \$16k.

She is Baha'i.

Trudy's - Riverview (Tampa)

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Mon Oct. 13

Indigenous Peoples' Day

I slept til 7, Trudy til 9. 64 degrees. She has multiple bird feeders. Cardinals, palm warblers, mockingbirds, mourning doves, ~~more~~ woodpeckers. The oak tree in her back yard attracts many birds. Saw a kingfisher.

The mattress is comfortable and I woke without a sore back.

Her house is very organized. Like me, she labels things. She's a nature lover with many field guides and found objects. Bird pictures adorn the walls.

The river is so still and flat it looks like a lake. The first motorboat goes by at 9:20.

Chia seed pudding with strawberries and agave syrup for breakfast, plus a glass of plain homemade kefir, tangy & slightly fizzy. Trudy showed me how she makes it. The starter are tapioca-like globs of bacteria & yeast. Cover with milk and let sit covered with cheesecloth for 24 hours.

There are sharks, alligators, stingrays, and water moccasins in the river. When Trudy single-handedly rebuilt her dock (badass!) she was nervous spending hours standing in the water.

She has a 17-foot, wide-gunnel motorized "canoe". It's got a hoist she clips it to to raise it out of the water. If you leave it in the water the bottom gets covered with barnacles.

There's an 80-acre preserve (Alafia Scrub Nature Preserve) across the street from Trudy that goes down to the water. It had been slated for apartments, her neighbor petitioned the state to buy it. Luckily he was able to find an endangered flower there, which helped strengthen the case.

We finally left on the boat ride at 11. Took a while to lower, unhook, fuel up, and otherwise ready the boat. The tide was going out. The boat felt small, especially when we entered Tampa Bay, but Trudy has thousands of hours of boating experience and knows what she's doing. I did wear a life jacket.

motored down under I-75 + I-41, past a phosphate plant + brown tailings piles. motored around Bird Island. Saw brown pelicans, herons, gulls, terns, cormorants, ruddy turnstones clinging to steep, slippery concrete jetty blocks. This is a "spoil island," created by

dredging the bay for ships. A dredger was out today, parked near the island. It was 18" deep around the island due to the lowering tide, and Trudy had to partially tilt the motor up. She got a new motor from insurance money after last year's hurricanes flipped her boat over.

On the boat ride we watched mullet jumping up to three feet above the water.

Shores lined with mangroves. Fancy houses with big boats. Best of all, a dolphin swimming across our bow, making half a dozen smooth arcs out of the water.

As we circled around the island farther into the bay, dwarfed by two huge tugboats, I felt vulnerable and was glad to re-enter the mouth of the river. Saw a guy paddle boarding who looked naked. He was wearing a thong! Also a bright orange sun hat.

Late lunch at Jerry's Dockside Bar + Grill. Hard to disembark at low tide. Pulled up to boat ramp, climbed out into muck, then got onto dock & pulled boat around to tie up, trying to avoid scraping hull on barnacles.

I had a grouper sandwich that was fine, not great (fish a little undercooked for me).

Leaving was tricky because the water level had dropped and the boat was 4 feet below the pier. Two kind guys appeared to help, so we could climb in while they held the ropes and we fended off the barnacles.

Back at 3:30. Shower and scrub mucky sandals.

Leave at 6 for Chip Erwin's, about 20 minutes away. He lives on a small private lake in Brandon called ~~Lake~~ Mango Lake. An island hosts hundreds of birds of 15 species each night. Chip took us in his pontoon boat to see them flying in for the night. Wow, what a sight it was! Ibis, egrets, herons, anhingas arriving by the dozens, ~~squawking~~ ^{squawking} & squabbling over roosting spots. They feel safe there because alligators in the water prevent swimming predators like raccoons from getting to the island. Also some common gallinules with their bright red faces. Also lots of black-bellied whistling ducks flying overhead.

Before we left for Chip's I sat in Trudy's delightful sun room watching the river. Guys were flying by on jet skis.

Her house is clean, loved, maintained, and informal. Very pleasant to hang out there.

Chip is conservative, geeky, sarcastic, funny, loves to water-ski, works in aviation and is developing some kind of electric ion engine for planes & rockets. He is unhappily married to a Czech woman he met while living there. Their son lives in Czechoslovakia.

Trudy & Chip's dad worked on the Manhattan Project & was a nuclear engineer. For some reason their mom, Debbie, gave her house to Chip. Brother Jeff lives there.

Home at 8:30. Trudy made vegetables over pasta with olive oil & parmesan + garlic bread. I only ate a little since it was 9 pm by then, but it was good. Said goodbye because I hope to leave at first light. It's been a really nice visit. P.S. Chip loves rockets. We watched a SpaceX launch on his phone as it happened in TX. Very interesting commentary.

Tues Oct. 14

66°. Watched the sunrise over the river. The Alafia is tea-colored. On the road at 7:30. Low tire pressure light came on again, darn. It went off after an hour or so when the tires warmed up. I had stopped to double check that none

of them looked or felt low. Trudy said the one time she got a low pressure light she decided to drive home and then check her tires, and she had a blowout at 70 mph! That had me very nervous.

Trudy's son Ryan was a hospital air lift medic but he got bored and became a Sheriff's deputy. He loves it. His wife is a regional fire chief (badass). Ledger is their oldest boy. Trudy^{*} said Ryan gave her a lot of grief as a teen. She feels they're not as close as she'd like and she has to be very careful to not overstep.

I-75 south to Fort Meyers then 867 south on palm-lined roads to the Sanibel Island bridge. \$6 toll (plus rental company fees I'm guessing).

The island has a strong tourist vibe that I did not find appealing. Glaringly bright sun & heat (87° today), people baking on shadeless white beaches.

The J.M. "Ding" Darling ntl. Wildlife Refuge was open but the Visitor's Center and some of the trails were closed due to the government shutdown. Arrived about 10:45. I had stopped at a gas station bathroom

because there were no rest areas along the freeway, so I went ahead and topped up my tank. So it was about a three-hour drive.

There is a lot of traffic down here.

\$10 entrance fee to the Wildlife Drive, but my senior pass got me in. 4-mile drive.

Not a lot of wildlife mid-day and a bit hot for walking (82° with a light breeze). You could park anywhere along the 4-mile drive. There were some trails & viewing platforms. Saw mottled ducks, ospreys, anhinga, ibis, fish jumping, and an iguana crossing the road. People were fishing.

Was planning to go to Corkscrew Swamp before going to Jim Heil's in Naples (my dad's cousin), but I texted him to see if by chance he had been planning to take me there and it turned out that he was, so I said goodbye to Sanibel Island (crossed that off my list) and drove an hour to Jim's, arriving at 2 pm. He lives in a condo community with a view of a lake and fountain. His wife died in 2009 and a few years later he moved fulltime to their condo here and sold his house in MA. A while later he met Gloria, his widowed neighbor. They keep separate places

but travel together, hang out, and often do meals. She's about 89 (he is 88).

About 5:30 we drove in Gloria's car to Jim's daughter Jill's house, about 15 minutes away. Gloria was a county housing director for 17 years. Five kids, 10 grandkids, and 11 great grandkids, spread all over the country.

Jill, husband Mike, and daughter Mia live in a beautiful house in a nice neighborhood (very conservative, to their chagrin). We ate on their patio by the pool, covered by a screen room (called a cage). Jill has a gorgeous saltwater aquarium with mesmerizing multi-colored coral she has grown from small pieces.

She & Mike sold their biomedical company a few years ago & moved down from Boston. Jill is 51 and Mike is 65. Mia is 14. She's got spiky black hair and a stud bracelet. She's very sweet & very much at the age of distancing from her parents. She's into music (viola), art, & theater.

Besides the fish they have three dogs & a cockatiel.

They are really struggling with Florida politics and finding kindred spirit friends.

Jill has back pain, sadly, and is having an epidural steroid injection tomorrow, so can't come sightseeing with us.

Wed Oct 15

Up at 6:30. 65 degrees. Coffee on the deck (screened) with view of lake & fountain. I'm not a fan of noisy man-made fountains in man-made lakes. They seem so artificial.

Jim up at 7:30. I had raisin bran and blueberries for breakfast. Jim read the paper. Left at 9 and drove 30 minutes to ^{Corkscrew} Cypress Swamp. Gloria didn't come, so we took Jim's Mustang. He's a pretty good driver though he wandered in the lane a bit.

I loved the Sanctuary. \$17 for me, \$14 for Jim (vet). He let me pay. A big loop boardwalk, about two miles, goes through shady, primeval Cypress swamps & meadows. The native sunflowers only bloom for about a week, and this was the week! There were meadows packed with them. Got a few mosquito bites. Heard a lot of

birds but only saw cardinals, ankinga, and woodpeckers. We stayed for 1.5 hours. Cool & pleasant in the shade. ^{convertible top down} for a while. Fun but too hot.

Took a detour on the way back to see the planned town of Ave Maria, founded by Tom Monaghan, founder of Domino's Pizza. He built a big Catholic church & university surrounded by commercial centers and housing, including upscale gated golf communities.

Back to Jim's at 12:30 for a sandwich. He was wiped from the walking so I went to the Naples Botanical Garden by myself. Easy 30-minute drive. Beautiful place but pricey at \$27. 86°, but tolerable in the shade. Only stayed an hour. Beautiful plants, but most not native to this area, and I'm more interested in the latter. Nice close encounter with a grazing turtle. Heard a staff person say that teak and ipe are the only woods that last in Florida. A few bugs but not bothersome.

Back to Jim's at 4. At 5 we drove to Coconut Jack's in Bonita Bay for dinner. Screened "chickee hut" on an inlet. Lovely setting. My pulled pork sandwich was good. Then we drove across the street

to Barefoot Beach County Preserve for a spectacular sunset on a shell beach. Passed mega mansions on the way. Gulf coast. Gorgeous.

Jim & Gloria watching a movie while I pack.

Thurs Oct 16

69° at 6 am. On the road at 7:30. Jim was awake but not Gloria. East on Immokalee and quickly out of town. Heavy traffic going the other way into town. Clouds help reduce the sun in my eyes. Pass thru Florida Panther Ntl. Wildlife Refuge.

Get on I-75, called Alligator Alley. Several rest stops along the way. One of them has a new Everglades Elevated Boardwalk, a fabulous constructed habitat with native plants, lots of birds, and a tower with breathtaking view south over the Everglades. Osprey gazed down at me from his (her?) perch on a railing above me. Palm warblers, boat tailed grackles. A committee of vultures sat on a shed roof while others soared & swooped.

There's a toll westbound but nothing

eastbound.

Gassed up (total rental car gas about \$50). Easy car return and they gave me an \$80 discount when I mentioned the low tire pressure symbol!

Through security by 11:15. Flight delayed 40 minutes, now leaves 1:53.

No problem getting the open jar of instant coffee through security. Love not having to take shoes off!

Bought a small yogurt parfait (i.e., 230 calories) for almost \$9!

Chatted with a couple just returning from a Panama cruise. Drinking water from the fountain tastes foul & sulfurous.

I didn't pay extra for a seat & got assigned 33 aisle. For some reason they then changed it to 20 aisle. The woman in the window seat had paid extra for an aisle seat & they moved her! Luckily there was an empty middle seat. 3.5 hours to Chicago. Lots of people coming off Disney cruises & Panama Canal. One mom with three kids was mean & nasty to her kids. Broke my heart.

Despite the delay, made it to the

^{nearby} gate with plenty of time for my connecting flight (and to grab a dinner yogurt). That flight was delayed 25 minutes. Window seat was a glassmaker from Wisconsin coming to a gala auction she had donated a piece to (pieces were juried) and got a ticket to the event. Empty middle seat again. 4.5 hours flight. Couldn't get wifi entertainment to work so I slept most of the way. 40 minutes from touchdown to curb. Home a little after 10.