

## Friday, 14 June

Last official day of school, but Marxie had clap-out yesterday and Mo already finished finals. Satch would have spent the morning in an assembly, so no school for the last day of school! Weekly Friday staff meeting at EZGSA, then we rented the van, and I came home to pack everything while Scott finished at the office. Finally got into the car at 2:45 and we all were pretty quiet for the first 4.5 hours through Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, just getting adjusted to no school, no work, etc. Lots of barns and rolling hills. Nice to be on the road.

Neared Cleveland at about 8:30 and checked our trusty TripAdvisor. Found high recommendations for Crop Bistro and Bar. Well earned. The owners re-furnished a large, 1940s bank building, with 40-foot-high ceilings and a roomy-railroad-station-like interior atmosphere. Everything was delicious: popcorn with truffle oil appetizer, beet soup, buffalo mozzarella salad, tuna special (from a \$1.5 million tuna our waiter told us), spicy bucatini with shrimp, ratatouille. And the pretzel unlogic dessert (chocolate) was really great too. Ended up as one of our most expensive nights out, though. Definitely under-dressed, but it was Cleveland -- no nasty looks or anything.

By the time we finished up and found a Marriott by the airport, it was 10:30ish. Scott negotiated and got us a good price, which took some sting out of the pricey meal.

## Saturday, 15 June

As it turns out, they never brought the rollaway bed for Mo or the foam pillows we requested. So Mo slept between Scott and I, but not very much, and I woke up puffy (feather pillows). Thanks to Scott's many talents, this ended up being worth a full breakfast for five this morning, so all good.

We quickly finished the breakfast and then drove 30 minutes to Avon, Ohio, where I had read about a Duct Tape Festival for Father's Day weekend. Sure enough, there was one road through the town that everyone parked on to watch the Duct Tape Parade. We loved it. Anything you could imagine duct-taping was taped.

Skirts, flowers, Elvis, a Back-to-the-Future Delorean, hip-hop Jesuses, trucks ...







... granny outfits,  
roller derby  
gals, zombies,  
and even a ...



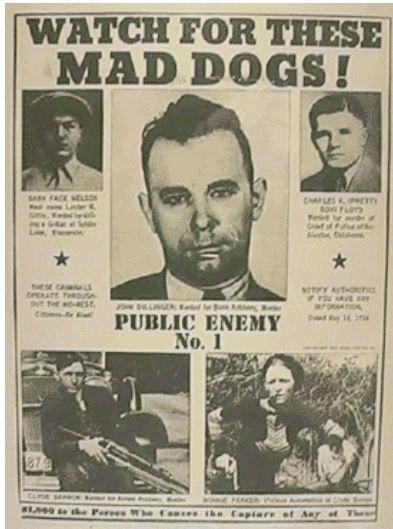
**Star Wars hovercraft with R2D2!**



The parade queen and princesses also wore duct tape outfits. It was really really cool!



Back in the car, and a 4.5 hour drive to Hammond, Indiana, home of the John Dillinger Museum. Small and hokey but neat. Signs



warned about traumatizing kids from an electric-chair simulation but completely ignored the grizzly morgue pictures. Made it through ok.



Snacked in the car on our way to an hour west of Chicago. Stayed at a Hampton Inn for half-price (gracias, Ruxandra) in a town center sort of place. Everyone's attention on TV showing the Black Hawks in Stanley Cup finals game 2 during our dinner at a small Italian chain place. I ordered a Strawberry Rita, without salt, thinking this was a strawberry margarita. Makes sense to you, right? Well, it came without salt, but tasted really funky. The waitress told me it was the Bud Lite cooler-type drink. Blech. She was extremely sweet about it, though, and took the drink away, bringing me a sangria instead, which was really just another cooler-type thing. Followed our rule of not sending something back more than once, just let it sit. Meal cost more than should have but filled us. Walked back to room and crashed.

## Sunday, 16 June

I woke up before everyone else and ran to the grocery store to buy picnic provisions. Today's free breakfast was hotel policy and not as filling, but fine. In the car by 9:15. We soon met our friend, Interstate 90.

Shortly after rolling into Wisconsin, Satch's bladder called out. Fortuitous. We stopped at the Cheese Mouse House. Cheese heads, 50 cheese varieties, including chocolate. That's chocolate cheese!!! Who could ask for anything more,

right? Compromises were made:

we bought the

mango fire cheddar (with habaneros) and the kids each got \$2 worth of fudge. The owner was so super nice. Kept offering tastes with patience way beyond what I would have had. We chatted with him for a while and he talked about how he loves his business and loves meeting people from all over. One of the very many great people we met.





Back on the road, we passed through beautiful Wisconsin farm land. Came upon the mighty Mississippi River, and pulled over. At this particular spot, the river is dammed and there's a lock (number 7) so boats can get



through to the other side. We watched a couple of boats do the dance and then sat down for a picnic. Marxe started a new tradition of trying to fit as many pickle spears into her mouth as possible, resulting in pickle juice spurting out from all places. Hilarious.

Minnesota farm land looks similar to Wisconsin farm land. Tons of windmills. As I-90 rolled through DeSmet, MN, we saw a sign that the Little House on the Prairie prairie (the first one, not the one in Walnut Grove) could be seen on the right. Thought of Sarah and our hours watching that show together.

We didn't stop there but did stop at the Spam Museum in Austin. Yes, there is a museum about Spam. Happens to sit across the street from the Hormel Spam factory. Mo, Satch, and I weren't too excited for this (didn't know of a vegetarian Spam version), but we ended up having a good time. You walk in to a wall comprised of almost 3500 Spam cans. And -- this is something I didn't know before coming to the Spam Museum -- there are 18 Spam varieties, including with bacon, hickory smoked, and Spam lite. We skipped the Spam movie (there is a limit), but did read about WWII Spamville, the Hormel Girls, and of course had a required viewing of the Monty Python skit. Marxe bought a can -- don't know when she will try it.



Our last stop in Minnesota was a town called Blue Earth, where the Jolly Green Giant oversees highway travelers. This 55 foot tall statue was erected in 1979 by a local radio station owner who wanted people to exit I-90 and come visit the town. They got the statue built but no one would provide money for Interstate frontage, so the statue is back a mile or so off the road. Took us a bit to find it. Greenie was dedicated when construction from the eastern half of I-90 met the western half, close to Blue Earth. This was a sad looking town, but Scott had fun posing Mo in pictures.

By 8:30, we were in another Hampton Inn, this time in Sioux Falls, SD. Had a snack in the room and went to sleep.

## Monday, 17 June

On the road by 9:30. Our first stop, about 40 minutes west of Sioux Falls, was the Porter Sculpture Park.

This is an amazing place. Wayne Porter is an amazing artist. From I-90 you can see his gigantic, 60-foot bull's head off in the distance, across grassy hills. We drove down the dirt road about two minutes and came upon a small parking area, with a trailer on one side and a wooden shed on the other. Over 20 acres, Wayne and his brother have set up an outdoor museum of his work.

From Labor Day until Memorial Day, Wayne lives at a home three hours away, where he has his workshop. He started in the blacksmith trade at 12 years old, and by his twenties, he was experimenting with found pieces of metal. Eventually, he made larger and larger pieces, and started bringing them to this site. During the summer, Wayne sleeps in his trailer here and hangs at the shed throughout the day, greeting visitors from off the highway. He charges admission; not a problem cause you know the money goes directly to him. So all this sculpture is placed within these hilly fields, tall grass flowing. They take a lawnmower once a week to cut a path through the grass and lead people through the park. We spent about 90 minutes or so ambling through the grounds, awed.



As boys, Wayne's brother had trouble riding a real horse, so Wayne placed him as a great knight riding on a stick!







Bull's head from the outside and inside. Four skeletal beasts surround the head. From the Inside you can see how Wayne welded the pieces together, and he also has bats, snakes, and dragons flying around. It's really neat.







From the corridor of vulture politicians



Wayne creates and paints poems about each piece



Frog dissection





As you can see, he has a great sense of humor. We hung out in the shed with him, talking and petting his gorgeous, hazel-eyed Australian shepard. After a few minutes, I understood why his work's innocence (both sculpture and poetry) feels so genuine. He was really excited to see pictures of my work also and gifted us with a hand-made book of his poetry and five Hershey kisses!

We left Wayne feeling jubilant and bouncy. I still feel so fortunate to have met him. He's golden.

An hour later, we exited I-90 at Mitchell, South Dakota so we could check out the Corn Palace. Autumn timing is better, because by then they have harvested the corn and created that year's display.

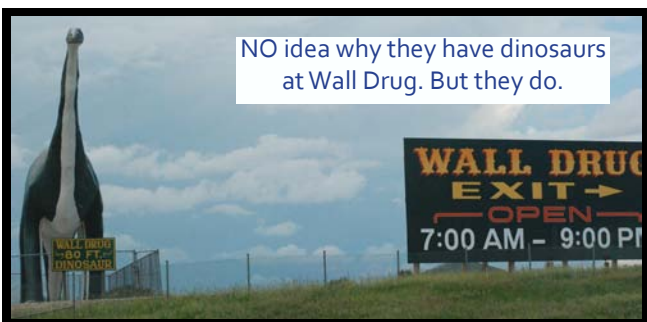


Yes, each scene around the palace is created with 12 different types of corn. This place has been here for over 100 years. They have a yearly competition to decide who's designs get represented. Corn is master.



Inside is a large auditorium, with more corn scenes. They were selling your typical tourist crap. We did watch the 15-minute corn movie...

Next stop down the I-90 line -- three hours to Wall Drug in Wall, SD. A gigantic amalgam of store/fake western town/Disney main street, with all kinds of junk to buy. Think South of the Border, western style.



NO idea why they have dinosaurs at Wall Drug. But they do.

The girls had ice cream here and I made some quick PB & honey sandwiches, which sufficed as lunch.

It was another hour before we arrived in Rapid City, and then 20 or so minutes south of town to our campground. We set up our old big, six-person tent and a smaller two-person tent borrowed from my nutritionst (thanks Lori. Actually, extra thanks Lori, because half way through the trip the zipper broke on this tent -- we used it anyway).

After a quick set up, we ran back into town for dinner. Nothing to write home about. Back to the campsite, and it was decided that Scott would sleep in the small tent (snoring). Marx felt badly for him, and went in there

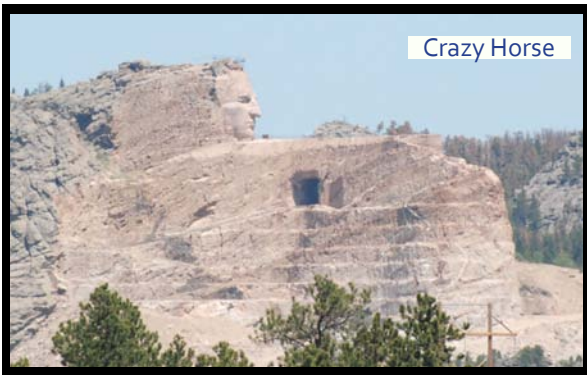


also. They ended up watching violent movies on his computer until the wee hours. Got chilly; we all nestled into our sleeping bags. Cozy.

## Tuesday, 18 June

Didn't wake with the sun, and in fact we woke slowly. Satch and Marxer took advantage of the campground's \$1 all-you-can-eat pancakes. They then tried swimming but the pool wasn't open until 10am. By then, Mo had arisen, so she went down for pancakes. We headed into town by about 10:30, and dropped the kids at a giant wooden maze while Scott and I did a grocery run. Returned to find Marxer exceeded our expectations by completing the maze in 30 minutes; Mo and Satch tried hard to make the wall of shame, but missed by a few minutes. They all finally made it out.

We drove past the campground toward Mount Rushmore. Turned around at the gate (really had no desire to see it, but we did want to say we'd been), and Scott pulled over to take some pictures. Drove about 30 minutes to the mountain carved with Crazy Horse, but again, we really couldn't get excited about paying \$30 for seeing his face in a mountain, and we weren't into going through a museum this day. Too gorgeous out.



Crazy Horse

So we pulled over to the side of the road, snapped a pic, and drove on.

This road took us to the small town of Custer, an unfortunate town in such an amazing area, touristy and without much of interest. Scott did see a barber, stepped in, and received a cut from a woman who used to cut hair for the Army. Next door, a rock shop interested Marxer and Satch. Not much else to see in Custer.



Piled back into the car to get to Custer State Park (again, unfortunate name, beautiful place) and the 'needles,' really cool rock formations with tiny, winding roads. Picnic there. And rock climbing!



That's Marxer in the red hat -->



Late afternoon, we went back toward our campsite. Scott and Marx visited the nearby Reptile Gardens, which had 225 species and subspecies and boasts more reptiles than any other zoo in the world. Marx was impressed. And happy.

Mo, meanwhile, was really interested in going to the Sitting Bull Crystal Caverns, across the highway from our campground. So I dropped Mo off, took Satch swimming (as previously promised), until it was time to go back and get Mo and then Scott and Marx. Everyone seemed to have a good time.

About 8:00 now, and time for dinner at a local place. Nice waitress who had no idea what she was doing. Food, eh. But afterward, we went into town and found Armadillo's ice cream.



I can safely say that the kids found this place to be one of the trip's highlights. They had large sundaes and malts with all the trimmings for half of what you'd pay at a Yogi Berry type place. Ice cream itself was good, not great, but we really enjoyed it. By the time we got there, it was 9:30, and we ended up waiting in a 30 minute line. But the kids said 'worth it!'

### Wednesday, 19 June

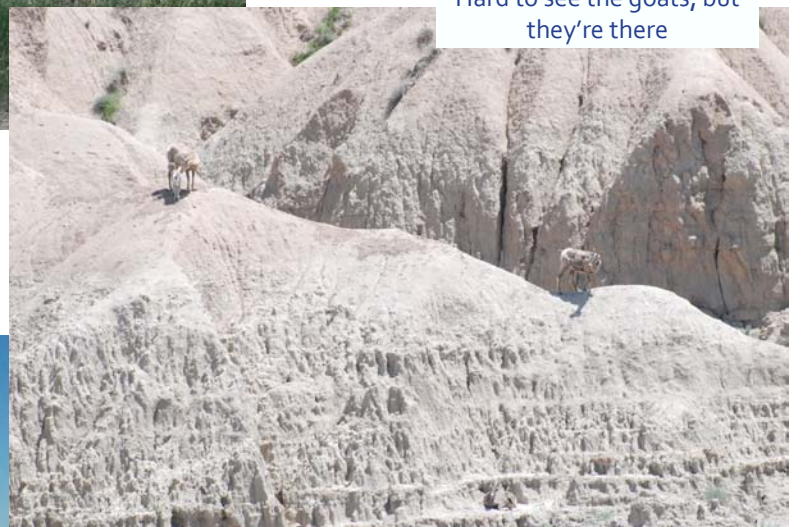
Slept in again, and I took a wonderful hot shower. Satch and Scott and Marx went for pancakes. Mo slept on. Timing was fine -- we were on the road to the Badlands by about 10:45. What an amazing place. The soft mud mounds varied in height, but you could still climb them and sit comfortably. Warm and very windy. Satch's hat left her head during a hike and although we didn't see it on any passing buffalo heads, we're certain that's where it ended up.

Drove all through the national park, stopping at turn offs to climb around and explore. Scott was smitten with the buffalo -- couldn't stop taking pictures of them. Kids entranced by the countless prairie dogs popping up and calling to each other. And the mountain goats were just plain cool, maneuvering around tiny precipices. If you ever get a chance to see the Badlands, take it. This area is gorgeous.





Satch with hat



Hard to see the goats, but they're there



Satch without hat



On our way back toward Rapid City, we passed (and had to check out) a Minuteman Missile site. First we toured a non-descript group of trailers comprising the old Launch Control Facility. Included Cold War artifacts, a movie about how controls were manned at the building, and why the missiles were located throughout South Dakota. About 12 miles down the road, we self-toured an actual decommissioned silo, where a missile had been located. Scary. And interesting.

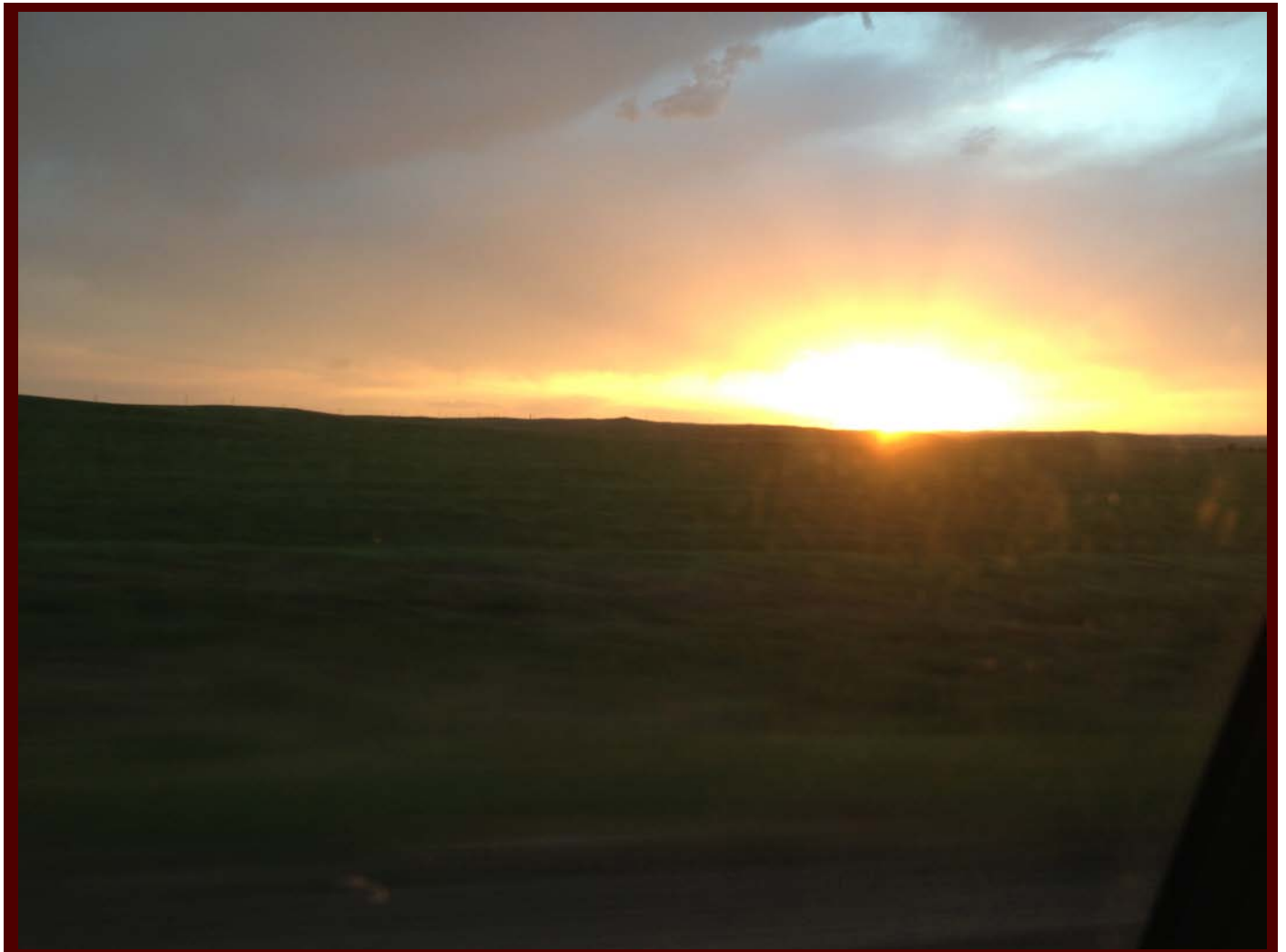
Family decided to pack up the tent and drive as far as we could that night, making the drive to Vegas easier the next day. Couldn't leave without another stop at Armadillo's though. Broke camp at about 5:30. On the road by 6:15.

Leaving South Dakota, we passed a 'Putz and Glo' mini golf course, convincing Scott of the presence of Jews.

Better yet, this was our last view of the Black Hills. Such an amazing place.



The Minuteman silo



Another state. Dusky light touching the Wyoming hills and plains reminded me of a big hand reaching and pulling up the earth like a lazily placed quilt.

We arrived into Casper, Wyoming at 10:15, just in time for me to feel conked out. Found a cool hotel, nice room, the C'mon Inn. Exposed beams and animal heads looked down on us as we jumped into one of the four hot tubs placed around the indoor courtyard. We slept well.

## Thursday, 20 June

Driving day. But first, before leaving Casper, we stopped at the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center, operated by the Bureau of Land Management. Pleased with myself that they accepted our National Park Pass for admission (definitely worth the \$80 if you are traveling to national parks or such. good for a year and saved us boucoup bucks). Interactive exhibits throughout the center about the four major trails that



A ride demonstrating the difficulties of crossing the Platte River nearby.

passed within eyesight of the museum: the Oregon, Pony Express, Gold Rush, and Mormon trails.

Offered a fair analysis of both the good and bad of pioneers and emigrants to the West. We loved the presentation and came away with a good sense of the hardships



Satch pulling a replica trail wagon. Not easy!

and joys of the time.

This also happened to be the place that Satch realized she had lost her two stuffed animals. So the first 30 minutes or so was spent with Scott and I calling the various places we had stayed, trying for a positive ID. No luck yet, but we were able to calm her down a bit.

From here we drove and drove and drove until somewhere in Utah, where we had a Mexican lunch/dinner in the restaurant of a dying, old-Western-type hotel. Everything we ordered was fresh and tasty, ample portions, inexpensive. Out the window and across the street, we saw a pink mohawk tattoo'ed dude walking out of his "Pink Ink Tattoo Studio." Then drive drive drive through more of Utah, a corner of Arizona, and then into Nevada. We saw Vegas from 20 miles away and arrived exhausted. But, it being 11:30pm, we couldn't go straight to a hotel -- we had to take the kids through the Strip with all the lights and Vegas-tude. They loved it.

Scott got us two rooms comped due to past gambling there (and he came away this night with \$250!). Mo and Satch roamed the hotel to see what was what, but Marxie just wanted her internet. I was happy with a bed.



## Friday, 21 June

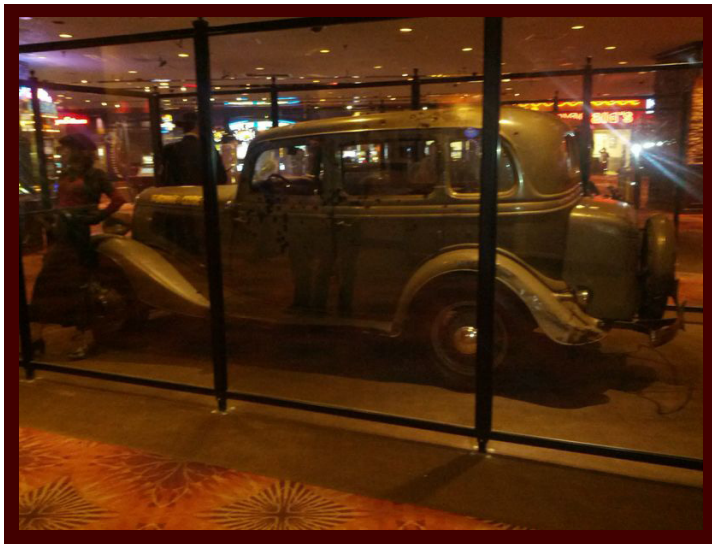
I woke early and tried to go to the gym, but they said \$18. Eesh.

We went looking for breakfast, and that wasn't happening, so we packed the van and were ready to pull out when we realized that Marxe was missing. Scott had left her in the room, thinking that she had come down with me. Back up he went. All together again.

Found a Jamba Juice and had lovely lovely smoothies. Scott noticed a taco place a couple doors down and he disappeared there with Marxe.

Scott then wanted to take the girls to the Venetian for a gondola ride, so I dropped them off, got gas, and circled the hotel. This bridge is as far as they got to the gondola, because ... as you can see, the girls are holding chocolate looking drink cups. A Godiva store stood between the hotel and gondola entrances, where none with Altman blood could pass. They were nice enough to bring me a truffle.

Hot desert sun. We stopped just before the California border at Whiskey Pete's Casino to check out the real Bonnie and Clyde death car. This place was gen-you-wine. Even had the shirt Clyde was wearing when killed.



Drive drive drive. About 30 minutes outside Escondido, we called Mom and Dad to see if they needed us to grab anything before we got to the house we were all renting for the week. They asked us to go by the Hungry Bear Sub Shop (less than a mile from our house growing up in Kendall, there was a Hungry Bear Sub Shop, which we all LOVED. A hole-in-the-wall place with the best subs in Miami). So before we headed to the family, we stopped at this Escondido Hungry Bear.

OK, so this Hungry Bear is owned by a fellow grad of Killian High School (albeit 10 years after me) and his mom named Mia. He told me how much he loved the Kendall Hungry Bear, and when he came out to San Diego, he opened one up, absconding with the name and a very similar logo. No harm no foul. Later, after tasting the subs, we all agreed: he's making the namesake proud.

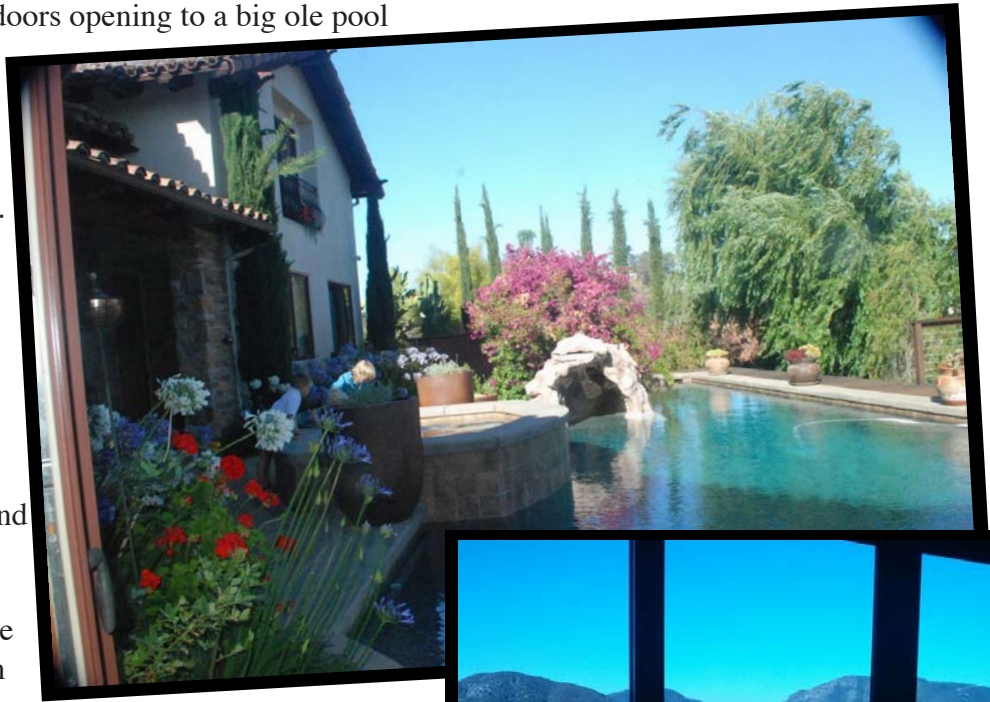
Then we drove up to the house, in the hills outside San Diego, looking down on a reservoir. Huge and GORGEOUS, two large wings of bedrooms, two kitchens (one right behind the other), doors opening out to a view

of the lake, and another area with doors opening to a big ole pool with a hot tub, waterfall, and lap lane area. Movie room, games corridor (with ping pong), reading room with side library, fruit tree grove, front courtyard, gazebo, etc. etc. Satch and Marxe glanced at the pool, ran upstairs to change into swimsuits and swam, playing, for hours and hours.

Sarah, Mike, and the boys had arrived a couple hours earlier, right before Mom and Dad; and Sarah and Mom had gone out grocery shopping. We helped them empty their entire car full of groceries. Then we all sat and had Hungry Bear. Aaron and family were due to arrive late this evening, but they suffered a canceled flight, and re-scheduled for the next day. Dad was recovering from his back surgery, still in a lot of pain. But it was really good to see him and everyone.

## Saturday, 22 June

Unbeknownst to Mom and Dad, this was the big day that Sarah had been planning for (with my, Ruth's, and Aaron's help) for over a year. The kids saw only the pool -- jumping in straight from their beds. We had a leisurely breakfast, and hung around, watching hummingbirds, a heron, and picking fruit from the trees. Scott and Marxe volunteered for the Ruth airport run, mostly because it entailed passing by some bacon restaurant (I'm informed it's called Slaters 50/50) where Marxe purchased a bacon brownie. Really.



At 4:00, we scooted Mom and Dad upstairs to their bedroom under the guise of special dinner preparations. In came the guests and caterer, up went the decorations. Aaron, Servane, and the kids arrived and ran up to their wing of the house to get dressed.

When Mom and Dad came down, they were completely surprised! It was wonderful and went beautifully. People had flown in from all over the country. Help from Sarah and Mike's friends made it even better. By the time the last guest left, I think Sarah was ready to sleep for a week.





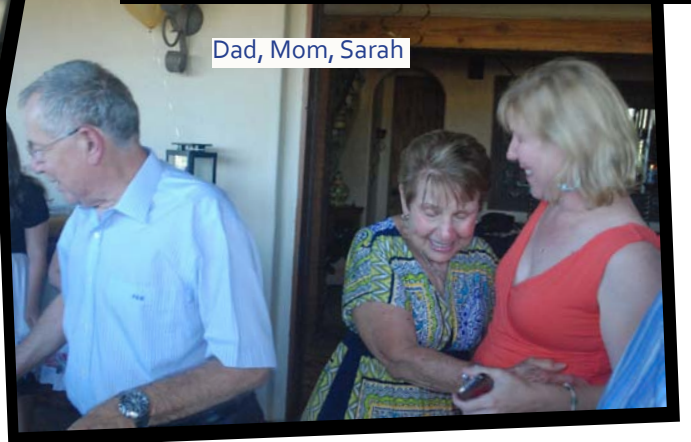
Satch's sign for the party



Dad, Maggie, Mom, Bob's partner, and Bob Allen.



Me, Joe, Ruth



Dad, Mom, Sarah



## Sunday, 23 June

Everyone straggled down to breakfast at some point, and eventually we started getting ready for the barbeque with about 10 of my parents' friends who were still in town. Kids in the pool. Scott manned the grill. Joe and Maggie arrived with a bag full of goodies they picked up from San Diego's Little Italy and proceeded to cook a very yummy pasta dish (Joe and Maggie own the best Italian restaurant in Miami).

Guests left by about 5pm. Cleaned up and crashed.



The Super Moon was out. Scott got a great picture.

## Monday, 24 June

This was Mom and Dad's actual anniversary. We handed out the T-shirts I designed.



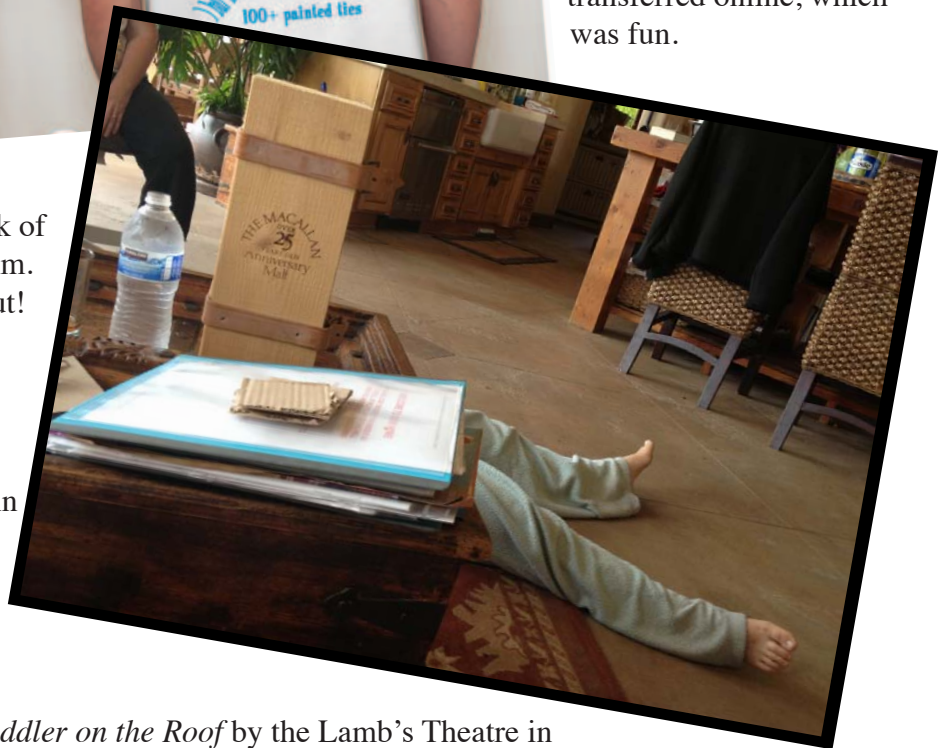
Second trip to Hungry Bear.

Overall, a recovery day in every sense of the word, although Sarah and I did take a morning walk. We watched some of the hundreds of slides/movies that Sarah had transferred online, which was fun.

Toward the end of the night, we partook of Dad's 25-year-old Macallan. Mmmmmm. Mo just had a sip, but it knocked her out!

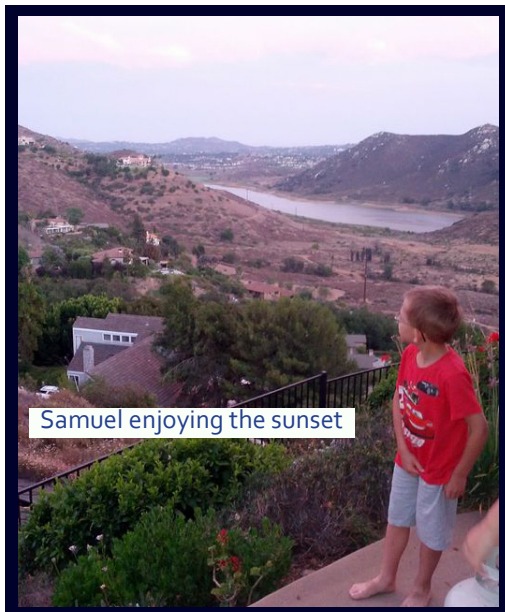
## Tuesday, 25 June

Ruth left early in the morning. Mike, Sarah, and I took a hike up the mountain through the backyard wilderness and ended up at a nice lady's home. She bemoaned how busy and loud the area was now (!), but was very sweet.



Mike's friend got four free tickets to *Fiddler on the Roof* by the Lamb's Theatre in La Jolla (the place where Sarah and Mike met!). Scott, Mo, Marx, and Servane had a great time.





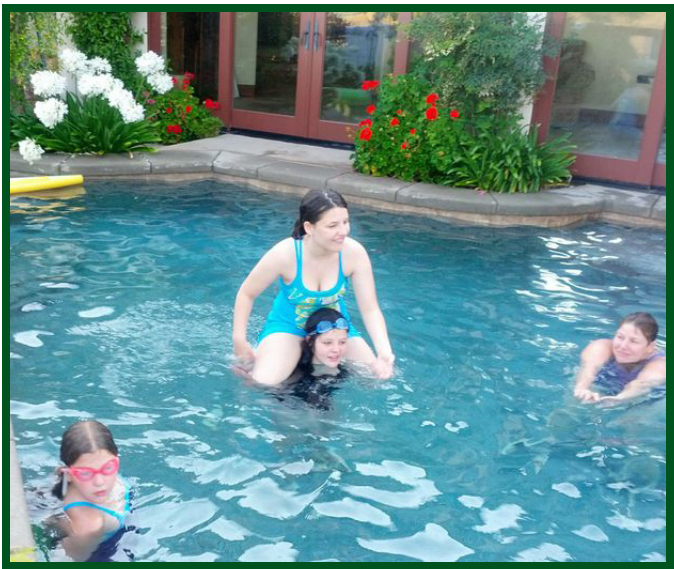
Samuel enjoying the sunset



Chocolate chip cookie or brownie or M&Ms? Only Kiernan knows.

## Wednesday, 26 June

Everyone in the pool. And after four days of constantly working with him, Samuel finally swam without one of us holding onto him -- with just the floaties. Meanwhile, the other kids had chicken fights.



Great sitting around and talking to Dad, who's back was markedly improved. Mom was relaxed (!) and happy.



Yaaay Samuel!

## Thursday, 27 June

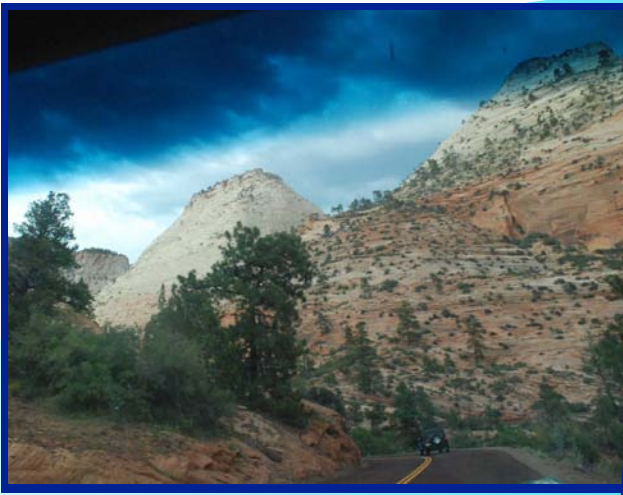
I keep getting older, but it never gets easier saying goodbye to my family. I love them all very very much.

A few tears later, we left Escondido, re-tracing our route to Las Vegas, stopping back at Roberto's Taco place and Jamba Juice. Don't know what we were thinking, but

someone allowed Satch to have beans. Windows down, windows up, windows down, windows up.

I drove for a while, but I was tired. Scott was as well, but less than me so he drove. We lost an hour crossing back into Arizona, and once in Utah, our phones stopped working so we lost use of the maps. Followed signs to Zion, leaving I-15, and pulled over for Marx and Scott (kangaroo jerky). Then through Zion, which was incredible. Grand grand place. Our campground is east of Zion, and you have to cross through the park to get to the other side: another big plus for our National Park pass! We set up camp, ate a pretty bad dinner (chicken fried steak. Blech), and the girls went into the pool. We crashed. Again.





Zion National Park

## Friday, 28 June

Woke up, and Scott was missing from the snoring tent. Guessed where to look: the air conditioned restaurant/campground office, two computers set up at a back table, on his phone. Tons of room at this campground, but they placed some very loud guys at a site right next to us, so Scott was unable to sleep long. Didn't affect the girls. They slept late.

Left our site around 11:30 and traveled back through Zion to the visitor's center. Shuttles pick you up here and take you throughout the canyon, dropping you off at various trailheads. We took the shuttle through the entire canyon and met a cute park ranger from Maine who explained about beavers eating the trees. Loves his job. Fun to speak with.

It was a hot one (rising to 114 degrees by 2:30), but we were set on hiking (might be more accurate to say that Mo and I were set on hiking and dragged Scott, Marx, and Satch with us). We alighted at Zion Lodge, crossed the Virgin River, and hiked the Emerald Pools and Kentaya Trails. Yes, it was hot, but about half-way through the hike, clouds rolled in, keeping the sun at bay.



Beaver-felled tree

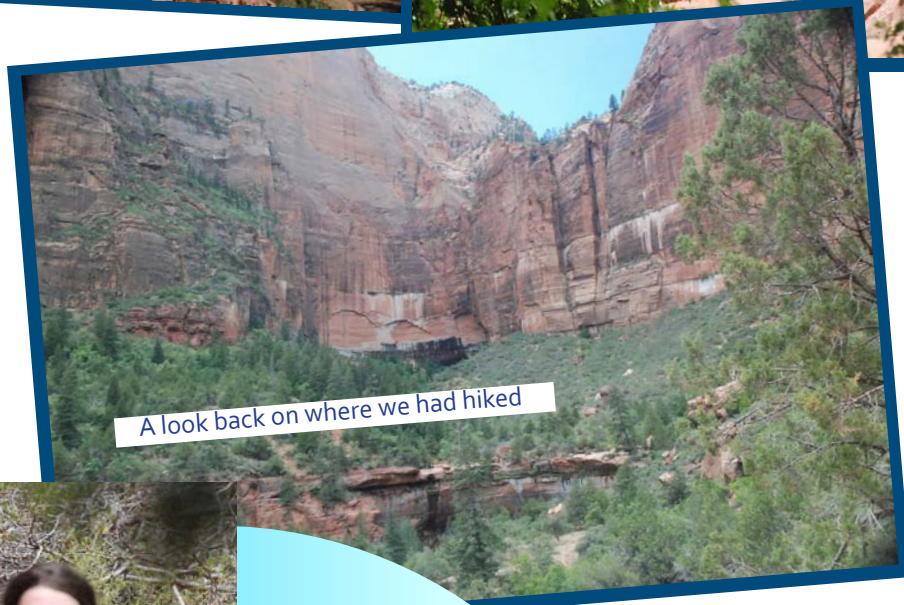


Dunking our hats in the Virgin River and replacing them on our heads was COOL





In front of one of the falls



A look back on where we had hiked



Past the waterfalls, Marxie struggled with a decision whether to remove her shirt and continue a la sports bra. Yes and then no, yes and no. Mo warned Marxie to make up her mind, and when Marxie didn't stop, Mo showed her how to hike a la natural! We were all laughing so hard, we couldn't breathe. Finally recovered, and Marxie pulled off her shirt.

We saw lizards and beauty everywhere. The climb affected Scott's knees a little, and the souls actually separated from his shoes.





Lunch-dinnered at 4:30ish in town at Amigos. Middle of the road -- not fast food not fancy, but the mesquite on Scott's shrimp was good and the horchado was yummy. More near beer (welcome to Utah) and the margarita needed help. Everyone nice though. Down the street we found the ice cream and chocolate store. Also searched for new Scott shoes, but no luck.

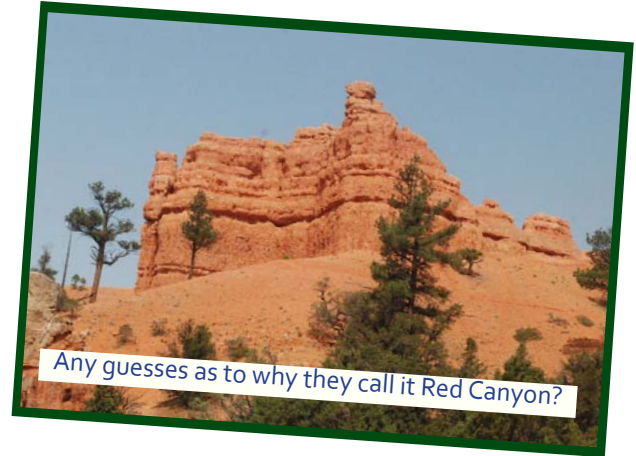
Back at the site, we all went swimming. After sunset, the campground offered ziplining from the old barn down into a field. Mo and Satch availed themselves. Fun. Then sleep.

## Saturday, 29 June

Today was Bryce Canyon. Before you even hit the famous arch, you pass through Red Canyon.



The arch -- entry to Bryce



Any guesses as to why they call it Red Canyon?

OK, there are really no words to describe Bryce Canyon. It is definitely one of the most incredible places I have ever been. We stopped by the Visitor Center, saw a neat movie about how the park formed, got some good advice on hiking, and drove the 18 miles down to Rainbow Point, which took about 40 minutes. As we arrived, the sky darkened, and we heard thunder. Didn't see any lightning,

so we decided to go for it. Moderate hike around Bristlecone Loop, few raindrops, nothing too serious, but



we had fun scaring each other. Congratulated ourselves on not dying.

These rock formations are called hoodoos. They form over millions of years and are constantly changing. Gorgeous.





We had PB&J sandwiches back at the car, and then took the slow way to Bryce Point, pulling over at every look out. Then Bryce Point, which was the perfect ending to the park: the panoramic view left us breathless.



This is an unnatural natural bridge. Not a bridge because it doesn't go from one side to the other. The arch was created by rain, snow, and wind eating through the sediment.





When we left Bryce, we trolled nearby towns looking for food. Paduitch was hosting a hot air balloon rally, which played really well against the 1800s-type western town. Pulled over for the street fair, and then put our name in for dinner at a place with big, old western-type windows that looked onto Main Street. While waiting, Scott found a liquor store (few and far between in Utah) where he could actually get a six pack of 8% beer. All single cans that he had over the past couple of days had been 4%: you know he was ready for some real stuff. Meanwhile, the girls found a thrift store two doors down wherein there was a special of \$5 for as many clothes as you could fit in one shopping bag. They did us proud.



After dinner, I drove back to camp, fast, because there was a barn dance the girls were interested in. But on the way, we saw a buffalo herd, hanging out in the early evening sun, rolling around in their own poop. Had to stop for Scott. He loves his buffalo.

Dealt with an asshole parked in our site space. He wasn't an asshole because he was parked there, but he was an asshole because he gave us a hard time about moving and then had all this attitude. He and a bunch of people had taken up the camp-

ing sites nearest to us. We shook it off, but man, what a jerk.

So the girls dressed in some of their new used clothes for the barn dance. Night time zipline was rolling again: we bought a ticket for Satch and some guy ended up giving her two more rides. She loved it. A girl named Sarah that Mo had met the day before was at the dance, and she and Marxe sometimes danced and sometimes went out to the playground while Mo danced and danced. All ended at 11pm, so we walked back to the tent. Scott and Marxe stayed awake watching violent movies.

## Sunday, 30 June

The jackasses in the next site were up early talking about guns, etc. So we got moving. Broke camp, purchased ice, paid our bill at the front office, and split. As we were driving the five miles back to the main two-lane road, one of the kids yelled, "Turkeys!" And there they were. Many turkeys crossing the road. A whole family of of wild turkeys taking their time. That was neat.

Arrived at a junction about 20 minutes later, but before turning south, we decided to pull over at the Thunderbird, a restaurant with this Ho-Made Pies sign out front. We all found this immensely funny. The sign was originally made in the 40s, but now the owners keep it up to milk the double entendre. Breakfast was fine.



Then lots and lots of desert driving on two-lane roads. Pulled over at Glen Canyon Dam, and Scott and I got out for a few minutes, but the girls were asleep.

An hour or so later, they woke up hungry,





so we decided to try a Sonic Shake place. Coulda done without. Back on the road, Navajo land surrounding us seemed so desolate. Driving driving. The rental van held up well with all the passing we did, once in a while getting up to 98 mph. Discovered that cruise control just wouldn't work above 92 miles per hour, though.

Sometimes we'd see these yellow signs with numbers in the middle of a field. Like 472.  
No rhyme or reason.

Pulled into the Four Corners monument. Perused the Native American vendors. Scott was ahead of the rest of us, and I had to ask him for some money because one of the girls saw something and my wallet was in the car. Then we had to call him back again because another saw something. Then I saw something too. Scott finally handed me a \$20, which did the trick.

After another hour or so, we passed through Cortez and stopped. Trying to find a tent similar to the second (smaller) one I had borrowed from my nutritionist, which we dubbed the snoring tent (for Scott). Had a zipper leak that I was able to fix the first couple of times, but teeth were missing and it wasn't going to shut anymore. Found nothing even remotely similar.



Fortunately, when we arrived in Mesa Verde, drove up the mountain, into the campground, and chose our spot, we found that bugs were at a minimal so an open flap wouldn't be such a problem. Pitched our tent back behind some trees, where we probably shouldn't have been, but it was private and beautiful and we were happy there. It was getting dark when we finished setting up, so we drove back 20 minutes down the mountain, 15 minutes back into Cortez. Had dinner at another TripAdvisor suggestion, La Casita, which we wouldn't have found otherwise because it's off the main street. Really good, tiny place! Owner was great -- offered us a shot of tequila when we wanted to find out what a Tarantula Margarita was (mmmm tasty). Portions were large and tasty. Mexican coleslaw, given with your chips and salsa, is sooo much better than the regular mayonaissy stuff. The shrimp fajita had tasty mushrooms, and they worked to make the vegetarians in our family happy. Mo spoke Spanish the entire time.

Back to Mesa Verde. Kids were psyched because the bathrooms down the road doubled as a hot spot. It was a beautiful starry night, moon light, but pretty windy, so the tent blew around a bunch. But we were fine. Scott and Mo switched places for the night, but he was up and down and up and down. All our noses had become really dry. Back to the other tent with him Monday.

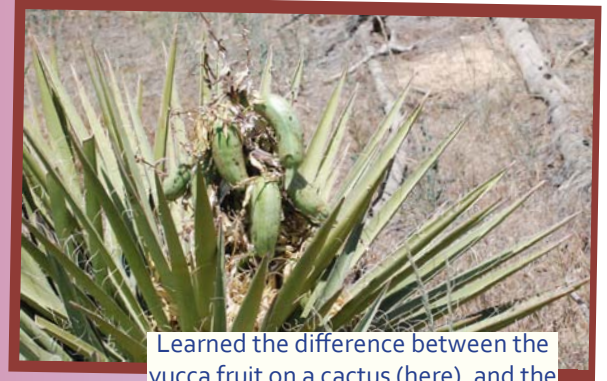
## Monday, 1 July

Satch and I woke up earliest, to a gorgeous morning -- cool and sunny. We hiked to the showers. Felt good. Ended up back there an hour later to do laundry, which was a necessity at this point. By the time we headed further back into the park, it was around 11am.

Wanted to see as much of the park as possible, so we took the wind-y, 45 minute drive south west to Wetherill Mesa, where you can hop on a tram ride looping around to views of Long House, Kodak House, and the Badger House community. A stop for each outlook to view the cliff houses there. Whole tram got off, checked out the view, and jumped back on the tram. Started to be funny how Scott was last on the tram each time! Trying to get those perfect pictures.

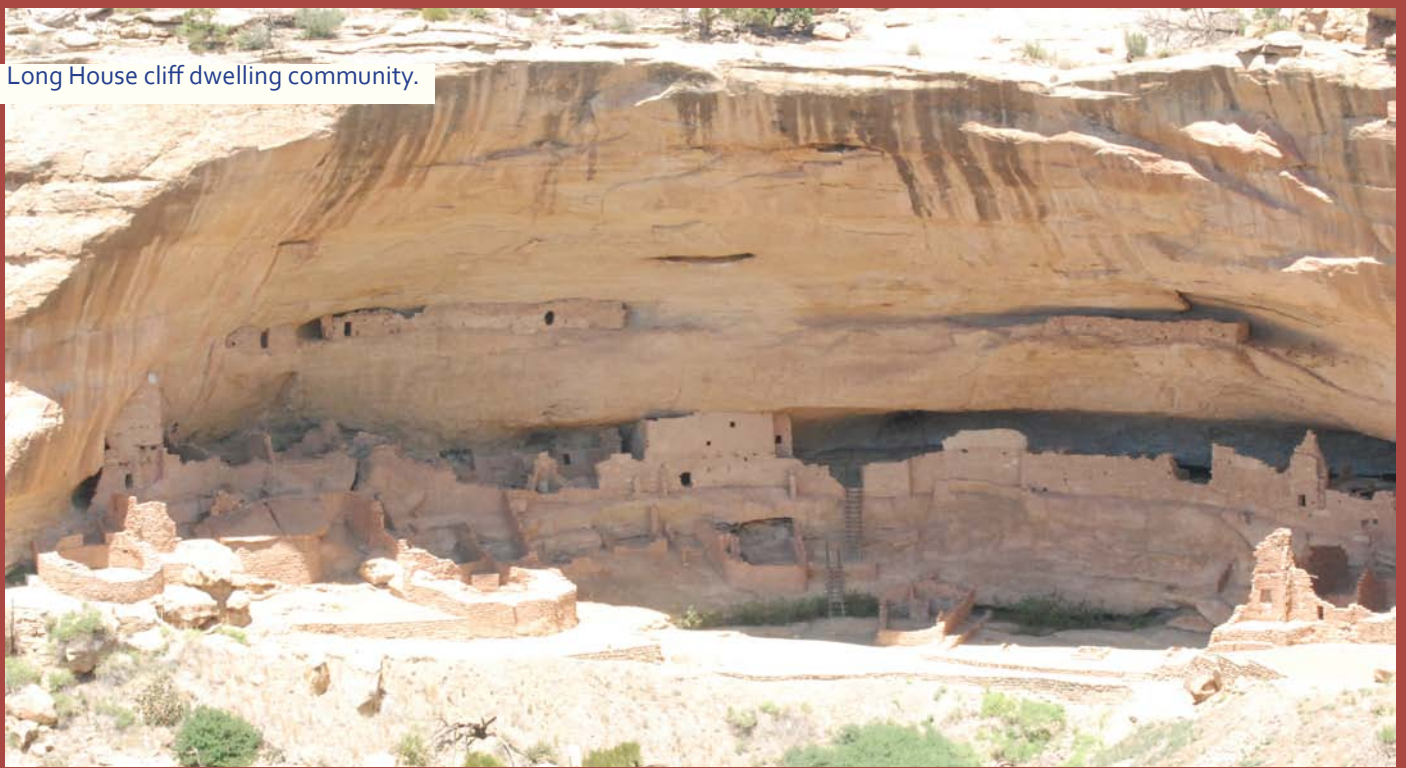


Marxe and Satch sat in the front of the tram, next to the driver.



Learned the difference between the yucca fruit on a cactus (here), and the yuca root found in South America.

Long House cliff dwelling community.



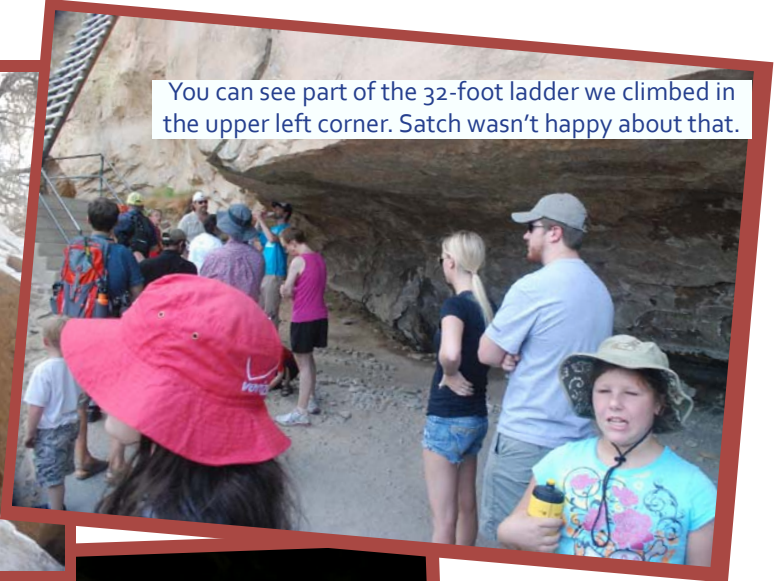
Signs noting which areas were hit by fire in which year let us see the re-growth over time. This fire was from 2003.



Yes, the Google Maps car was up on Wetherill Mesa, charting away.



Once we finished that loop, we drove all the way around to the Chapin Mesa for our guided tour of the cliff dwellings comprising Balcony House. Joshua, our park ranger tour guide, was awesome. He had us imagining ourselves as right there in the 1200s. Not pictured, the 18-inch-wide tunnel through which my hips and Scott's belly had to fit. This was the method that the original cliff dwellers used to control access to their homes.



Mid afternoon by the time we finished at Cliff Palace. Stopped by an interesting archeological museum not far from this site. Then, of course, the gift shop. Purchased little things the girls liked.

Pretty hungry now, so we drove straight past our campsite and into Cortez for a second night at La Casita. Still yummy. Ice cream after dinner, and each of the girls provided their tithe, I mean taste, to the driver.





On our way back to the site, we saw deer everywhere, especially congregating around the water station. Watched a male and two females assume control of the area, letting some deer in to drink (but only on the ground -- not at the dripping faucet with them) and physically butting others away. Marxe and Scott got close to catch some pictures, but not too close.



Sky darkening at 9pm, and the Ranger Evening Program started at the amphitheater on the other side of the campground. This was so so cool. Ranger Jim Zachary's talk was "Coyote Watches the Stars," and we learned so much about the constellations, individual stars, and how the cliff dwellers tracked seasons and time. Lack of surface lighting made it easy to see the sky.

Returned to the campground an hour or so later, and the deer now hung out by the bathroom down the road. Scott set up in the car, Mo and Marxe watched a movie on Scott's computer, and Satch and I climbed into our tent. Neat looking out the window and seeing Scorpius,

the Teapot, Polaris, Vega, the Big Dipper, Saturn, Venus, etc. So beautiful.

## Tuesday, 2 July

Another gorgeous morning. We broke camp, retraced the route to Cortez, then turned north to check out a folk artist who uses mufflers and other car parts, paints them white, and creates pipe people.

Walked around the fenced-off path. Arrangements were whimsical, humorous, inventive. As we finished up, Floyd came down the hill and introduced himself. And so we met Floyd Johnson: former missionary and teacher at the Navajo reservation, originally from Minnesota, in his 80s I think. Gosh, he is soooo nice. Many years ago, he bought these acres with his wife and built the entire homestead from scratch. Himself.



We had finished the public part of the yard, but now Floyd offered to give us a guided tour, through the gate and into the whole area. His stories about some of the pieces were hilarious.





We completed the tour, said goodbye to Floyd, and walked back to the van. Took a few minutes getting everyone situated, and I wanted to take a picture of Floyd's mailbox so I could send him some white

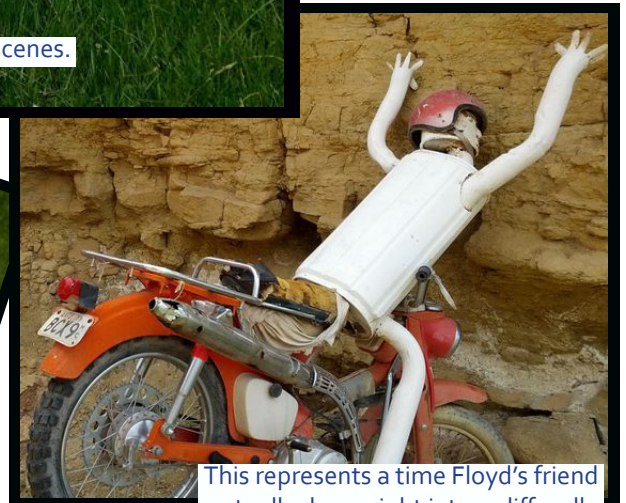


Floyd dug this pond and little by little peopled its banks with fun scenes.

paint. Suddenly, Floyd came trotting down the driveway and asked us up to the house for some coffee and lemonade. He said his wife was complaining that he always gets to meet the people coming through and she never does.

So we met Joyce!

Floyd laughed hard remembering sledding like this back in Minnesota.



This represents a time Floyd's friend actually drove right into a cliff wall.

They've been married 53 years, and she's as talkative as he. Sitting on their porch, looking at Joyce's beautiful flower garden, sipping lemonade

-- this was wonderful. A high point of the trip for me.

We left close to 11am, much later than we had expected, but such is life. Drove back east, past Mesa Verde, and within 15 minutes, the landscape completely changed to rolling green hills and mountains. TripAdvisor suggested a good breakfast place (yeah, we were hungry by now) in Durango, which was .... closed when we got there. So we parked and looked around. Durango has changed A LOT since Scott and I were there 16 years ago. Now it's kinda hippy dippy friendly with tourist chic thrown in. Not a bad thing.



While Scott talked up the guy in the free jerky tasting booth, the four of us went into a store. It was a neat store. And this is coming from me, who hates shopping. Sale going on: buy one, get one half price. We all tried on clothes and figured out who had what money left to spend. So we put it all together and then the cute tattooed, pierced college-y saleslady gave us another 10% off! Cool! She also directed us to a primo lunch spot with great salads and other good food.

Back on the road, past some rocky mountains, and into New Mexico, where I admired the turquoise license plates and promptly got pulled over for speeding. Nice cop, though, decreased the reported speed so I wouldn't have too high a ticket. While he was handing me the paperwork, we heard some funky noises coming from his direction. Finally Scott asked him if he was quacking, which made us all crack up hysterically. The cop's phone was set to quack for incoming messages. Fortunately, he had already written up the ticket.

Into Santa Fe a few hours later. Another hotel, discounted courtesy of Ruxandra. No way we would have stayed here without her discount, as this is a major resort-type place. Everyone was really happy to plop down on a bed, and then we saw the showers! I showered, Scott showered, and even Mo showered. The girls went to grab some s'mores from the lobby, and then we had dinner at the hotel restaurant -- decent but really pricey. We were all asleep by 10:30.

## Wednesday, 3 July

Late check out so that we could check out the International Museum of Folk Art. Missed the international folk market by a week.

Santa Fe was somewhat disappointing. People were very nice, but everything was expensive and plastic-y.



Breakfast down the street was eh and pricey. Didn't like the museum at all. Overwhelming permanent exhibit: too much stuff on top of each other; all countries mixed together; no write ups on individual pieces or listing of their materials or cultural importance. The special exhibits were ok. Satch made a kite in the Tako Kichi Kite Crazy in Japan exhibit.

Interactive computer design projected on the wall for the Amish quilt exhibit was cool. And the exhibit about chocolate, with a video of people taking a chocolate bath was a hit with the girls.

Back at the room, Scott napped while Mo watched Netflix and Marxer, Satch, and I took a dunk in the pool. An hour later, we were back and packed. Stopped by FedEx with three boxes of clothes and camping equipment to lighten our load a bit and give the girls some more space in the back, and then Albertsons for provisions. Drove directly into rain clouds, spitting cherry pits across southern New Mexico. Turned on the radio and heard that Morsi had stepped down.

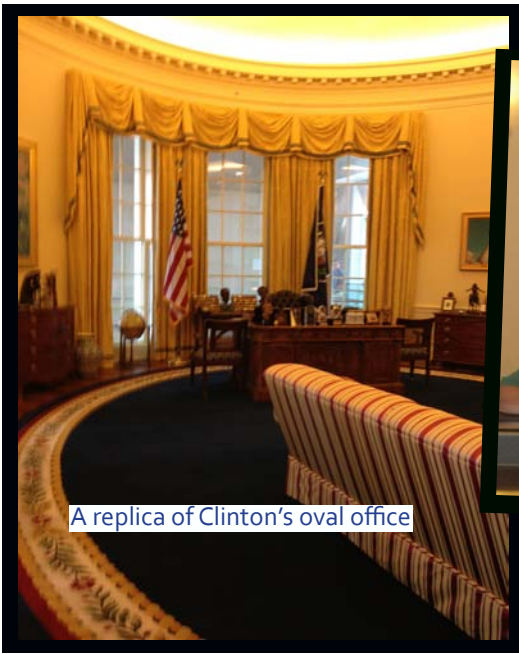
Drove and drove. The blinking blue LED light from Scott's headset became inscribed on my eyelids. Into and out of Texas with a single stop in Amarillo for gas. Made it to Oklahoma City.

## Thursday, 4 July

Good breakfast (Embassy Suites have those omelette bars, and our chef was amusing), and then goodbye Oklahoma. Drive drive drive until Little Rock. Got to the Clinton Library close to 2pm, and whoo hoo, it's free on July 4th!

This is my first presidential library, so I'm not sure if they all whitewash (ha) everything as much, but I still





A replica of Clinton's oval office



In the cabinet room

enjoyed it. The main hall is supposed to be modeled after the interior of the Trinity College library in Dublin. I can see echos of it here, but why are there signs about it everywhere? I correctly guessed the most expensive state gift to the Clintons on display (an enormous carved jade figurine) and the docent presented me with a baseball-card type of Clinton fact sheet.

We checked into our hotel on the river, a good view for fireworks. Satch has become the new Mo as far as sleeping buddy goes. She kicks and punches. No one wants to sleep with her anymore. Mo took the floor.

Across the street was a pizza joint. Mo ordered for us (!), pizza and salad and breadsticks. Forgettable. Then we dropped the girls three miles down the road at *Monsters University*, which they had been asking incessantly to see for days. Scott and I



The Millenium Tree, by Dale Chihuly, used in the White House during the 1999 holiday season.

had two hours to wander the riverfront, check out the July 4th celebration. A five-piece big band played, the Chick-fil-a chickens danced with kids from the audience. Hokey stuff all around. Lots of fat people among a fairly segregated crowd. Cool draw bridge that lifts up in the middle while the sides stay put.

Brought the kids back and watched fireworks from our hotel room. Lots of fireworks. Pretty.

Ready to go home I think. Don't like hotels so much as tents and the national parks. People in Little Rock are nice, but there's definitely a change from out west. even from Oklahoma City. Out there, people seem more at ease. Here (maybe cause of the July 4th crowds) they seem more stressed, unhappy. Lots of young parents.



## Friday, 5 July

I opened my mouth as we were coming into Memphis and said Graceland. Shouldn't have, but did. I had seen it years ago with Lin, but Scott and the kids, no. And because Elvis is as close to royalty as America gets (1970s



version of Louis XIV), this was a must see for them. So we did. In all its kitschy glory.



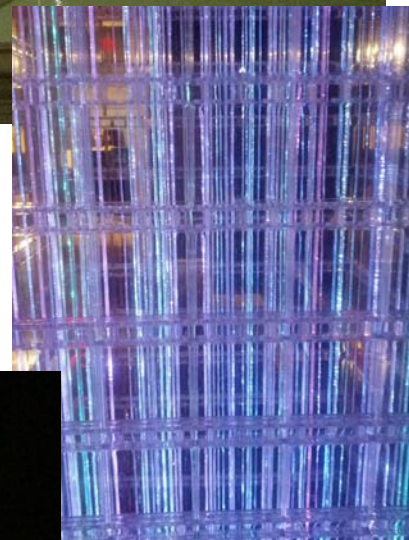
From Graceland, we drove into Memphis to visit the Lorraine Hotel, the site where Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. Skies were darkening. Still a woman protesting across the street (don't know if she was the same woman from 1989) about the Lorraine and the Civil Rights Museum that now surrounds it being antithetical to King's legacy. And she has a point. Viewing the hotel is free, but it costs money to walk the balcony where King was shot. Felt wrong that people were laughing and posing for pictures up there. Solemnity was missing completely.





From there, followed a TripAdvisor lead to a restaurant about 15 minutes away, which looked great, but was closed (again). A guy there directed us to Overton Square, another part of the city where we could get some decent food. As soon as we walked into the restaurant, the sky opened and a torrential downpour started. Still raining when we walked across the street later on for fro-yo, but not so badly. We had to hurry a little, though, because Nashville was three hours away and we were (I was) set on seeing the temporary Bruce Munro exhibit at Cheekwood Mansion and Gardens there, which only shows at night.

It was just incredible. Oh gosh, there was so much to see. His outdoor installations spanned the grounds and his indoor pieces were gorgeous at the mansion. The top three pictures are from some pieces inside.



This one is from the field of light in front of the mansion. A picture can't really capture the magic of his work -- you really have to see it. This was one of several installations set up outside.





At 11pm, they closed the place and we had to leave. I could have stayed there for hours more.

We found a hotel close by and crashed.

### **Saturday, 6 July**

Left Nashville knowing that we were going to drive the day through to get home. Lots of the same -- girls discussing and comparing their body parts, Scott driving without lights, and one of our only driving days with rain.

We pulled into Knoxville, Tennessee around lunchtime, stopping by the World's Fair Sunsphere for a picture. Then consulted TripAdvisor for a place and called (yes, they were open), and had one of the best lunches ever! The Holy Land Market, a small exotic grocery store with a section set apart for eating. Walter is a great cook and everything we ate was delicious: spanikopita, mujdera (lentils spiced with cumin, onions, parsley), baba ganoush, sulu, chicken tiki, etc. Arabic music in the background. A hole-in-the-wall type place that delivered perfect food and kept us rolling until Chevy Chase.

So that's it. Twenty-three days, 7200 miles, 135 hours in the car. Our country is amazing. We had a really wonderful time.

