



FROM LONER TO JOINER

My Life Story, Part 2,

from 1982—2012

Frederick Laird

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My Life Story, Part Two, 1982 - 2012
PROLOGUE

I wrote in Part 1 of my life story (A Walk Through the Past) which covered the first 60 years of my life, that early in my life I was a loner and that I reverted to that pattern when my first wife, Terry, died. This phase lasted perhaps three years, at which time I woke up from my melancholy and became aware that I had to get on with my life.

I first joined a local RV group called Single Mingles that met once a month at a nearby camping area. Often, this camping area was in someone's back yard, or at Camping World. This became my main activity for the next two years. Here, I met a few people my age, mostly women, but none I got close to.

At the same time, I joined the Sierra Club and met with other members for hikes in the Long Beach area. When the Sierra Club's Long Beach chapter voted for a snow trip to a lodge in Northern California during the 1982 Thanksgiving weekend, my sister Lilian and I signed up.

Joining these two organizations had a significant effect on my life. Of the two, the Sierra Club was the most significant, as it was while on the snow trip that I met Joan and turned my life completely around. The RV club became significant later on when one of the members informed me about the newly formed Escapees Club, which became an important part of Joan's and my life for the next 25 years.

LIFE WITH JOAN

Joan, as it turned out, lived in Concord, near San Francisco, which was over 400 miles from Lakewood. Nevertheless, I was determined to see her again and made arrangements to fly up and spend some time with her during her Christmas vacation.

(Another teacher)

This visit made us both aware that we had strong feelings for each other. Love at first sight? Perhaps, but we discovered we had many common interests. Enough so that, in early January of 1983 I packed all my personal things in the motorhome, said goodbye to Bill and Barbara and left them to manage for themselves in the Lakewood house. Kind of the reverse empty nest syndrome.

This move I consider the smartest decision I ever made. Joan and I fit together so well, even with Ebony and the motorhome as part of the package. That Spring, when I asked Joan to marry me, she said yes and we began preparing for that event to take place that summer, wherever we happened to be.

As soon as the school year ended we packed the motorhome and Joan directed me to her favorite part of the Sierra, near Pinecrest Lake. On June 28, 1983 we drove to Sonora where the county clerk performed the ceremony, with two of her staff as witnesses. The next year, 1984, Joan retired, giving us the entire year to do whatever we chose.

(ESCAPEES RV CLUB (SKP))

The Escapees RV club was founded in the late 1970s by Joe and Kay Peterson as an organization primarily for full-time RVers who traveled from job to job and needed to keep in touch with each other. Kay began writing a news letter to the members. This attracted new members and the organization grew rapidly.

When I heard of this group I immediately sent in my money for membership. I was assigned #1799; this number showed an amazing increase in membership over a few years. Membership increased rapidly after that and now numbers over 100,000.

Before I had even joined the club a California chapter was formed and was designated chapter, the golden Gate chapter. Joan and I went to a rally of this chapter in October, 1984 and not only joined the chapter, we jumped in with both feet. I was nominated vice president, to take effect at the next rally.

This was the beginning of a long membership in the chapter. During the next 22 years or so we were very much involved in the activities of the chapter. We attended 3 or 4 rallies each year and both of us served as officers more than once.

Our big rally of the year was and still is the annual Thanksgiving rally at Merced County Fairgrounds in Los Banos, California. Members start arriving the weekend before Thanksgiving to begin getting ready for the big day. For the last 10-12 years that we attended I had the very enjoyable privilege of putting together a show to be presented Thanksgiving evening. I worked all year gathering materials, writing scripts and arranging one 45 minute show. All for one brief moment of glory when we presented the show after only two rehearsals..

Before we retired from RVing the chapter made both of us honorary lifetime members.

We also had short term memberships in several other chapters but did not get involved as we did with the Golden Gate chapter.

A spin-off from chapter one was Park of the Sierra, an RV park in Coarsegold, California. We helped in the construction of this park during the first two years of its construction phase, 1989 to 2002. This park is under the aegis of the national Escapees Club and is open to all Escapees. (Some of the people we worked with during the construction phase still live there.)

OTHER ASPECTS OF LIFE BESIDES SKPS

When Joan and I were not attending Escapee Club functions we wandered, mostly in the West, in whatever RV we owned at the time. This was Joan's introduction to long term RVing. We spent many summers in the mountains, all the way from Huntington Lake in south central California to the high mountain country in Washington state. I don't know if we had a favorite but we spent a lot of time in the area immediately north of Mount Lassen. We also drove to Alaska and back one summer and during several other summers explored western Canada.

In 1986, from September through December, we made a grand circle of the United States. We drove eastward through the northern states all the way to Vermont. We spent a week in Vermont enjoying the culture of some small towns and the magnificent Fall foliage.

From Vermont we went south to Worcester and stayed with Jim for a time before heading south through Gettysburg, the Natchez Trace, and across through Texas to California.

One of our favorite summer destinations was western Montana, with frequent visits to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. We often found a stream to fish where no one else was fishing or camping.

During several summers we parked for a time next to Joan's cousin, Bill Webb and his wife, Bicky, at Hebgen Lake, near West Yellowstone. They were avid fisher people and were happy to take me out on the lake in their boat.

I also introduced Joan to backpacking, which was a brand new experience for her. For her first such adventure Jim accompanied us. We left one car at our exit point, which

was at the end of the Clark Fork Road, and drove to Sonora Pass. From the Pass we picked up a faint trail across a snowfield and followed this trail down the Clark Fork of the Stanislaus River to our other vehicle. This was quite a challenge for Joan but once she saw what backpacking had to offer in the way of unparalleled scenery she was less reluctant to take part.

We had a number of other backpacking trips, including two with the Sierra Club doing trail maintenance. Our last backpack was with Jim, Bill, Kim, and Matthew in 1989. We also had two dogs, Ebony and Cody with us. From Edison Lake we took the ferry to the head of the lake and hiked about 6 miles up Mono Creek.

Beginning in 1985, we spent parts of many winters in Arizona. We discovered two delightful areas that we returned to many times, Sabino Canyon near Tucson and Lost Dutchman State Park, near Apache Junction. I believe this was also the year in which our annual faculty breakfasts began. They have been going on almost every year since then.

In 1989, when the earthquake hit San Francisco, we were in Oakhurst having dinner with some other Escapees, waiting for word that permits for Park Sierra had been approved. Early the following year we moved onto a temporary site that had been opened at Park Sierra and occupied that site off and on for the next two years while helping with the construction.

Our life was not all RVing. We also enjoyed escorted tours in parts of North America, Europe and Africa.

In 1992, Joan decided that, as she had inherited some money from her mother, we should use some of it to tour Europe. We bought Eurail passes good for 90 days and flew to Zurich in mid-June. During the next 82 days we traveled through much of Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany.

It would be difficult to decide which country we liked best. We loved Rome and its antiquities. We also loved most of Switzerland, particularly the Interlachen area. In Interlachen we stayed at a lovely gasthof that overlooked the valley below and was within walking distance of the railroad station. From the station we could take either a bus or a train to one of the scenic surrounding areas.

Another place we loved was St. Wolfgang, which is south of Salzburg, in Austria. To reach St. Wolfgang we took a bus to St. Gilgen and then a boat on St. Wolfgang. See, a beautiful lake that is a vacation spot for many Europeans. We also liked Salzburg, with its reminders of "The Sound of Music" and other ongoing activities.

We celebrated our 10th anniversary with a family campout at Pinecrest Lake. We arranged our RVs around one end of a campground loop with tents inside the loop. In attendance were Elaine and Wally, Bill and Kim and Katie, Barbara and Teresa, Matt and Jenny, Kathryn and Dave, Bruce and Joy and Ryan. The water was too cold to swim. Bruce and Joy used our new camper.

In June, 1994 we drove to Utah and visited many of the Utah National Parks. Then, in September attended an Elderhostel at Sagamore Lake in the Adirondacks.

1995 saw us doing a Kings River raft trip with Bill and Kim in May. I fell in and almost froze before others were able to pull me out of the river. Then, another Elderhostel; this one in San Antonio.

Our next organized tour was a 12 day Globus tour of the Maritime Provinces of Canada in July, 1996. The tour began and ended in Boston. We traveled north, by bus, to Portland, Maine and then by ferry to Nova Scotia;. By bus again to Digby and Halifax. We then looped the Cabot Trail before going to Prince Edward Island and following the coastline south into Maine. We stopped to tour the Franklin Roosevelt estate on

Campobello Island, and Acadia National Park before returning to Boston. We visited Jim in Rochdale both before and after the Globus tour...

The following year, 1997, was a very busy year. It began with Joan's 50th high school reunion in January. Joan met with many people she had not seen in years. Later in the year we traveled with Globus again. This time, we flew to London and toured England, Wales, and Scotland. In addition to touring London, our bus took us along the south coast of England to Plymouth, then to Cardiff in Wales. We then visited Liverpool, with a side trip to the beautiful walled city of Chester.

We continued north through the lake country of Wordsworth (one of my inspirations in writing poetry.) We made a stop in Glasgow and a brief visit to Loch Lomond. Our northernmost stop was in Inverness. Here we looked into the geneology of kilts and found one for Laird, as a sub-division of McDonald.

We did not stop in Dundee which I had hoped we would as this was my dad's home town. We did stop in Edinburgh, which was one of our favorites, then on to Stratford upon Avon, another favorite; and, of course, Shakespeare country.

After returning to London we went to Portsmouth where cousin Christina had arranged a fabulous Gill family reunion. We met, for the first time, many members of my mother's family.

Following this, in July, we camped with Lynette's family on the Madison River below Beartraps. Jim and his young friend, Richard, joined us and later floated through Beartraps Canyon.

Early the next year, 1998, we went to an Elderhostel in Savannah, Georgia then toured Georgia and South Carolina, with a side trip to the Bahamas. In July we went to an SKP Fun Days in Great falls, Montana then camped in a beautiful, small campground on Hyalite Creek, near Bozeman.

In January, 1999 we decided to try Hawaii. It was not our favorite place, we visited only Maui and Kauai. Fifty-six years after my first visit during WWII we visited Hanapepe.

In late May we attended Lynette' and Jeff's wedding in Gilbert then toured several National Monuments near Flagstaff, then Lees Ferry, Monument Valley, and Canyon de Chelly in northern Arizona. We continued our explorations in New Mexico:: Albuquerque, Taos, and Santa Fe and Bandolier National Monument. We made another visit to Pinecrest Lake during the summer. Then, In September, I flew back East so I could go fishing with Jim. Unfortunately, it was much too stormy for either Vermont or a river Jim knew in eastern Mass. so we fished Jim's pond and I caught two large pike Jim had planted there some time earlier.

We drove our motorhome to Colorado in June,2000 to visit Bruce and Joy and family. From there we headed west to Oregon and visited Art and Mame Ferreira who were camp hosting near Mt. Hood in Oregon. We then drove the North Cascade Highway and followed this with a loop through British Columbia before heading for home.

Our next guided overseas tour was in September of 2000. We signed on with Saga tours for what was called, "The Grand Tour of France," and decided to spend a week exploring Paris preceding the tour. This we arranged with another travel company, The French Experience. Through this company we arranged for a week at a hotel on the left bank near a street, Rue Mouffetard, that Joan's daughter, Kathryn, had recommended. In addition to the hotel, as part of the package, we also got a 5 day pass for the transit system of Paris, a 5 day pass good at 65 museums, transportation to and from the airport, one deluxe dinner, and a tour of Versailles. All for \$1312 for the two of us.

We explored Paris, sometimes on foot, sometimes on the Metro, didn't see all 65 museums but did visit about 8 of them. We were much impressed with Notre Dame Cathedral, and with Paris in general. It's a beautiful city.

At the end of the week we got lost trying to find the hotel where we were to join the Saga tour. Saga had given us the wrong hotel. After a few phone calls our leader came in a cab to pick us up.

After leaving Paris our bus took us to the excellent museum at Caen, where we saw film footage and videos depicting the World War II landing in Normandy and documentaries about the times leading up to and during the war.

From Caen we drove to the Bayeux Tapestries in Bayeux and the Normandy beaches where the Allies landed in 1944. We took a tour of the cemetery where almost 10,000 Americans are buried.

We continued, in the rain, to Blois and then Chinon and the beautiful chateau at Chenonceau which was built across a river, on our way to Bordeaux. Next was Toulouse, and Carcassonne, a lovely medieval walled city. Our local guide was an 82 year old local resident and author of tour books.

We next drove to Aix en Provence, by way of Nimes, where we paused to see the 2000 year old Arena (Colliseum), older than the one in Rome. Leaving Aix we drove to a view of Pont du Gard, a 2000 year old aqueduct on the Gard River. In Avignon we walked on the bridge made famous in the old song, Sur le Pont d'Avignon, then to a hotel in St. Laurent.

We explored the old town of Nice, including a long climb to the top of a hill where a castle once stood. The next day we ended our tour in Monaco. We were disappointed; not scenic but claustrophobic and unfriendly..

We again visited Bruce and family in Colorado Springs, in the motorhome, this time in July, 2001. From there to a Gill family reunion in Washington state, most of the time was with Vera. . . .

On October 1, three weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York and Washington, we flew to Athens, Greece. In spite of the fear in everyone's mind we didn't want to miss out on a long - planned Grand Circle tour of Greece and the Greek Islands. Besides, it was all paid for.

The tour began in Athens, not an attractive city at the time as it was in process of reconstruction to prepare for the 2004 Olympics. Of course, none of the construction affected the ancient structures. We viewed the Acropolis, the Parthenon, and other antiquities in Athens before heading out to Delphi and the museum there. Fabulous!

Maria, our excellent guide, was well versed in all the ancient history at Delphi: the Oracle, the Agora, and many more. From Delphi we went to the original site of the Olympic games, where our leader organized a walking race for the men on the tour, which I won.

Returning to Athens we boarded a cruise ship which would take us to Ephesus in Turkey before heading for the Greek Islands. Ephesus (written about by Paul in the book Ephesians) was an ancient seaport now more than 5 miles from the ocean because of changes in the earth's crust. Much of Ephesus was still buried and being excavated.

The islands themselves were worth the trip. We were able to go ashore on several of them. Mykonos, famous for its windmills, was one. Heraklion, on Crete, had many ancient buildings, and Santorini was the most picturesque,

Early in 2002 we spent most of our time in southern Arizona; first taking in two SKP rallies in Quartzsite, then an Elderhostel in Sedona. We returned to California and helped Bill build a tree house in his new back yard.

Our next venture into the unknown was in September, 2002, one year after 9/11. We signed up with Elderhostel for a safari in Kenya and were rewarded with an exciting adventure.

Because of the fear of flying still prevalent at the time there were only eight people in the group. This worked out beautifully, we had two open-roof vans to ride in. Four in each allowed each of us space to either stand or sit, and see well in either position.

We also had an excellent driver and an excellent guide to locate and point out the many animals we had gone there to see. The only downside to the tour was the long flight to get there, about 22 hours of flying time.

From Nairobi we drove to an old tea farm near Nairobi and were amazed to discover a temperate climate so close to the equator. The owners claimed it was temperate year around. Close by, was a former country club built by the British during their colonial era. This area was mostly for bird watching.

We went from there to "The Ark," a hotel like structure built close to a salt flat where many elephants came to get their daily salt. We could watch them from a porch with large plate glass windows and even see them approaching "The Ark" from our bedroom window. On one of our daily trips we crossed the equator and were given a certificate stating that fact.

Everywhere we went we saw animals: impalas, gazelle, water buffalo, giraffe. Baboons and monkeys were plentiful, especially near our camps, and sometimes they

invaded us. At Lake Nakuru we observed thousands of flamingoes and pelicans. Apparently this was a nesting area.

On one trip our guide saw some white rhinos off in the distance and drove cross-country so we could see them close up. A rarity. Another area had many lions. We saw them in small prides of five or six and also two who were “honeymooning.”

Always, wherever we went, we found elephants, but what we saw the most of were zebras and gnus. Both of them were on their annual migration. We saw one line that was perhaps five miles long.

One of our favorite places was the Sarova Mara Camp. Here, our rooms were tents, complete with bathrooms. They also had a dining room second to none. Our only problem was to make sure we closed all the zippers around the door. If we didn't, the monkeys would get in and raise havoc.

We visited one Masai village and listened to a talk by one of the young adults who was attending school and destined to be a leader in his village. The Masai are still warriors and still do battle with other tribes, mostly over ownership of animals.

At the end of our safari we returned to Nairobi and visited a Giraffe Center where we could feed the giraffe from our hands. Very gentle animals. For a farewell lunch we went to the Carnivore Restaurant and dined on domestically raised crocodile, ostrich, zebra, and impala.

The highlight of 2003 was my 80th birthday party that Lynette put on for me. Many friends and relatives, some from England, some teachers, some RVers..

OUR 2003 OVERSEAS trip was to England for the wedding of my brother, John, to our cousin, Diana in Newcastle upon Tyne. It was a beautiful wedding. We stayed with friends of Diana for the length of our stay in Newcastle.

Prior to the wedding we met Lilian in London and spent several days getting better acquainted with the old city. We walked a lot and used the local transportation to places we had not visited in an earlier visit to London in 1997.

Among the places we visited were Marble Arch, Piccadilly Square, Trafalgar Square, the National Gallery and the British Museum. We also viewed Big Ben and the houses of Parliament from across the river.

In late June we again drove to Colorado Springs to help Robbie celebrate his 7th birthday. From there we boondocked with SKPs in Red Lodge, Montana and went to Spokane for a chapter 39 rally and to Yaak, Montana for a rally at the Dirty Shame Saloon.

.Our first major activity in 2004 was a small Laird family reunion at Lilian's in Florida. in March,. John and Diana were there, also Richard and Teri, and Jim.. We visited the Kennedy Center and attended a pre-season baseball game .In July we camped at Juanita Lake, way up in the northeast corner of California.

In September, 2004 we returned to Italy for a tour of Tuscany and the Amalfi Coast. Our tour began in Rome, with a brief tour of the area around the Vatican. From there to Sorrento; we stayed in a nice hotel and made several walking tours of this interesting city.

It took an excellent driver to negotiate the precipitous roads and almost figure 8 turns on the tour of the Amalfi Coast. It was a very scenic drive; we stopped at some small towns that were literally carved out of the rocky cliffs. We also visited Pompeii on a side trip to Naples.

We returned to Alaska in 2005. We had heard that the Concord Senior Citizens' Club had arranged a cruise to Alaska that would include a bus to take us to the dock in San Francisco and then pick us up on our return. This seemed too good to be true, but it was true.

We sailed on May 16 on the ship "Infinity" for our first stop in Victoria, B.C. We toured this city, stopping at the Royal British Columbia Museum where we were quite impressed by the diorama display of coastal mammals and birds.

Our next stop was in Juneau and excellent views of Mendenhall Glacier, before continuing on to Skagway, where we took a bus, in the rain, to the summit. We had closeup views of Hubbard Glacier, including some calving during the next few days.

We stopped at Sitka, an interesting, picturesque town and then in Ketchikan, which we had visited on our earlier Alaska trip. During an interesting walking tour of Ketchikan we observed a working fish ladder and took many photos of the harbor. We returned to San Francisco on May 28, quite pleased with the cruise.

We visited Bruce and Joy again that summer. Then in the Fall we made a major move when we decided we wanted to live in Southern California. We moved to a full service apartment which we soon discovered we couldn't afford. After 14 months, in February, 2007 we moved to Huntington Beach and, although we have to do our own cooking again, have money left over each month to plan for more travel.

We found we had made a good decision moving to Huntington Beach. This is a city that caters to senior citizens. There are a few activities going on where we live but our interests were satisfied when we both joined a singing group called "The Singing Goodtimers." We practice every Wednesday morning at the Senior Center and put on shows five or six times a month at local senior establishments. We love it.

Another organization I joined is a poetry group called "The Word Gatherers". We meet once a week and read a poem we have written for that meeting. This also has been a pleasant group to meet with, and my poetic skills have improved because of it.

After several years with no major tours, in 2008 we signed on for two tours. The first of the two, in late April through early May, we discovered a Sierra Club tour to Costa Rica that sounded interesting. And it was, although we found out it was a low budget trip that, for the most part, had us staying at low-priced facilities.

The "mid-evening" departure from LAX turned out to be "early morning": departure as we did not leave until 2 o'clock or so. When we arrived in Costa Rica two rickety buses picked us up. Those two buses stayed with us through out the trip. We were driven to our first hotel in Arenal, close to the Volcano Arenal, which we never did see. While in Arenal we visited Cano Negro. on a wildlife refuge boat tour.. When we left Arenal our coaches drive around Lake Arenal, the largest lake in Costa Rica, then on to Santa Elena/Monte Verde.

Perhaps the most interesting area we visited was Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio. This is a famous resort area, known for its beaches, abundant wildlife and lush rainforests. On the way we stopped at Crocodile Bridge to see the crocodiles basking along the river banks.

The following day, after breakfast, we headed for San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, where we are to spend one night. That evening we repacked our clothes to have fresh clothes for Tortuguero (land of turtles.) We drove to Cano Blanco and boarded boats to Tortuguero. No cars, no trucks, no roads, just foot paths This is primitive jungle for the most part. There is a high school that is partly sponsored by the Sierra Club.

The last two days of the trip we are in Cahuita; more jungle trails to walk. The next day we returned to Juan Santamaria International Airport for our return home.

On June 24, 2008 we began a tour with Collette Tours that took us to Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, and Toronto. We arrived in Montreal late on the first day, then on the second day toured the city.. The highlights of this city tour were Notre Dame Cathedral, St. John's Oratory, Jacques Cartier Square and McGill University, We were bussed to the top of Mount Royal for a spectacular view of the city.

Next day, driving along the St. Lawrence River, we stopped at the shrine of St. Anne de Beaupre on the way to Quebec City.. This city we found to be very quaint, more like France than any of the others we visited. We parked in an old part of town, near the Chateau Frontenac and walked through some of the alleys in this old part of town. And had our group picture taken in the rain.

I had planned this trip so we would be in Ottawa on our 25th anniversary. As Ottawa was also the place of my birth we celebrated that evening by buying a drink for all the members of our tour group. I'm not sure we got wine but the dinner was delightful any way. An afternoon tour showcased the Rideau Canal, in winter the world's longest skating rink.

The next morning we visited the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Officers Musical Ride Center.

The next day we drove to Kingston where we had a cruise among some of the 1000 Islands before continuing on to Toronto. With all the tall buildings we understood why Toronto was called the Little Apple. Not our favorite city.

On May 30, 2009 we flew to Prague for the beginning of a Grand Circle tour called Old World Prague & the Blue Danube.

Starting out in Prague, we visited St. Vitus Cathedral and had a walking tour that included the historic city center and the astrological clock, among other cultural sites. Then by motorcoach to Linz, Austria where we boarded our ship that would take us Along the Danube . Our first stop was at Cesky Krunlov where we enjoyed lunch with a local family.

We then cruised to Melk where we toured the 11th century Abbey. We had seen this abbey from the outside when we did our Europe tour of 1992. It was more impressive from the inside.

Our next stop was Vienna, to us a beautiful city. In addition to touring the city we enjoyed an evening performance of Austrian music. From Vienna we went to Bratislava, where we toured the Archbishop's Palace and the Castle District.

We were quite impressed with Budapest, with its two halves, Buda and Pest on opposite sides of the river. While in Budapest we attended a horse show in which trained horses went through their paces.

On April 27, 2010 we flew to Amsterdam to join a "Tulips and Windmills" cruise through the canals of Holland. We were transferred from the airport to our river cruise ship, which will be our home for the next nine nights. After breakfast on the second day we were taken for a cruise on a glass-topped canal boat, seeing many bridges and also many houseboats parked along the canals.

On the third day we visit Hoorn and an old vegetable auction house. Next, to Arnhem, which is remembered for “A Bridge Too Far” in which British and German troops fought for possession of a bridge the British were trying to secure. Next, to Kinderdijk, known for its windmills.

Next, we visited Antwerp and then Brugge for a walking tour of this beautiful city. One of the highlights of the Holland trip was the Middleburg Delta Works. This was an ambitious hydroelectric project that took 30 years to complete to protect Holland from the sea.

The Keukenhof Gardens were our main reason for this trip and they were as great as we had hoped they would be.

Joan and I had not made a bucket list of things we wanted to do or see one more time but we had discussed several options. One we discussed became a reality in 2010.

Our backpacking trips had often taken us up and over a mountain pass that was open only in the summer months, to a beautiful place called Edison Lake. This lake was an Edison impoundment that had a number of trails leading from it to various areas we could enjoy only by backpacking.

We knew our backpacking days were over but we also knew that a private resort there called Vermillion Valley Resort had a small campground and that they also had cabins and tents to rent. During the Fall of 2009 I communicated with the owner and arranged a trailer rental for the following summer.

It was an idyllic week. The trailer was parked parallel to the lake shore and each morning we woke to the view of beautiful Sierra mountains across the lake from us. The weather was warm and dry. We didn't catch any fish, or go for a swim, but we had a delightful, restful week.

Our only disappointment was that the ferry that usually plied its way to the head of the lake several times each day was out of commission.

On September 26, 2010 we joined a trip presented by Exploritas to tour Yosemite National Park and the area around Lake Tahoe; another item on our bucket list. We drove to Reno to meet with the tour there, taking two days for the drive.

After a night in Reno, we first drove to Yosemite Valley where we were met by a staff member who knew Yosemite, its history and flora and fauna as well as anyone I have listened to. He led us to many places, describing the background of what we were seeing. From Yosemite we drove to Lake Tahoe where we again were given several lectures about men who made the Tahoe area famous.

In September, 2011 we went on a short cruise put together by Cory Saltman of the Singing Goodtimers. We were bussed to LAX and flew to Vancouver, Washington. We were picked up at the airport by a Princess cruise employee and whisked to dockside where we boarded the Sapphire Princess. It was one of those huge cruise liners that looked like an oversize hotel.

The cruise was adequate. We toured Vancouver then pulled up anchor to cross over to Victoria. From there the Butchart Gardens was a short hop. We walked through the Gardens and also through an adjoining Butterfly Garden before returning to the ship.

From there we headed south to Los Angeles where a bus met us to take us back to the Huntington Beach Senior Center.

It was a good cruise but we didn't get some of the extras Cory was promised. She was told we could sing, daily, in a piano bar, that never happened. She also was told we could put on a program in a bar. That happened, but the bar was so remote it was like an

eagle's nest. The daily newsletter made no mention of our program AND we had to pay to use the piano. No more Princess Cruises for us.

June 19, 2012, we traveled on what was probably our last overseas jaunt. We toured Ireland, both the Republic of Ireland in the south and Northern Ireland. It rained almost every day, sometimes all day, and sometimes in torrents.

We flew to Dublin where we joined our tour group, operated by Collette Vacations. While in Dublin we toured the city, with stops at St. Patrick's Cathedral, drove by a number of stately mansions which made Dublin look like a prosperous city, and enjoyed dinner at a pub where we had an evening of excellent Irish music.

From Dublin we drove to Waterford and toured the Crystal Factory before taking a walking tour of the city.

Next to Blarney Castle in the hardest rain we encountered on the entire trip. We did not kiss the Blarney Stone. We then drove the ring of Kerry, described as the most beautiful coastline in the world. And it was beautiful, even in the rain.

We next stopped at the museum that featured the Cliffs of Moher. Unfortunately, the cliffs were fogged in and the only view of them we got was a large photograph of them at the museum.

We continued on to Galway with beautiful views of its bay and then to Donegal and Derry in Northern Ireland. The next day we reached the Giant's Causeway, an interesting arrangement of rocks that looked like a massive road leading in from the sea. Here, John and Diana picked us up to spend the last few days of our trip with them.

Not to be outdone by the tour guide, each day Diana drove us all around the countryside surrounding Bally Castle where they live.

Before we left Bally Castle we were told, by a young lady we met in one of the shops, that there was a bus that went from Belfast directly to the airport in Dublin. This we took advantage of but left us no time to explore Belfast.

To sum up our tour, I would have to say that our tour leader was well versed in the history of Ireland and its many differences with England, but her personality left a lot to be desired..



EPILOGUE

So, where am I now? I'm approaching my 90th birthday, so that means I'm old. And old people have bodies that are just wearing out. Doctors try to counter this by prescribing pills. All I need to do is remember which pills to take and when to take them.

The following two poems perhaps describe who I am,
and where I am at present.

THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE

I haven't a dime to pay my way
As I walk down the pathways of life
But I whistle and sing as I walk along
Free from all care and strife.

For life is a great adventure to me
That can't be enjoyed sitting still
There are rivers to cross and roads to explore
And that lake at the top of the hill.

Follow the call of the open road
Or hike to the distant hills
Fly to the moon, or sail the high seas
Whatever provides the right thrills.

Take the life that's been given to you
Face it with a song and a smile
Reach out to the many joys to be had
And make the adventure worth while.

Written in June, 1984

IT'S MAGIC

What's magic to me is the life I'm living
As I am growing old.
I have time to do many things I love
As long as my energy holds.

I spend much of my time singing
Songs I've known for years,
And twice weekly find a bridge game
To play with some of my peers.

I've plenty of time for poetry
And share it with very good friends
And think my skills as a poet have grown
As these magical years extend.

I look for the magic to continue
And share it with my loving wife
What more can a man ask for
In the comfortable last years of life?

Written January, 2012

