



OurWanderYears 2019

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Cover photo: Jett and her surviving siblings, Ray, Christine and Sybil, at Ray's house, Worcester, MA, June 2019.

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New Year's Eve - almost ushering in 2019

2 Jan 2019



Over 200 people

We attended the New Year's Eve party at the resort. 208 people dining on prime rib or chicken, with steamed vegetables and baked potatoes. Cheesecake for dessert. A 5-piece dance band. All cooking and entertainment provided by residents of the park.

Jett and I did our part by prepping the baked potatoes. Over 200 potatoes washed, trimmed as necessary, seasoned, wrapped in foil and put into roaster ovens. I did most of the washing. Jett did most of the seasoning. Not too bad - it took just about an hour. But the work made the food taste better somehow.

Jett also cut the cucumbers for the salad. She made me add that.



Our table, pre-meal



The band and dance floor

We didn't do any dancing. The band was okay but certainly not great. We were told that line dancing took over after 11 pm. We don't know because we left around 10:30. Jett went outside for a moment and heard fireworks. We decided to go check on Rusty and we are glad we did. He was a quivering mess. We stayed home, cuddling with the poor beast. I fell asleep about 11. Jett woke me to tell me it was 2019.

I probably could have figured that out.

The RV park's new section

3 Jan 2019

Our RV park has nearly completed the fourth and final stage of its development - the addition of about 50 new sites. They were supposed to be ready for occupancy on Jan 1, but as with most construction projects there have been problems and delays. The most significant problem was Hurricane Michael. The arrival of the hurricane in October did no direct damage to the park, but drew all of the utility workers north to repair the damage. As a result, the new section is not wired for electricity yet. In desperation the developer has installed a generator that will provide electrical service to half of the new sites. I guess half the revenue is better than none.



First rigs on the new sites



Free burgers and dogs

So, on New Year's Day, the first RVs took up residence in the new section. After months of looking at nothing but empty sites it was nice to see the area being used. But apparently the generator was having some problems. Four of the first occupants seven complained of some kind of electrical issue.

The park greeted the rigs arriving on New Year's Day with a cookout - free burgers and hot dogs. It was a nice gesture and a beautiful day. I volunteered to help with the grilling and Jett volunteered to help with the greeting.

Night lighting

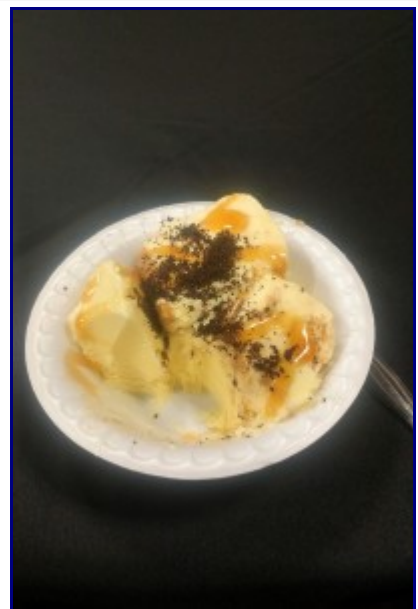
8 Jan 2019

I posted a photo a few days ago showing our new flags. But I didn't have the flag lit, which is a violation of flag etiquette. So we got a solar-powered spotlight for the flag and some solar-powered lights to line the driveway. When the lights came on for the first time I took a snapshot. Turned out pretty good.

I might as well throw in the photo of the homemade ice cream that I had that night. A full bowl for \$1. Very affordable. I had half vanilla and half salted caramel. Also pretty good.



Night lighting



\$1 bowl of ice cream

Stats for Sparky's American ancestors, 2019

9 Jan 2019

I have made another pass through my family tree in Ancestry.com, making corrections and adding some 25 newly-discovered ancestors. Some of the new ancestors are also Jett's ancestors, meaning that we are related some 11 generations back. Good thing we didn't have children.

Number of American ancestors: 349

Location of graves, by state:

- MA – 106

- VA – 65
- NY – 43
- CT – 38
- WI - 25
- NJ – 14
- MD - 13
- NC - 12
- NH – 11
- IL - 4
- OH - 3
- IN - 2
- ND – 2
- MO - 2
- PA – 2
- TN - 1
- IA - 1
- TX - 1
- England – 2
- France - 1
- Barbados – 1

Number of immigrant ancestors: 209

Country of immigrant birth:

- England – 148
- Netherlands – 23
- Scotland – 9
- Germany – 9
- Prussia/Poland - 5
- France - 5
- Norway - 5
- Wales - 3
- Ireland – 1
- unknown - 1

Patriots domination, 2019 edition

16 Jan 2019

The New England Patriots are a perennial winner, with Bill Belichick and Tom Brady (coach and quarterback) teaming up for 5 championships in the first 18 years of the 21st century. Some people are tiring of their winning ways, making them a Team That Some Love To Hate. So when, a few days ago, the Patriots had their first playoff game, against the San Diego Chargers, I wanted to get out and watch the game in the company of some true believers.

My first plan was to go down to our home from last season, Paradise Pointe RV Resort in Naples (now The Waves, don't ask me why) and watch with the friends that I watched the games with last year. But that plan was thwarted by newly-installed security gates. I didn't have the phone number of any people there and didn't want to deal with the hassle (and who knows if I would have been welcome anyway), so I switched to Plan B: Foxboro's Sports Tavern, just a few miles north on US 41. This is southwest Florida's preeminent Patriots sports bar. It was wall-to-wall Patriots fans. I was in a friendly crowd for sure.



Foxboro's

The game? It was competitive early, being tied 7-7 through most of the first quarter, but the Patriots scored before the end of the quarter to go up 14-7, then scored 21 unanswered points in the second quarter to turn it into a rout, 35-7 at halftime. The Chargers came back a bit to make the final score 41-28, but the game was never really in doubt in the second half.

Anyway, it was a successful game viewed in a friendly environment. It is nice to know that there is at least one bar where Patriots fans can gather and not be annoyed by The Haters. The Patriots Burger - 1/3 pound of beef on a brioche bun with bacon, tomato, pickles and onions - was very tasty, too.



Another view of the bar



Patriots Burger

Next Sunday: the Patriots' 8th straight conference championship game.

Softball glory

17 Jan 2019

Anybody engaged in an athletic endeavor has his good days and his bad days. Ted Williams hit a home run in his last at-bat; that was a good day. Hockey players sometimes get hat tricks and sometimes get their faces flattened against the glass. Downhill skiers sometimes win and sometimes wipe out. With senior softball, any day where you don't pull a muscle or fall flat on your ass is a pretty good day. But every now and then you have a game that is immensely satisfying.

Today was that day.

We were down 6-1 after the first 2 innings, thanks to some remarkably inept fielding and some very weak hitting. It was looking bleak, but the defense improved, as did the offense. After 6 innings we were down 9-7. As we were home team we batted last. In the top of the last inning (the 7th) we played some outstanding defense and held them. In the bottom, I got to the plate with bases loaded and one out. If I hit into a double play (all too likely given my poor summer softball performance) the game would be over. If I hit a fly ball it would likely score 1 but still leave us behind by a run. My goal was to get a solid hit and, hopefully, tie the game.

I hit a sharp line drive that the left fielder tried to quickly field, no doubt with the idea of throwing out the tying run at the plate. But he let the ball skip by. Three runs scored. We won 10-9.

Glory. And a very good day.

"The Midnight Line" by Lee Child

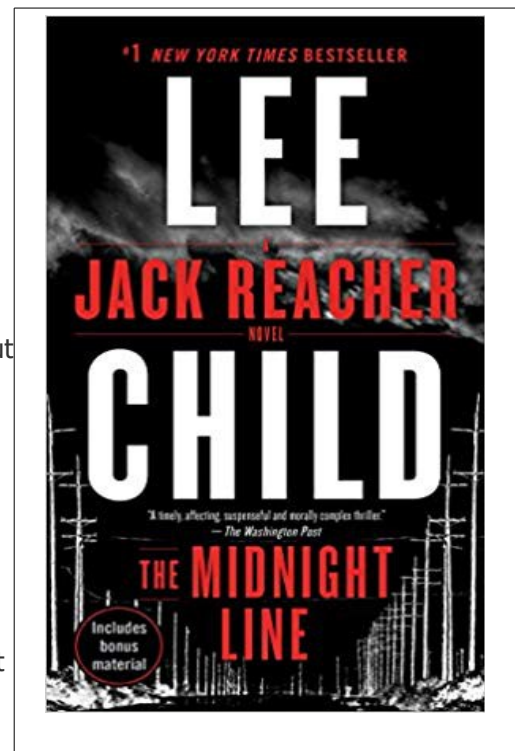
18 Jan 2019

[Copyright 2017 by Lee Child, published by Bantam Books](#)

Yes, another Jack Reacher book by Lee Child. I like them, for sure, but the fact that I have read 3 in a row is pure luck. I have a stack of, usually, 6 to 12 books in my to-be-read stack and I choose my next volume randomly, by flipping a coin. To get three Reachers in a row is beating the odds since I had only 3 in the stack and there are still 9 more books there after picking this one.

But the book. This is the 23rd in the Reacher franchise. It is not my favorite Reacher ever because it is, compared to most, very grim. But any Reacher is worth reading.

This one starts in Wisconsin, which makes it unique in my Reacher experience so far. He is on a bus, heading to some random destination in northern Wisconsin, chosen not by flipping a coin but by buying a ticket on the next bus out. But he gets off for a rest break somewhere in the middle of Wisconsin and wanders into a pawn shop where he spots a pawned West Point class ring. A West Point grad himself, he knows how valued these rings are. He immediately starts wondering why the owner pawned it and who that owner was. He decides he would like to return it to its owner. Some of his interest probably derived from the knowledge that it was a



woman's ring - it was very small.

He managed to extract some information from the pawn shop owner using some very Reacher-esque techniques (but no broken bones). He subsequently obtained more information from a member of a motorcycle gang after subduing several of the bikers. That led him to South Dakota where, in the course of observing a laundromat owned by a guy who reportedly provided the ring to the pawn shop, he runs across a PI who is looking for a missing person. It is not immediately obvious that the missing woman and the owner of the pawned ring are one and the same, but it is a logical conclusion.

Again, using the persuasive Reacher charm on the laundromat owner, he obtains information that leads him to Wyoming. But there the trail runs cold as the guy who purportedly supplied the ring died 18 months earlier in what was called an "accident", his body ravaged by bears and his bones spread around the forest. But Reacher doesn't give up easily and eventually hooks up with the PI whose missing person trail also led to the same little town in Wyoming. Soon the PI's client, a woman from Illinois, joins them. The missing person is her twin sister, a West Point grad. They team up to search the area, convinced that she is still alive.

She is, but grievously injured and, all-in-all, in a bad way. The guy who became bear bait was, for a time, her boyfriend. She is reluctant to talk about either herself or her dead paramour. But for various reasons she is living a tenuous existence and the 3 amigos try very hard to find a solution to her problems. Meanwhile, Reacher has to survive a couple of attempts on his life, kill contracts issued by the laundromat owner who clearly is doing more than cleaning sheets.

The rest of the story is about how the amigos get the West Point grad better situated and how Reacher extracts retribution on the laundromat guy.

This is not the best Reacher novel by any means, but it is pretty satisfying in its conclusion.

7 out of 10.

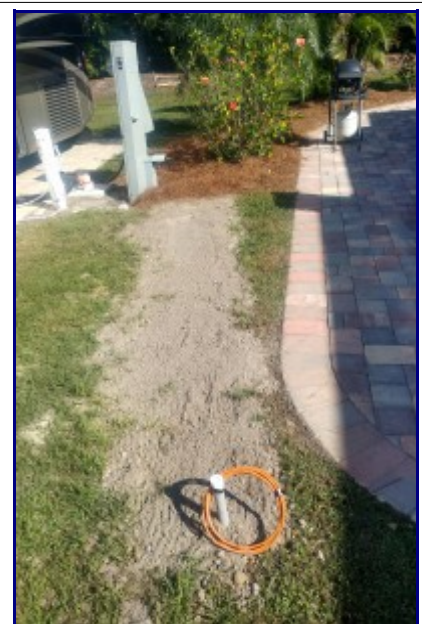
Shed prep

26 Jan 2019

Our shed will be arriving soon - sometime in February, I think. It will be plopped down on our site with no additional foundation work. Four of the six hurricane tie-down points will be on pavers and two will be on grass. I was initially concerned about this, thinking that the corner on grass might be vulnerable to settling. And I might be right about that, but it seems to not be an issue for everyone else - the majority of the sheds in the park have one corner or more sitting on grass. Besides, it is just a shed, so if I need to jack it up a bit I can do it myself with the 10-ton hydraulic jack that I carry with me wherever we go.

But some other prep work was needed. We had to get the electric service run from the pedestal (and meter) on the right side of the site over to the left side, near where the shed will be. We are going to need electricity in the shed. More electricity than we need in the RV. The shed will be wired for 80 amps or more while the RV has only 50. The power is needed for the washer/dryer, the A/C and the on-demand water heater.

Our GC, Roger, said that a conduit is typically run under the site before the concrete is poured in anticipation of this. But because our site was modified to have pavers instead of concrete and because the pavers



Electrical (and cable) prep

were extended to be as wide as possible - wider than the typical concrete pad - he was concerned that he would have to dig up some pavers to find the end of the conduit. Dollar signs started running through my head. Fortunately, that turned out to be unnecessary as the marker for the end of the conduit was found hidden under a bush.

So Roger ran wire through the conduit and extended the conduit to the location where the back left corner of the shed will land. He also ran the TV cable from the pedestal, through the bushes to the same location. I was puzzled why he did this as I have no intention of watching TV in the shed. But he said that residents typically put their cable TV modem and wireless routers in the shed. Makes sense. I am glad he took the initiative.

Maybe I can mount my third TV on the outside of the shed...

Blog booklets, 2011-2013 (GTW, QTE, QTS)

28 Jan 2019

I have received enough positive feedback on my printed blog booklets that I am going to post the PDFs online. Here are the first three, 2011 to 2013.

- [OurWanderYears 2011](http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/OurWanderYears-2011.pdf) (13.9MB) - preparation and planning (<http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/OurWanderYears-2011.pdf>)
- [OurWanderYears 2012](http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/OurWanderYears-2012.pdf) (22.5MB) - rig acquisition, more preparation and the Great Trip West (GTW) (<http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/OurWanderYears-2012.pdf>)
- [OurWanderYears 2013](http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/OurWanderYears-2013.pdf) (35.4MB) - California, the Quick Trip East (QTE) and the Quick Trip South (QTS) (<http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/OurWanderYears-2013.pdf>)

Honoring our veterans

29 Jan 2019

Military Appreciation Month for 2019 started on January 4. I was never aware of any such month and, had I been aware, probably would have ignored it as I am not myself a veteran. However, the RV park where we now reside did not ignore it and, being home to quite a few veterans, scheduled an event in their honor. It was a ceremony in which each individual's service was recognized and a few words of appreciation were offered by the ranking veteran in the park, Major General (retired) Kropp of the Army Corps of Engineers. As a Civil Engineering graduate myself, my ears pricked up when I heard the



POW/MIA table



Major General Kropp

title. The Corps of Engineers are, in my view, heroes and men who complete incredible feats of engineering under very difficult conditions. They have always had my respect. It was an honor hearing a man who

commanded an entire division of these brave men.

He was an entertaining speaker and surprised me with a few observations about the current state of the armed forces. For example, according to Major General Kropp, just 24% of American men currently eligible for service are sufficiently fit to serve. Shocking, but probably not surprising when I think about all the overweight young people that I see on the street.

Jett and I were both moved by the "POW/MIA table". I can't recall the import of every item on the table, but it was a sobering reminder of the sacrifice of many.

After the ceremony I made it a point to shake Major General Kropp's hand and to express my admiration for the Corps of Engineers.

Then we ate hamburgers.

Steps!

31 Jan 2019

We had fiberglass steps last year at Paradise Pointe, but had to sell them at the end of the season. We wanted to get similar steps for use in Cypress Trail and, with the imminent arrival of the shed, would be able to store them for multi-year use. However, we couldn't find any suitable used ones and the new ones were pretty pricy - at least \$400.

But recently, when looking at available sites in the park, we came across a site with the perfect fiberglass steps. A couple was moving back north and needed to sell them. They weren't available that day as they still needed them, but we gave them our number and were very pleased when they called us and offered to sell us the steps for just \$100. We jumped. We paid our landscaping guys a few bucks to haul them to our site and we are now the proud new owners of fiberglass steps.

Jett, as you can see, is very happy with them.



Our new used steps

Shed!

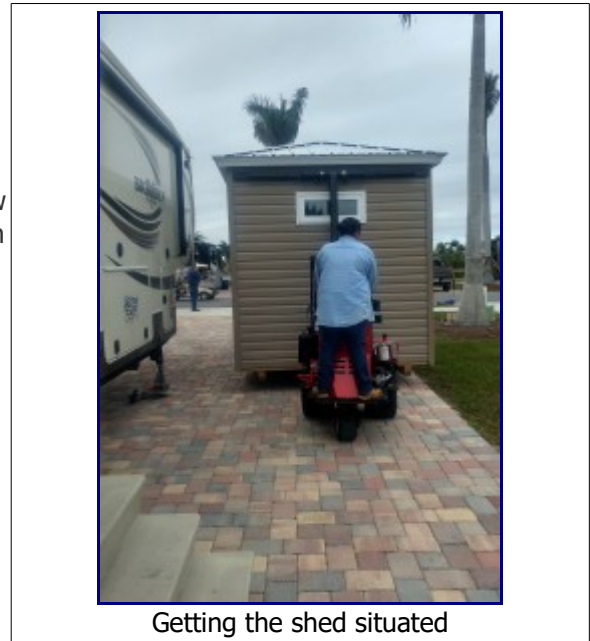
1 Feb 2019

The day after we acquired our fiberglass steps, our shed was delivered. Getting it onto the site was a bit of an adventure which started with me having second thoughts about the precise location. The proposed location had been approved via a drawing on the site plan, but the problem was that the site plan contained no reference marks. A clear rule, though, was that the 5-foot setback had to be observed at all times. While the setback on the south side was pretty clear - the gap between my pavers and my southern neighbor was precisely 10 feet - the northern setback was not clear at all. The gap between my neighbor's pavers and the outer edge of my

pavers was only about 9 feet. I believe that the developer, when he installed my paver bump-out, cheated a bit on the setback. I had already compensated a bit, but it appeared that the back side of the shed would still be just 9' 8" from the neighbor.

The site next to ours is unowned, but I had this vision of a new owner checking his boundaries and finding my shed in violation of the setback rules. I decided to move the shed in 4". A further complication was that once the shed was moved 4 inches to the south, the corner tie-down point was too close to the curved edge of the paver bump-out. So I also shifted the location 6" west. Having decided on these alterations to the original plan, I was hastily marking new corner targets while the shed was being unloaded from the trailer.

The next adventure was getting the shed dropped without crushing the water and sewer lines. It was a close shave, but the forklift driver - a woman - maneuvered with the skill of a surgeon.



Getting the shed situated

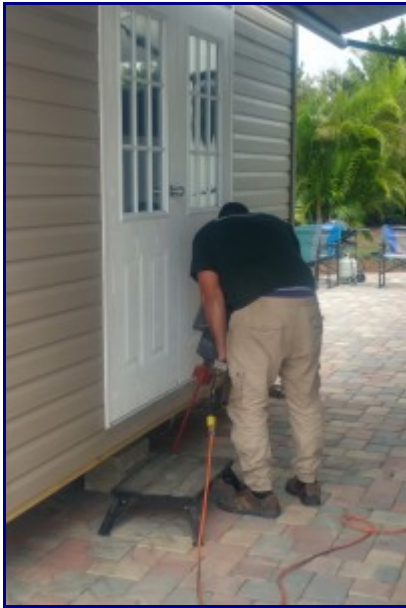
I was fascinated by the installation of the hurricane tie-downs. These were 6 metal rods, with auger tips, that were drilled into the soil (after removing some pavers on the south edge) using a super-sized version of an electric drill. It obviously had tremendous torque. After the rods were in place, metal straps were screwed into the rods and attached to the underside of the shed. Supposedly these will keep the shed from flying off to Kansas in the next hurricane.

When I had first selected the site for the shed I had eyeballed the RV awning and was convinced that it would be able to fully deploy without touching the shed. But after shifting the shed 4 inches closer to the RV, I was no longer so confident. After getting the shed tied down, I apprehensively put the awning out. Gingerly, inch by inch. It finished deploying with about 3 inches to spare. And was above the top of the shed doors - a factor that I had not considered and feel damn lucky that it worked out.

Now we are awaiting arrival of the county building inspector, to give final approval before we can start using the shed.



Before tying it down



Installing the tie-downs



Awning down

Doggone cold

2 Feb 2019



Cold comfort

The last 2 weeks have been very cold here in Fort Myers. By "cold" I mean highs in the 60s. Meanwhile, the folks up north have been shivering through sub-zero temps. While I expect no sympathy from my northern friends, I just wanted you to know that the chilliness here has taken a toll on Rusty. He has become a fan of blankets. When we cover him he makes no attempt to get out from under. I think I even detect a "thank you" in his eyes.

Mobstah Lobstah

5 Feb 2019

Our RV park invites food trucks onto the premises twice a week - Wednesday and Friday. We have sampled several of them and weren't greatly impressed with either the quality or the value. That all changed on the past Friday when we sampled the fare at the Mobstah Lobstah food truck (byline: "seafood to die for"). Both Jett and I got lobster rolls, but Jett got the "Connecticut" version (cold, with mayonnaise and celery) and I chose the "Maine" (warm, with butter). Both were outstanding. Large, fresh chunks of lobster meat, a toasted bun, a very nice cup of coleslaw and crispy tater tots with a tangy chipotle aioli sauce. Everything was perfectly done and perfectly delicious.



Connecticut



The food truck



Maine (half eaten)

Blog booklets, 2014-2016 (QTN, STS, STN and TTS)

9 Feb 2019

Here are the PDFs for the blog booklets for the years 2014 to 2016.

- [OurWanderYears 2014](http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OurWanderYears-2014.pdf) (10.8 MB) - the Quick Trip North (QTN), summer in MA and coming off the road (<http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OurWanderYears-2014.pdf>)
- [OurWanderYears 2015](http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OurWanderYears-2015.pdf) (21.4 MB) - winter in MA, Carnival cruise and the Second Trip South (STS) (<http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OurWanderYears-2015.pdf>)
- [OurWanderYears 2016](http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OurWanderYears-2016.pdf) (21.3 MB) - Second Trip North (STN), workamping in VT and the Third Trip South (TTS) (<http://www.ourwanderyears.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OurWanderYears-2016.pdf>)

"Hello, Darkness" by Sandra Brown

12 Feb 2019

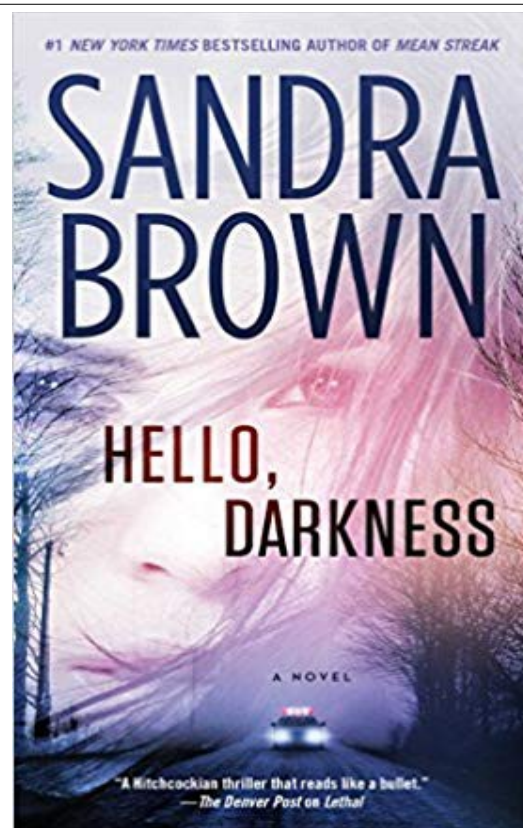
[Simon & Schuster, 2003](#)

I think I have read a Sandra Brown mystery before. I have certainly listened to one of her audiobooks. I had a fairly positive view of her skill as a writer. So it was with a modicum of pleasant anticipation that I picked up *Hello, Darkness*.

Imagine my disappointment.

This is a book of 353 pages, about 350 of which are devoted to desperate attempts to convince the reader that one of the four possible suspects is the person who has kidnapped and threatened to kill a teen girl. Unfortunately, Sandra's attempts to feed me red herrings were not very convincing. I figured out pretty early on where this one was headed and got pretty annoyed with her for wasting my time.

The capsule summary is this: a female late-night Austin radio DJ, Paris, receives a phone call from "Valentino" who tells her that he is holding his girlfriend captive and will kill her in 72 hours because she has been unfaithful and is trying to dump him. The police - including a psychologist profiler who has a history with Paris - are notified and try to find the caller. The suspects are the radio station's manager, the station's janitor, a dentist with a sex addiction (who once molested Paris) and the profiler's teen son. It is discovered that the abducted



"girlfriend" is the teen daughter of a judge who refuses to believe that she has been abducted or that she was one of the loosest girls in town, a founding member of the Sex Club, a teen social media concoction that fed their need to hook up on the shores of Lake Travis.

Not only are the red herring stories completely unconvincing, every character in this book is immoral and pretty much a scumbag, including, sadly, the purported "heroes." Thin plot, unlikable characters. Bad combination.

2 out of 10.

Bonefish Grill

18 Feb 2019

We haven't dined out much lately, but we couldn't let my 70th birthday pass without some kind of celebration. So we decided to blow a few bucks on a nice dinner. My first choice was Bahama Breeze - dining *al fresco* on the patio with a steel drum band playing and a signature margarita in my hand. Ahh! My idea of a nice dinner. We had to wait for a spell of cold rainy weather to pass, so it was a few days after my birthday that we sallied forth.

And found a line about an hour long.

Too much waiting. So we looked for another nice restaurant nearby and settled on [Bonefish Grill](#). We had dined at a Bonefish Grill in Georgia a couple of years ago and had positive memories. And it had immediate seating.

Jett chose a filet mignon - superb - and I tried the Georges Bank Scallops and Shrimp. Likewise superb. But the real surprise was the side of crusty broiled brussels sprouts. They looked terrible - black and crusty - but tasted great.

I also got my requisite margarita. A fine dinner.



Scallops and shrimp



Crusty brussels sprouts

Taco in a bag

20 Feb 2019

Jett and I volunteered to serve at a "taco in a bag" patio party recently. We had no idea what we had signed up for, but felt that we were due for some volunteer work. I guess I was expecting to hand out bag lunches from

Taco Bell. But the reality was quite different.

To create a "taco in a bag" you first get a bag of Doritos. Not that tiny lunch-size bag, but the larger 99 cent bag. You cut it open on the long side, crush the chips, then load the bag with beef or chicken taco meat, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, onions and taco sauce. Hand the bag to the customer along with a plastic fork and a napkin and send him/her on his/her way. \$5 for what turned out to be a pretty tasty light dinner. Beer for sale for \$2.

We sold about 100 of these. All the time listening to steel drum music. A very pleasant volunteer experience.

Then we watched a piñata be destroyed. No one was injured and it turned out to be filled with candy bars and bags of peanuts. Dessert.



Steel drum music



Dining *al fresco*



Piñata



Taco in a bag

Railing!

22 Feb 2019

Now that we have fiberglass steps it seemed like a good idea to attach a railing. Jett has vertigo occasionally (where the "occasion" is "every day") and her older sister Sybil, who is none too steady on her pins, is coming for a visit. So a railing seemed like a REALLY good idea.

I could have cheaped out and cobbled together something workable out of 2x4s. But I decided I should make it as attractive as possible, so I opted for a white PVC plastic railing. The railing is designed to work with sheaths that slip over 4x4s, so the hard work was cutting the 4x4s and securely attaching them to the steps. Putting up the railing was a piece of cake after getting the posts installed.

Of course we had to paint the steps, too. No sense in putting a nice PVC handrail on a crappy-looking set of steps. So I painted them beige, to match the RV, more or less.

I also completed the front-side frame for the vinyl skirt that we will be putting around the shed. This frame, on the front side, also doubles as the foundation for the steps that I will be building. This was a lot of work, but I have already had compliments from two men in the trades - a general contractor and an electrician - who admired the frame and said that I "did it right." I take some pride in that.



The finished railing on painted steps



Painting the steps



The shed frame

Consistently inconsistent

28 Feb 2019

That would be a good description of my softball team. We scored 17 runs in our first game of the season, then won several low-scoring games to get to 4 wins, 2 losses. Then we lost 5 straight, scoring no more than 7 runs in any of those games. That is less than 1 run per inning. In slow-pitch softball where you need to score at least 10 to have any realistic chance of winning scoring less than 1 run per inning is pathetic. A team-wide hitting drought.

Then we won our last 2 games 19-12 and 27-14. After scoring no more than 7 in the previous 5 games, we score 19 and 27.

Consistently inconsistent.

More steps!

6 Mar 2019

Yes, the shed now has steps. It wasn't a huge project, but it was done in sweltering heat so I invested a lot of "sweat equity." I am pretty happy with how they turned out because (1) I didn't screw up any cuts and waste some material and (2) they are solid. Stepping on them feels like stepping on concrete.

I did make a couple of minor mistakes. For no good reason, I decided to use screws to attach the cosmetic strip at the top and, no surprise, the screws split the thin strip of wood. I will eventually replace the strip and this time use finishing nails, as any halfway competent carpenter would do. I also painted the stringers brown initially and didn't like the result, so I redid them in white. But no screwups on the things that mattered.

Got 'em done just in time, too - the electrician is arriving today.

I now have an entrance "alley" that I think looks pretty attractive.



Construction getting started



Completed steps



Our entrance "alley"

Plans for summer 2019

10 Mar 2019

Last summer was spent hanging out in Phillipston MA, which was great because it was close to the summer cottage of Jett's brother and his wife. The time spent at the cottage was wonderful. But the rest of the time was rather boring.

The summer of 2017 was spent touring New England and then taking an early exit to head west. The summer of 2016 was spent on Lake Champlain in Vermont.

Do you see a pattern? No? The only pattern is that we try to do something different each summer.

Since it has been 3 years since our last workamping gig (Lake Champlain) we thought we were due for another. So we will be workampers for 4 months in Conway NH. That is still 2 hours from Boston, but much closer to Boston than Lake Champlain. We should be able to see family occasionally without needing to overnight in Boston.

Our home for the summer will be the [Eastern Slope Camping Area](#). That is a pretty generic name for a private campground but it looks very nice. The things that attracted us were (1) the area (Conway is nestled in the White Mountains) (2) the work (it includes a kayak/canoe excursion business, so I could be spending some time on the Saco River and (3) the owners seem to be very nice.

We start work just before Memorial Day. So I need to figure out how to get there by then. We will be squeezed a bit on the time because we need to stay in Florida longer than we would like to get some work done on the shed. Details of the 5th Trip North (TN5) will be forthcoming shortly.

TN5 plan

11 Mar 2019

The plan for the fifth trip north (TN5) has us towing the RV 1,732 miles in 15 days and 7 hops, from Fort Myers FL to Conway NH. It will be a relatively quick trip, the compressed span being necessitated by our obligation to be in NH by Memorial Day and our interest in getting our shed insulated and air conditioned before we leave. We hope to leave May 6 and arrive May 21.

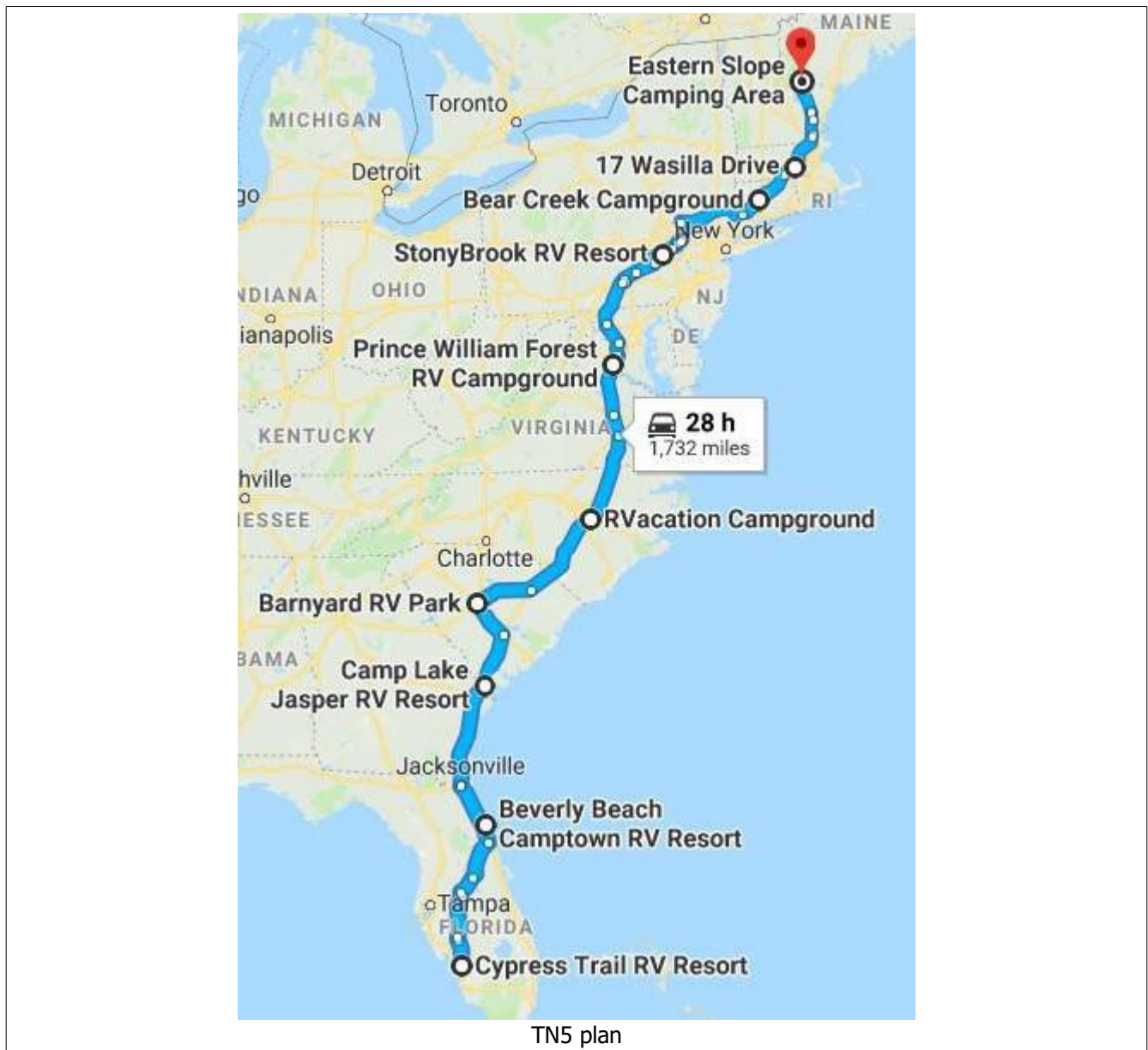
But we expect to see some new and interesting places, too:

- St Augustine FL. This is one of the oldest cities in North America. It is somewhere on my bucket list.
- Hilton Head Island SC. Also somewhere on that bucket list.
- Columbia SC. Not on my bucket list, but a city that I have never been to.
- Allentown PA. Also not on the list, but will look around.

We will also make a return visit to the campground at [Lake Compounce](#) in Bristol CT. It was pre-season and spooky on our previous visit. We will see what it is like when the amusement park is open.

We will also make a brief stop in Worcester MA to retrieve the Corolla that Jett's brother Ray has volunteered to drive north for us. I will have to find a good place to stop with the RV in the very urban Worcester.

That is the plan. But our previous two trips (TN4 and TS4) both encountered major problems with both the truck and the RV. It is hard being confident that we can execute the TN5 plan flawlessly. Time will tell.



TN5 plan

Lights!

20 Mar 2019

The shed was given electricity last week and, shortly thereafter, acquired lights as well - two shop lights which gave off a surprising amount of illumination. We will have plenty of light by which to do laundry, even at night.

The electricity was provided by an electrician, all properly permitted and inspected. I installed the LED lights which were plug-ins and required no special talent beyond the ability to drill holes and screw in eyebolts.

The electrical wiring has 7 circuits: hot water heater (30A), dryer (30A), washer, air conditioner, interior outlets (5 of 'em), exterior outlets (2) and interior lights.

Next up: installation of the air conditioner, insulation and plumbing. I am hiring a contractor to do that work.



Shed lights

When completed I will install paneling and flooring. Then, finally, we will be ready to install a washer, dryer and sink. That likely won't happen until next fall. My goal, before leaving to head north, is to get the insulation installed and the air conditioner working.

I purchased a "smart" air conditioner - one which I can monitor and control from my cell phone. That will be pretty cool.

If it works.

The cost of climate control

23 Mar 2019

No, I am not talking about fixing global warming; I refer to the cost of getting heat and air conditioning in my truck. If you recall, the blower failed - with the mode of failure being that it wouldn't shut off - in Tennessee on our way south for the winter. I have been driving the truck with no heat (not a problem), air conditioning (a bit of a problem) or defroster (a real problem on cold/damp days) since then. There have been a few cool mornings when I have had to drive with the windows open to keep the windshield from fogging up.

I had almost forgotten, but prior to the blower failure I had experienced another problem: the heat/cool controls worked only on the passenger side. This was, I thought, a relatively minor problem as enough air passed through the passenger side to heat/cool the entire cab. But I mentioned that peculiarity when I took the truck into the dealer yesterday.

I had some hope that the problem(s) could be fixed for under \$500. It had been suggested to me that the truck needed a "module" to fix the blower problem. And if that had been the fix for both problems I would have just about made it as the "module" (which I think included replacing the blower itself) cost about \$600 installed. But the passenger/driver control was a separate issue and that cost another \$400 to fix. So about \$1000 to get my climate control fully functional again.

I know that the cost is always higher at the dealership and now that I am a resident of Fort Myers I should try to find a reliable independent mechanic to work on my truck, which seems to need regular repairs. But finding diesel mechanics is difficult.

Maybe get a new truck? Relying on one that is 15 years old is a risky proposition. So while waiting for the repairs yesterday I looked around the lot and saw a very nice 2016 GMS 3500 diesel dually with under 30,000 miles. Cost? Just \$59,000.

Ouch. I may have to try squeezing a couple more years out of my beast.

C'mon, baby, you can do it. But please, please, please, do it inexpensively.

The upside of getting the truck fixed was that I could wait for it at the adjacent [Bahama Breeze](#) restaurant. It was a bit coolish on the patio but the shrimp and mahi combo bowl was delicious and the margarita almost made me forget the money that was being poured into my truck next door.



Shrimp and mahi bowl

"Tick Tock" by James Patterson and Michael Ledwidge

23 Mar 2019

[Copyright 2011 by James Patterson, Grand Central Publishing](#)

I NEVER read books of the famous-author-and-some-nobody variety because you know damn well that the book was written by the nobody and the famous author is just getting paid to put his name on the book. So I don't know how this one slipped into my "to be read" pile.

But since it was there I decided to read it anyway. I still have the same opinion of books of this type and I will continue to avoid them in the future, but I have to admit that I enjoyed this one. It isn't an American literary classic, but it is well written with interesting characters. And the chapters are very short - an average of just over three pages - which I really like. The edition I had also had very large print which meant I could read it without reading glasses. I liked that, too.

The protagonist is Michael Bennett, a NYPD detective who lands the unenviable task of catching a serial killer

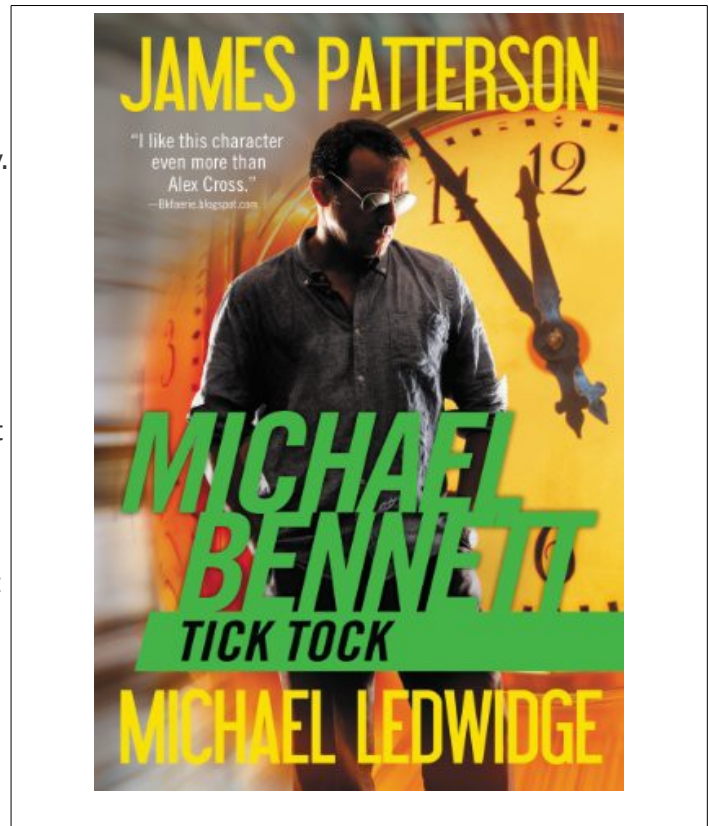
who is mimicking or paying tribute to some of the most notorious serial killers in New York City's long illustrious history of murder. He has to try to catch the culprit while on vacation on Long Island with his 10 adopted children and their young siren of a nanny.

He succeeds, of course, but it is due more to the killer finding him than him finding the killer.

The style of the book was intriguing. About two-thirds of the book is first person, from the eyes of Michael Bennett. The other third is third-person, giving us insight into the life and evil intent of the killer. There is a little misdirection in this that I won't divulge as it would spoil the fun, but as a literary device it works pretty well.

I enjoyed the book. I won't go out of my way looking for more by the Patterson/Ledwidge duo, but this was not a waste of time.

7 out of 10.



Skirt! (a start, anyway)

31 Mar 2019

A finishing touch on our shed (which is far from finished) is putting a "skirt" around the bottom to hide the underside ugliness. It is strictly cosmetic and not vital in any way, but it is also pretty simple and the idea of paying a guy \$580 to do it (that was the quote I got) didn't appeal to me very much. I really wanted to do it myself.

The hardest part was figuring out where to get the materials. I needed about 50 s.f. of soffit material and about 90 feet of "J-channel" edging. But it had to match the beige color of the siding. I happened across a guy installing his skirt and asked him where he got his materials. The answer: 84 Lumber. So I ran down to 84 Lumber and ordered what I needed. The color was "Khaki". I had to drive a mile to the warehouse, but within an hour had everything I needed for under \$100.

Yesterday, lacking anything more important to do, I took a stab at installing the front skirting. I have to leave two sides open until the plumbing is done, but the front skirting was my "proof of concept" - my chance to convince myself that I knew how to do it. The tricky part was leaving a portion of the J-channel free so I could slip the soffit sections in, then finding a way to secure the J-channel when the soffit was in place. I found a way. The first half took about 2.5 hours but I learned from my mistakes and was able to complete the second half in just 1.5 hours. I guess I am still trainable.

Looks pretty darn good, I think.



Skirt on the front of the shed

"Almost Killed by a Train of Thought" by David Benjamin

10 Apr 2019

[Last Kid Books, April 2019](#)

This is a collection of essays. That, alone, makes this book unique among the books that I have reviewed. It is also written by a guy I know very well - a good friend who goes *way* back - he was my best friend in high school.

So this will be my first book review that might actually be read by the author. Oh, the pressure!

I guess I can eliminate the suspense for him - and you - by saying right up front that I liked the book very much. I will go into some of the reasons why, but the big one is this: it made me laugh. Not just chuckle laughs but LOLs. Some of these essays are just hilarious. But others are thought-provoking, insightful or sad. They are all different. The book is like Forrest's box of chocolates; you just never know what you are going to get.

Some of this variety is geographical. The author, who, as you will discover by reading the book (some of which is autobiographical), had humble beginnings but has lived in Paris, Japan, Brooklyn, Boston, California and Wisconsin. He has also visited Las Vegas many times and, because his wife is an expert on cutting-edge electronics, he knows quite a bit about electronic gizmos, too. Essays from each place are included.

Some of the variety is temporal. The essays were penned between 1994 and 2016. Some of the essays delve into the topics of the time. The Iraq War, the financial meltdown, the death of Annette Funicello. But some of the essays are timeless. His grandfather's hands, Paris in the early morning, linden tree helicopters, Yankee fandom.

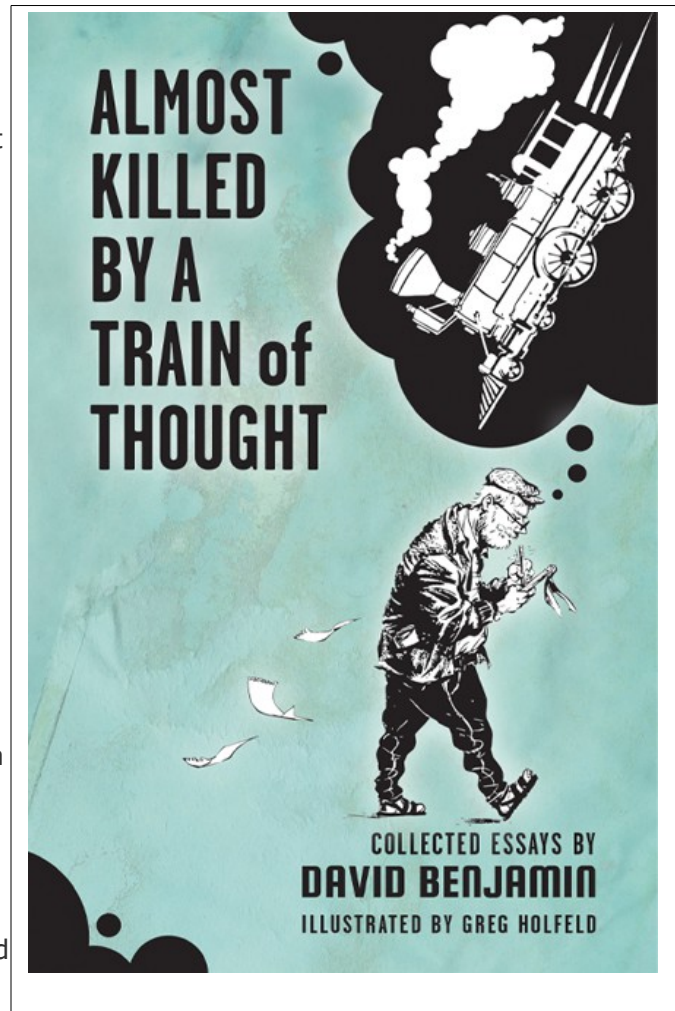
Because I know him and shared part of his past, the autobiographical essays are particularly meaningful to me. Growing up in Tomah, Saturday matinees, high school friends, his less-than-heroic father. Poignant, even if you don't know the places or the people.

David Benjamin is a wordsmith which in my view ranks a bit higher than "author." He knows the English language intimately (and shows off his knowledge in one of his essay rants). He has a huge vocabulary and if you want to understand every word you had better have a dictionary handy. Looking up all the unfamiliar words could be tedious, but it will be rewarding.

Some of the essays are whimsical and I think I like these best. Several essays feature his outrageous "idea man," Wilhelm Bienfang, a guy who would make Jonathan Swift proud. One essay is a satirical piece about a cell phone app that serves as spermicide - it emits a high-pitched sperm-killing squeal when it hears the words "Oh God! Oh God!" The next essay delves into just how many people took that essay seriously and tried to buy the app. Hilarious.

Because they are essays they are short - about 1,000 words each. I like that, too. If you don't like a particular essay, just turn the page. I turned them all and felt a bit sad when I turned the last one.

9 out of 10.



"Running Blind" by Lee Child

20 Apr 2019

[Copyright 2000 by Lee Child. Published by Berkley, New York.](#)

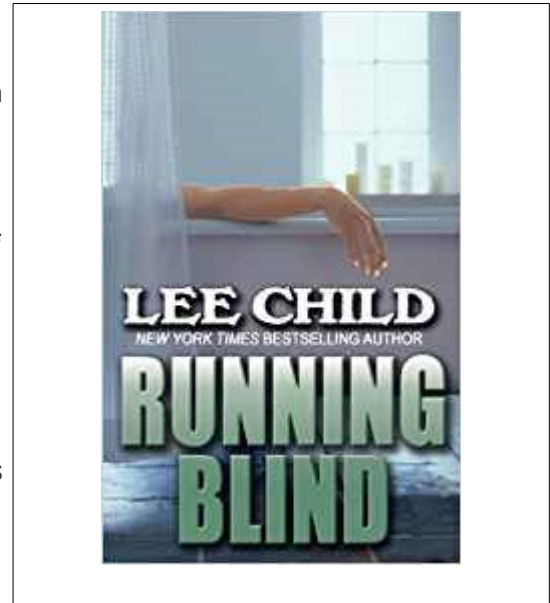
Yes, another Jack Reacher book. I always expect to be entertained and I am never disappointed.

Some of the Reacher books are set during the time when he is in the army, but most are set post-Army when he is an aimless drifter. This one is in between: he is out of the army, but he has inherited a house and, at least temporarily, has a permanent address. He doesn't know how to deal with that situation and it won't last, but for the duration of this book he has both a house and an SUV. His internal conflict with this (to him) unnatural situation is a subplot in this book, but it is pretty obvious that it will be resolved shortly and he will, once again, be shiftless.

He also has a girlfriend and this might be a little more permanent. Jodie appears to be the love of his life. But

her life goals conflict deeply with his and, though he clearly cares for her, the attachment will not be sufficient to root him. This subplot resolves itself rather neatly by Jodie becoming a partner in her law firm and being sent to London for 2 years. Problem solved.

So much for the subplots. The main plot centers on a serial killer. Someone is killing women who, while in the army, accused men of sexual harassment or worse. The FBI is on the case and their top profiler has identified the characteristics of the man they are looking for and, wouldn't you know, his profile looks a lot like Jack Reacher. The first two women, in fact, knew Reacher because he was the investigator assigned to their cases when he was still an MP. The FBI haul Reacher in for questioning. But his status as "prime suspect" is short-lived as a third woman is killed while he is in custody. Rather than just letting him go, however, the FBI decides that he might be a useful addition to the investigative team. Reacher is not interested but is coerced into participating.



The murders themselves are bizarre. The women are all found in bathtubs filled with army-issue green paint. There is no obvious cause of death and no sign of a struggle, no sign of forced entry. The women apparently let the murderer in and then, quietly and without complaint, strip naked, sit in the bathtub filled with paint and just die. Figuring out the "how" and "why" is what makes this story interesting.

Reacher figures it out, of course. And so did I, mostly. I was pretty sure I knew who the killer was halfway through the book, but Child fooled me with some deft misdirection and convinced me that I was wrong. But I wasn't. But I can't claim that I figured out the "how" though in retrospect I should have.

This book, more than most of the Reacher books, is a classic whodunit. Like all Reacher books, it is a quick read. I had a hard time putting it down.

8 out of 10. I would have given it a 9 if I hadn't figured out whodunit halfway through the book.

Playing out the string

20 Apr 2019

The park is about half empty now. All activities have ceased. The weather is hot and humid. It seems like we are just waiting until we leave. In sports terms, we are "playing out the string" - not accomplishing anything other than passing time.

This feeling is supported by the lack of progress on the shed. The expectation that the electrical work would be inspected days after being completed has turned into a month-long waiting game. As I cannot proceed with the other work - most notably getting the air conditioner installed - I have been limited to doing things in preparation for a time when I can make real progress. I have completed the skirt on 2 of the 4 sides, but have to leave the other sides open for the plumbing work. I have purchased the air conditioner, the utility sink and the flooring, but can't install any of them until the electrical work is signed off. I will likely get some shelving because it is now apparent that nothing else will get done before we leave and I may as well get all the stuff neatly stored for the summer.

This is all pretty disappointing. I suppose I shouldn't blame the electrician as he doesn't control the inspector's schedule, but doubts are creeping in. Did he actually pull a permit?

In any case I need to decide how to handle the possibility that the inspection will not be completed before I leave. It has to be done, then, while we are away (there is a 6-month deadline for completion of the permit). Who do I trust with a key? How do I make arrangements for the electrician to enter the shed?

These are problems that I didn't expect. And don't enjoy dealing with them. But they do give me some focus while playing out the string.

Flowering palms

22 Apr 2019

I was doing some site cleanup yesterday - removing dead fronds from our palm shrubs - and noticed that they are all "flowering". Not that a palm produces flowers, but they all go through a reproductive phase. Some had pollen-covered "antlers" growing from their stems. But one had pods of what looked like bananas, split open to reveal thousands of little white pearls. Seeds? Don't know, but maybe I will research it.



Banana-like seed pods

Prepping for the schlepping

25 Apr 2019

We are 12 days away from the start of the Fifth Trip North (TN5). I have abandoned all hope of getting more work done on the shed - including getting the air conditioner installed - but still have a long list of tasks to be completed before we go. I have already done some of the work:

- Dropped off our clothing donations at Goodwill.
- Made a final trip to Costco to return some items and to get a few new ones.
- Turned in our Florida Lottery scratch ticket "winning." That \$40 will get us... about 100 miles.
- Got some cigarettes to keep Jett calm.
- Painted the shed door.
- Installed a shelf in the shed and got shed items stashed away on it. Neatness counts.
- Got the modem and router moved to the shed.



Shelving unit

This last item was more difficult than it should have been. While the electrician ran the cable line to the shed, he didn't install connectors on either end. My first two attempts to add the connectors failed miserably. But my third attempt - using screw-on connectors - was successful.

Even though the air conditioner won't be installed before we leave, I intend to start it up and get it to communicate with the router. Then, if we get the contractor to install it while we are away, I will be able to control it remotely.

There is still much to be done. Besides prepping the air conditioner, I also need to talk to both the contractor about doing the work while we are away and coordinating the electrical inspection with the electrician. Then I

need to stash away anything that we intend to leave behind - most notably the fiberglass steps.

There is work to be done to ready the Corolla for the trip north, too. Mostly it is cleaning the car and removing stuff we want to leave behind, but I also need to swap GPS units with the truck, leave driving authorization for brother-in-law Ray and put the EZPass unit in the car - useful for tolls in New England.

The truck is ready but still needs to be loaded up. The grill, the lawn chairs, the RV wheel covers, the 5-gallon reserve can of diesel fuel and the toolbox. And tire pressures need to be tested and adjusted on both the truck and the RV.

Then hitch up, point the truck north and go. And keep our fingers crossed that, unlike our previous trips north and south, this one will be disaster-free.

Smacked with the palm

5 May 2019

No, not the palm of the hand; the royal palm.

This morning, while having my second cup of coffee, I was startled by a loud BANG! My first thought was that a bird flew into the side of the RV. But when I stepped out to look, I saw no dead bird. Or anything else near the side of the RV.

But... there, between the car and the truck, lay a large frond (branch?) from one of the royal palms near the sidewalk. I hoped that the noise was due to the frond dropping onto the truck's tonneau cover which is pretty close to dent-proof. No such luck. A quick inspection of the car revealed a very noticeable dent in the roof. Better than a dent on the hood, I guess, because I don't have to look at the roof while driving. But not good. I am considering whether to file a claim. Probably not as it is pretty minor. But I may get an estimate, just to know what I am dealing with.

The truck is heading north in 3 days. The palm couldn't wait until then to shed?



The fallen frond



The culprit palm



Roof dent

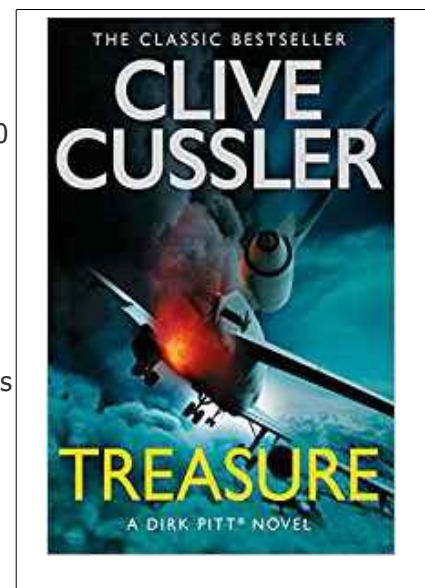
"Treasure" by Clive Cussler

4 May 2019

[Copyright 1988 by Clive Cussler Enterprises, published by Pocket Books](#)

This is a long book - 678 pages in this edition. But I finished it in less than 10 days which is a pretty good indicator of how much I enjoyed it. It isn't great literature but it sure is a fun beach book.

For those of you not familiar with Clive Cussler's plots and the heroic adventures of Major Dirk Pitt, Air Force officer, Special Projects Administrator at the National Underwater and Marine Administration (NUMA), son of a US Senator, antique auto collector, national superhero and sexual studmuffin, I will tell you that Cussler's plots (and Pitt's adventures) are always epic. This is #9 in the series of 23 Dirk Pitt adventures. He has raised the Titanic, saved the world from environmental disasters, solved the riddle of Atlantis and figured out how Abraham Lincoln was kidnapped (yeah, really). In this book he not only unearths the contents of the fabled Library of Alexandria (Egypt) - long believed to be lost forever - but also brings down a global criminal conspiracy to take over Egypt, Mexico and Brazil. And in his spare time he



single-handedly saves the life of the very attractive (and hot to trot) Secretary General of the United Nations... three times.

This is all ridiculous, of course. And a lot of fun.

I hadn't read a Dirk Pitt adventure for a couple of years because I had convinced myself that I had read them all. When I ran across this book and read the synopsis, it didn't sound familiar. And it didn't sound like a plot I would forget. I really enjoyed this book so I will have to go look at the entire series and see if there are any others that I have missed.

8 out of 10.

TN5 Hop 1: Fort Myers FL to Flagler Beach FL

7 May 2019

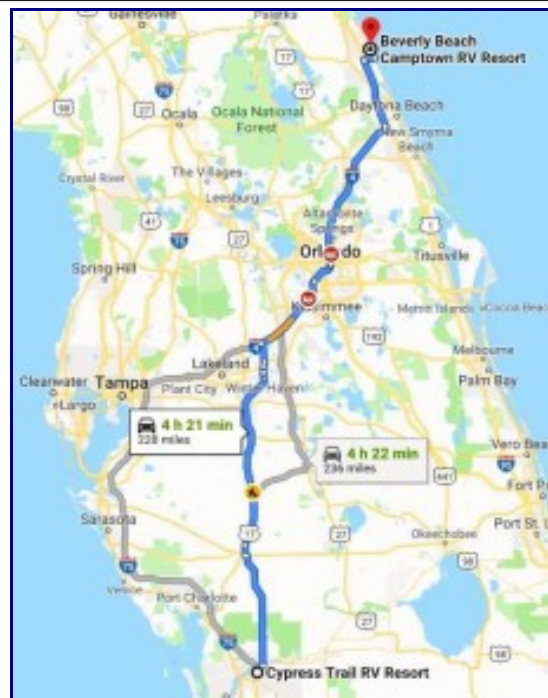
227 miles via FL 31, US 17, FL 557, I-4, I-95 and FL 100. Cumulative tow miles: 227. Truck miles: 237. Cumulative truck miles: 237.

This was not a fun hop, primarily due to I-4 through Orlando. I think I-4 and I-84 in CT are competing to be our "least favorite" interstate. Both are very rough, both are very busy and both are constantly under construction. The trip was supposed to take 4 hours and 20 minutes (according to Google) but was just over 5 hours total (including a brief bathroom break at an I-4 rest area).

The big news on this hop was: no breakdowns. The truck ran like a champ and the repaired A/C pumped out cool air the entire way - which was important when the outside temp reached 97 in Orlando. I have to confess that I am worried about the truck's reliability. And will continue to be worried until it proves itself to be better than it has shown on the previous two trips.

The teardown at Cypress Trail was uneventful until the very end, when I tried to take down the electric service. The electrician, when he added the electricity for the shed, reinstalled the electric panel cover such that it wouldn't open. I had to pry it. As I was prying, bees started swarming - there was a nest inside. Well, I couldn't not open the cover, so I just pressed on. I got it open, but not until I got one very painful bee sting on my right index finger.

Then I couldn't get it to shut securely. I didn't have time to fool with that, so I taped it shut.



TN5 Hop



Ray doing my dirty work



The very empty site

Something to deal with when we return in the fall.

The setup at Beverly Beach Camptown was uneventful - or so I thought. It was a back-in site, which Jett hates. I asked her to stand by the picnic table to provide a point of reference for me. I had to maneuver a bit, but got it backed in fairly quickly. Then I got the RV leveled, got the slides out, got the water, electric and cable hooked up. Done! Jett went in for a nap and I took Rusty out for a walk...

And as I was coming out of the RV, my brain started to function. I knew when I was shown my site on the campground map by the office staff that it was next-to-last in the row. So why were there **2** sites between me and the end? An awful realization crept over me - we had set up in the wrong site! I was in Site 75 when I was supposed to be in Site 74. In 6 years of travel, that was a first. And not a happy first, either.

What's a guy to do? Well, the hope - a faint hope - was that I could just stay where I was and whoever was going into 75 could just go into 74. So I trekked down to the office, apologized for making a rookie mistake and inquired about the possible swap. No dice - the people scheduled for Site 75 the next day were staying for 11 nights and couldn't easily be moved.

So we had to tear down, move the RV and set up again.

I guess we needed the practice.



All set up - in the wrong site!

St Augustine

8 May 2019



Castillo de San Marcos

I planned to spend the better part of a day in [St Augustine](#) and planned to do the sightseeing with Jett. Well, that didn't happen (for reasons that I will explain later), but I did get to make a short trip there this afternoon. Total sightseeing time: 60 minutes. Not enough, but enough to give me a glimpse of the town. Nice place. Very scenic.

The highlight of my 1-hour tour was the [Castillo de San Marcos](#), a 16th century fortress built by the Spaniards. You can read all about it. There is a lot of history here.

In doing my genealogical research I was struck by how many Europeans actually came to America before the Pilgrims. The Spanish settled St Augustine by 1585, there were Dutch fur traders in the New York City area by the early 1600s, Jamestown VA was settled in 1607. Why did I have this idea that the Pilgrims were the first Europeans in America in 1620? They were Johnny-come-latelies: when they arrived in Massachusetts they encountered Indians who spoke English.

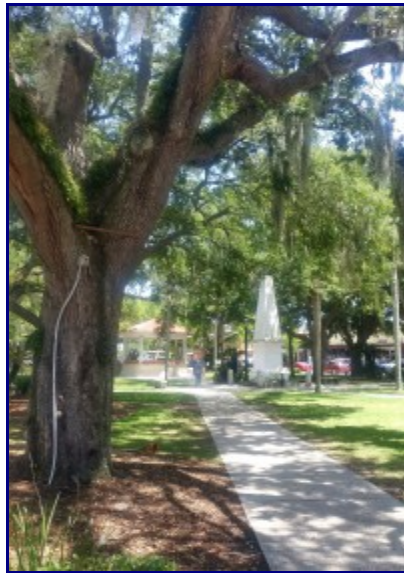
Anyway, St Augustine is one of those early settlements that the English history writers tried to forget.

It is a beautiful little town. The streets are narrow, which made it difficult to navigate in my dually, but I found a place to park for \$2.50 per hour. After walking around the downtown a bit and taking some photos, I strolled along the harbor to the fortress. Watched a little film about its history, took some more photos there and walked back to the truck. On the way I bought a soft drink (peach/ginger - terrible) and caramel corn (actually caramel *kettle* corn - delicious) and headed home.

A beautiful town on a beautiful day.



Downtown street



Downtown park



Downtown building



Fortress courtyard



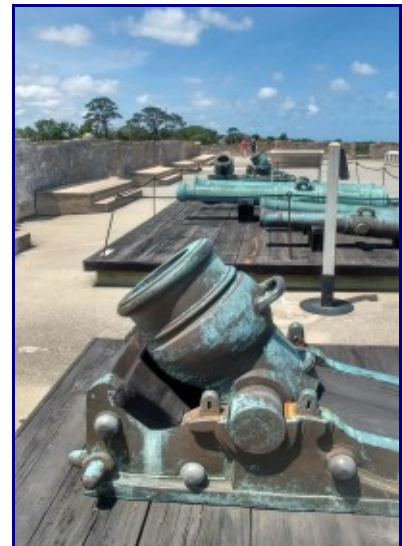
Harbor



Moat



On the parapet



Cannon

Tripus interruptus

11 May 2019

English translation from the Latin: interrupted trip.

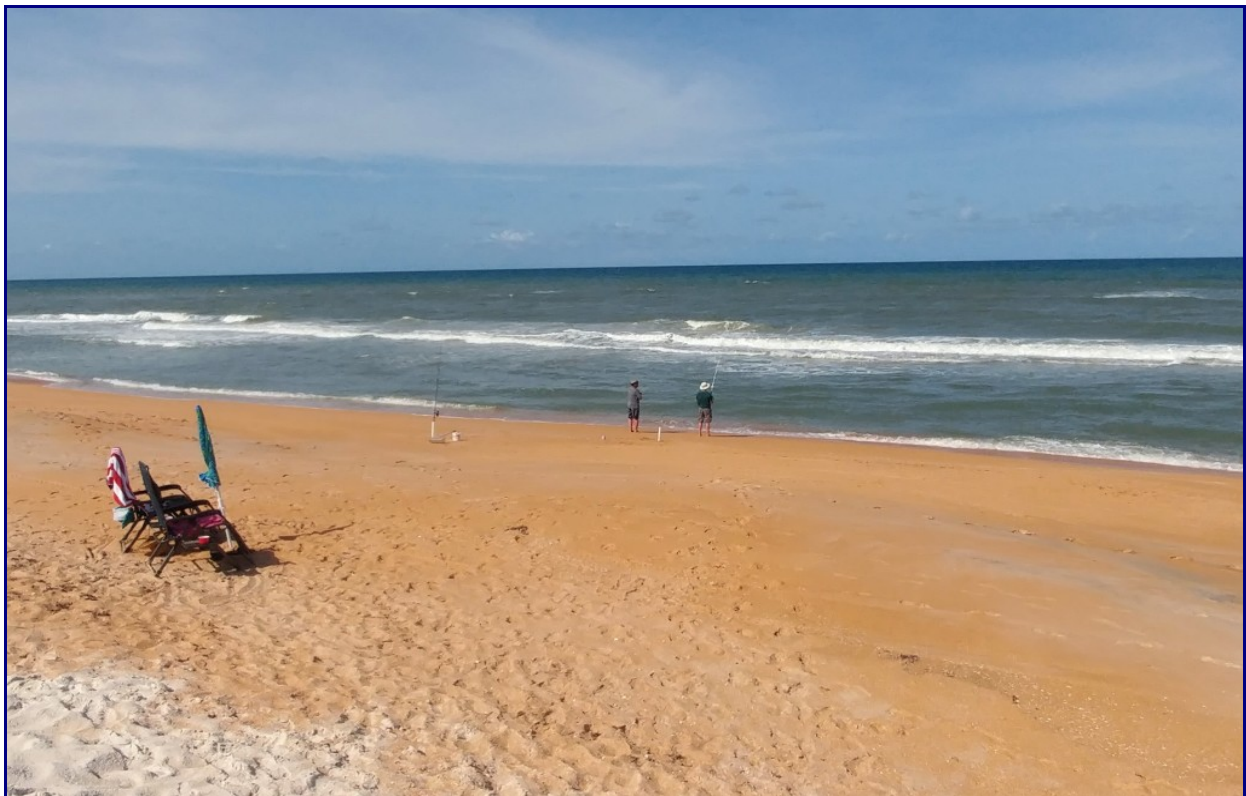
Yes, for the fourth trip in a row (the transatlantic cruise, TN4, TS4 and now TN5), the trip has not gone according to plan. The truck is not the problem this time; as with the transatlantic cruise, the problem is Jett's health.

She has not been well for a long time - at least 18 months. She has been suffering severe abdominal pain for the past several months but other than getting blood tests for a possible recurrence of the low hemoglobin problem that scotched our cruise (no problem - the hemoglobin levels were tolerable), she has resisted going to a doctor, rationalizing that she will see her regular, trusted PC physician when she gets north.



The AdventHealth waiting room at midnight

But on the evening of our arrival in Flagler Beach after the 5 hour first hop of TN5, she was in so much pain that I took her to the ER at AdventHealth Hospital in Palm Coast. They did a CT scan, gave her a prescription for pain medication and sent her home with some unintelligible scan results and a recommendation that she return to discuss the CT scan with a specialist. We extended our stay so that we could see the specialist on Friday. The upshot of that meeting was we agreed to stick around for more tests.



Beverly Beach

We called the owner at the campground in NH where we were due on May 21 to begin working and informed him that we would be unable to work for him this summer. It was pretty clear that, though we didn't have a complete diagnosis, Jett was too ill to work. I also cancelled our campground reservations for most of TN5, though we are still hopeful of getting to VA at some point.

But when? The scheduled tests will keep us in Flagler Beach for at least 2 more weeks.

I went out today looking at other campgrounds because Beverly Beach Campground, while wonderful in many respects (and Jett loves the sea breeze and the pounding surf), is very expensive and the salt spray gets EVERYWHERE. It would probably eat the truck away if we stayed for two more weeks. So we will move to another campground on Monday and start the tests on Tuesday.

This is not fun, but the fact that we are finally taking steps to deal with her pain is a relief. Hopefully this will be the start of a recovery and a happier, healthier Jett.

If we had to get stuck somewhere, the beach is a good choice.

Cypress Trail RV Resort

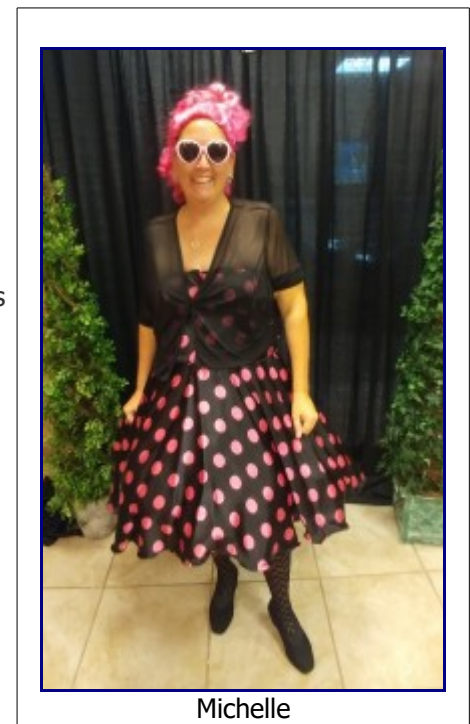
12 May 2019

This is my first ever review of an RV resort where we are residents. I will keep it brief as I can't possibly be completely objective.

In a nutshell... we like it!

How so? Let me count the ways:

- A very nice community center with ballroom and kitchen.
- An "omni" room with pool tables and cable TV.
- A large, attractive pool.
- A poolside patio with tiki (but no bar).
- A small laundry room (but large enough) with very nice machines (and a broken coin dispenser).
- A card room/exchange library with a large collection of books. We may never buy another book.
- A very nice dog park with "large" and "small" sides.
- Wide roads and sidewalks.
- Very nice pickleball courts. Also bocce, shuffleboard and tennis.
- Two beautiful ponds.
- Fun activities (thanks, Michelle!).



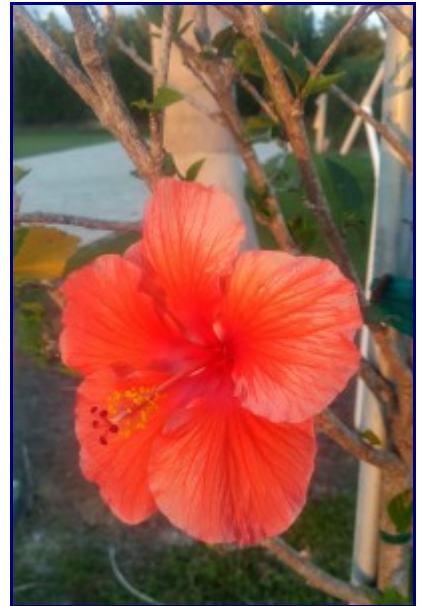
Michelle

- Our site - spacious, private, nice pavers and beautiful landscaping, including a wonderful hibiscus. Our shed. Next winter we will have our own washer and dryer!
- Wonderful neighbors.
- Awesome sunsets.

Also, the resort is in Ft Myers. We like Ft Myers. The Red Sox are here in the spring.

Ok, enough gushing. What is wrong with the place?

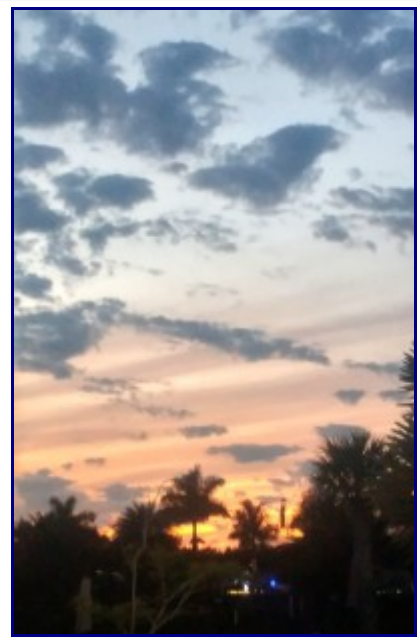
- Poor cable TV. The cable TV is included in the monthly HOA fee, but it is very basic - about 40 channels, of which we view maybe 10. But... not all of the channels are viewable all the time. The signal is weak with the result that our living room TV picks up maybe 25 of the 40 and none of the network channels (switching from cable to antenna and back again is really, really annoying). And sometimes fewer. It isn't weather that causes the problem; the signal is just weak all the time.
- No tiki bar. This really isn't that big a deal except that (1) Gulf Waters, which we regard as the standard for a really great RV resort, had a tiki bar by the pool that we loved and (2) we were told when we bought our site at Cypress Trail that a tiki bar would be there when we took up residence. A broken promise.
- Weak WiFi. This is probably a corollary of the "poor cable TV" problem as they are both served up by the cable system. We were surprised and pleased, initially, that we got a free internet modem, but the quality has been mediocre (we sometimes can't get Netflix when we want to watch it) and the WiFi has been nearly useless.
- The developer. The park is relatively new - about 6 years old, I am told - and the developer (or, more specifically, the on-site developer agent) is universally disliked. The park is currently managed by a board consisting of 2 developer reps and 1 owner rep, so the developer still controls everything. But that will change soon - probably next winter - when the number of sold sites exceeds 90% of the total number of sites. The board at that point will transition to a majority of owner reps, so the owners will gain control. This is exciting, but also will be a time of turmoil and uncertainty. We probably should have paid more attention to how the park was managed before we bought in.
- I mentioned the broken coin dispenser in the laundry room and I will use this as an example of a larger problem: the office management. The coin dispenser was broken when we arrived in November and was still broken when we left in May. I don't know what the problem was or why it was so difficult to fix, but to have no coin dispenser in the only coin-operated laundry on the premises is really unacceptable - especially since the office staff was prohibited from keeping cash of any kind, including quarters. At the very least the machine should have been replaced or a second one obtained. But, as I said, this was indicative of the general disorganization and incompetence of the office staff. I had to make four separate requests to obtain my mailbox key when I arrived and finally had to stand in the office and refuse to leave until a key was in my hand. Unacceptable.



My hibiscus at sunset



Awesome sunsets



Did I mention sunsets?



Our nearly empty street



Pool



Ballroom



Entertainment on the patio

But, overall, we are very happy with our decision. The HOA fees are low (\$200 per month) and should remain low even after transition. This dramatically changes the economics of RV ownership as we now could, in theory, stay in Ft Myers year-round for \$200 per month. Of course we really don't want to do this because (1) Ft Myers in summer is hot, humid and very wet, (2) we have friends and family in New England that we enjoy seeing and

(3) we still like to travel. But staying year-round at no additional cost is now an option.

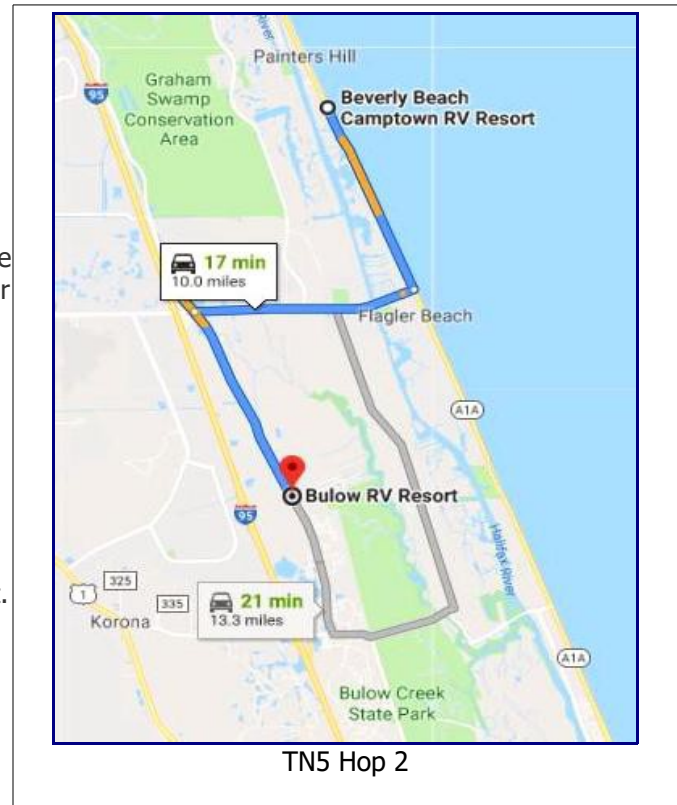
TN5 Hop 2: Flagler Beach FL to Flagler Beach FL

14 May 2019

10 miles via FL A1A, FL 100 and Old Kings Rd.
Cumulative tow miles: 237. Truck miles: 293.
Cumulative truck miles: 530. The truck miles were accumulated in my trip to St Augustine and various shopping trips in and around Flagler Beach. Plus two trips to the hospital.

Once again, this was not the hop that I planned. We are now committed to spending a total of 3 weeks in Flagler Beach while Jett undergoes a series of tests. While we liked our initial destination in Flagler Beach - [Beverly Beach Camptown](#) - there were 3 things that argued against staying there for the duration:

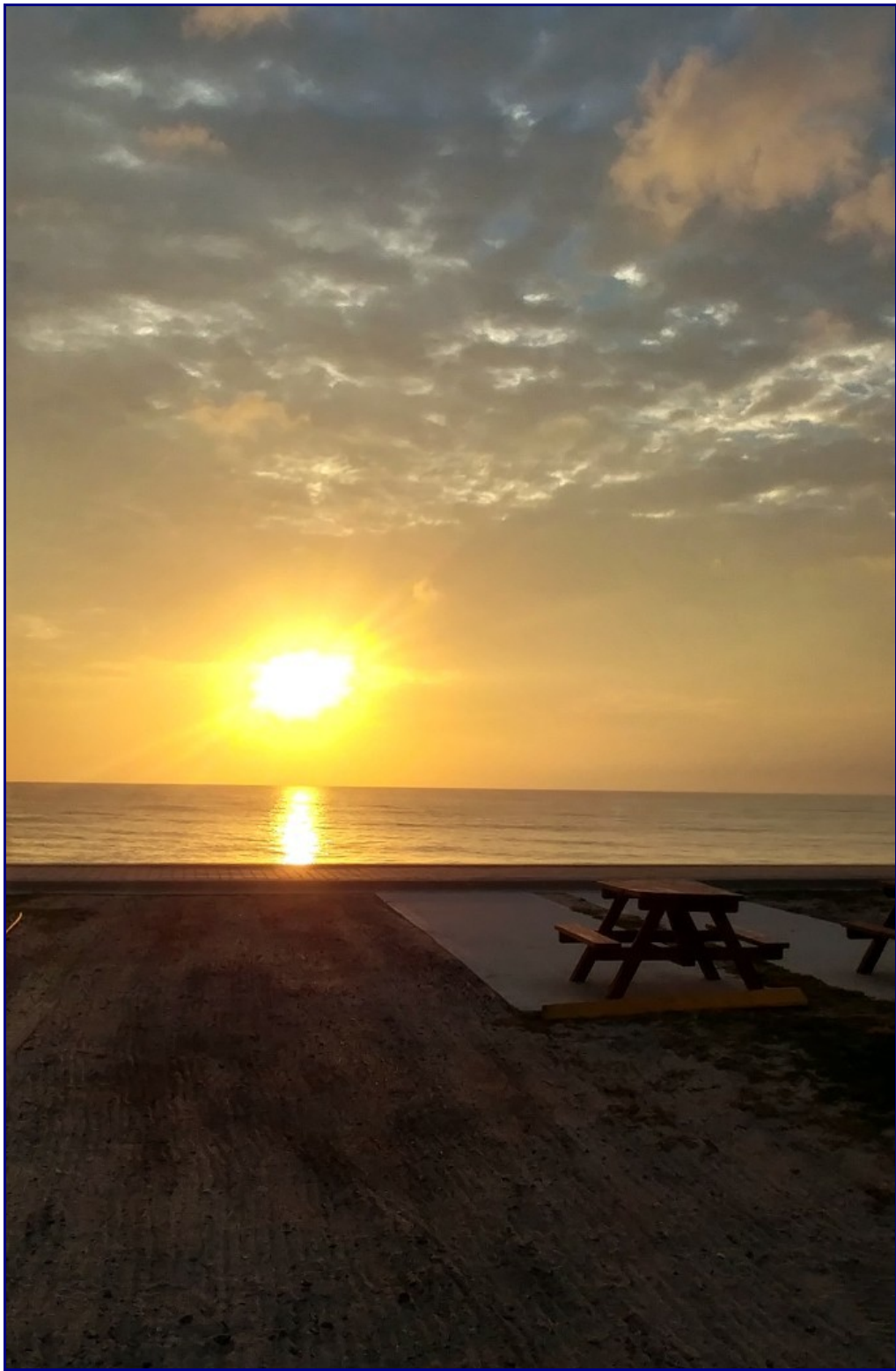
1. Cost. It is expensive - ridiculously so, for what you get.
2. Salt spray. If we stayed for 3 weeks I think the truck would have been reduced to a pile of rust.
3. Lovebugs. These little pests bloomed while we were there. By the time we left they were swarming. They might be gone in a couple more days but they would be a miserable couple of days.



As I said, we liked Beverly Beach Camptown. Being close to the ocean was nice and was a balm for the emotional burns we suffered with Jett's illness. She enjoyed the sound of the surf and the smell of the salt spray.

Other than proximity to the ocean, the campground doesn't offer much else. The office staff was pleasant and efficient and the camp store was pretty nice. It had a small but adequate laundromat that we almost - but not quite - used. The beach was more golden than white, but the sand was very soft and the beach was very clean. I can't comment on the water as I didn't jump in.

Being on the Atlantic, the sunrises were spectacular. Jett, of course, slept through them. But I didn't.



Sunrise on the Atlantic



Our site

Bulow Creek State Park

15 May 2019



A southern live oak

We have a TV problem at our new campground. No OTA stations and the funky cable system, which requires a

cable box (free) doesn't seem to work either. So we are facing 2 weeks with no TV - a period which includes the finale of *Big Bang Theory*. This is not good. And it is going to make me stir crazy.

Jett basically kicked me out of the RV yesterday, demanding that I go check out the [Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park](#) just down the road a bit. Well, I couldn't do that because it was closed on Tuesdays, so I did the next best thing: I checked out [Bulow Creek State Park](#), right next to the plantation ruins.

We have found the Florida state parks to be very nice and very well maintained. Bulow Creek is no exception. But it is a small park whose main feature is trees. More specifically, southern live oak trees - huge, hulking trees that are made more impressive by the Spanish moss dangling from their branches. The main tree is the Fairchild Oak, which is nearly 90 feet tall, about 300 feet wide and perhaps 500 years old. An impressive tree. Admiring it took about 5 minutes.

The other attraction of the park is nature trails, the longest of which is over 6 miles. I went about 200 yards down this trail. Seems nice, but I was wearing sandals and wasn't about to go trekking.



Fairchild Oak trunk

Tomoka State Park

16 May 2019

Another day, another state park. This one, [Tomoka State Park](#) in Ormond Beach FL, is larger and has a wider variety of recreational activities than the Bulow Creek State Park. Florida apparently thinks it is better because it charges \$4 to enter.

The park encompasses the site of an ancient Timucuan Indian village, documented by an early Spanish explorer in 1564. The park also contains a rather odd statue giving homage to Chief Tomokie of those ancient Timucuan.

You can fish, swim, canoe and camp in this park. I stopped at the park store for some refreshments and to enjoy the view on a beautiful day.



Drawing of Timucuan village



Boat rentals at park store



Chief Tomokie statue

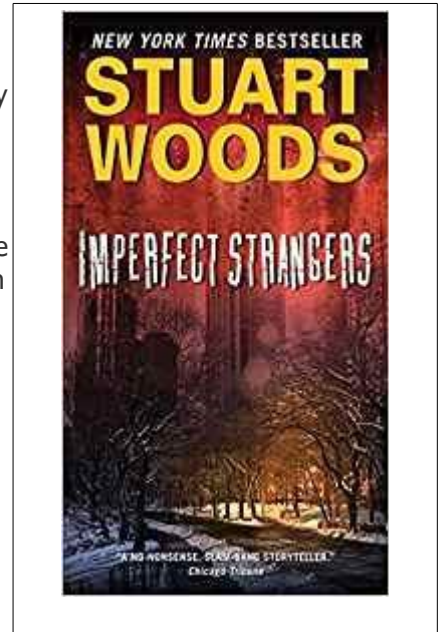
"Imperfect Strangers" by Stuart Woods

21 May 2019

[Copyright 1995 by Stuart Woods. Published by HarperCollins.](#)

This is my first Stuart Woods novel ever and it won't be my last. He is a very talented writer who kept my interest.

Those of you familiar with the movie *Strangers on a Train* will recognize the starting premise: two strangers meet - on a plane, not a train - and discuss the possibility of killing each other's wives. Woods gives credit where it is due: the strangers broach the subject because the movie was shown on the flight. The plot continues in a familiar way initially. They meet again, discuss the details of how both murders would be done and they agree to do it. Then one - Sandy Kinsolving, a wine executive in his wife's family business in New York - decides he can't go through with it and executes the agreed-upon signal to call it all off. But his wife is murdered anyway, in a way that suggests that the other husband ignored his signal. And since she was murdered right after she told Sandy that she was filing for divorce and wants him out of the business, Sandy is a prime suspect. He has an iron-clad alibi, but the detective on the case is convinced that he hired someone to kill her and tries very hard to prove it.



Sandy is none too pleased that his attempt to call off the execution was ignored. But he can't deny that he is pleased that his wife is gone as she died before she had a chance to change her will. He not only inherits her half of the thriving business - which he sells for a nifty \$28 million - but he finds a new love interest, a beautiful interior decorator.

But the other husband - Peter Martindale, a San Francisco art dealer - won't let him off the hook. He says he has proof that Sandy masterminded the execution of his wife and has deposited that proof with his lawyer with instructions to send the proof - a full description of their murder-exchange agreement, along with the keys to the basement storage unit that Sandy had given him and where his wife was murdered - to the police in the event of his death. So much for the idea of killing him instead of Martindale's wife. Sandy feels cornered and compelled to go through with his half of the bargain. So, during a trip to San Francisco to tour some vineyards, he attempts to kill Peter's wife in her art gallery. But someone beats him to it: he arrives at the gallery to find it surrounded by police and a body being carried out.

What is going on?

What follows is a rapid series of moves and countermoves that are pretty fascinating and veer the plot away from the original. I was constantly surprised and even 80% of the way through the book had no idea where it was headed, though I did feel that it was likely to end up in Sandy's favor as he was much more sympathetic as a character than was Peter.

I was right. Sandy ends up smelling like roses, but the way he triumphs was pretty interesting. The conclusion was a little bit of a letdown, but the book was still a very worthwhile read.

7 out of 10.

Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park

22 May 2019



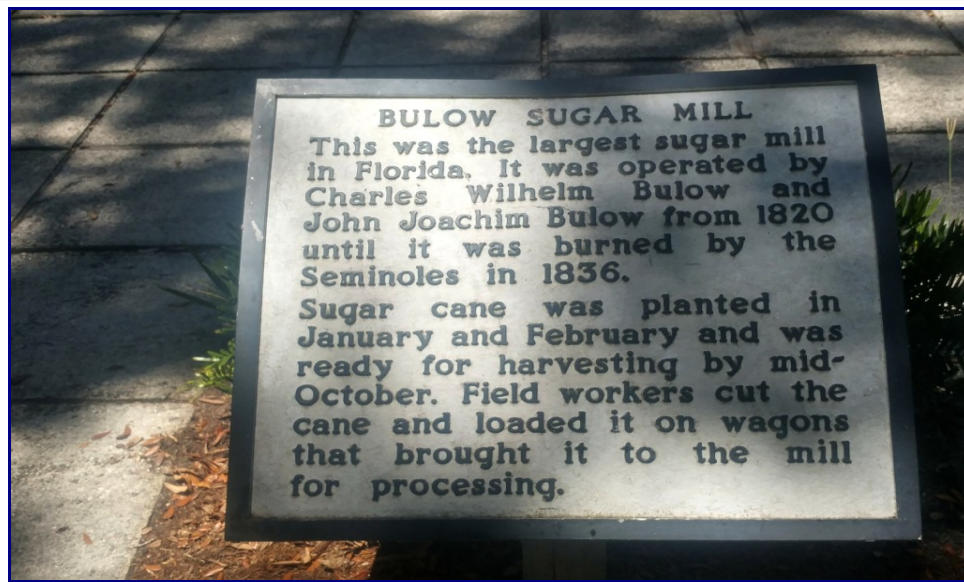
Sugar mill ruins

I finally got to visit the [Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park](#) which is basically adjacent to our RV park. Despite its proximity it wasn't easy to get to, requiring a long drive down a narrow dirt road. I paid the \$4 fee and got in to see... not much. There are some ruins, yes, of the sugar mill. But no ruins of the plantation mansion itself. The plantation was a major sugar cane provider from 1820 to 1836 when it was destroyed in the [Second Seminole War](#). That war, by the way, was due to the Seminole Indians objecting to the US Army trying to move them out of Florida. Who knew they would be so sensitive?

It looks like there were some nice nature trails within the park. But there are also some nice ones outside the park. If I wanted to walk I would save the \$4.



Left side of the mill



Historic marker

Finn's Beachside Pub and The Golden Lion Cafe

29 May 2019

Flagler Beach has some fine places to wine and dine near the beach. I have visited two: [Finn's Beachside Pub](#) and [The Golden Lion Café](#). They are both separated from the beach by A1A and both attract a young beach-oriented crowd - but they let me in anyway. They both offered live music when I was there. I ordered fish and chips at both. The fish and chips at Finn's... ok. At Golden Lion... superb.

I went to Finn's for dinner, solo, so it was a solitary experience, just me and my food, in the sea breeze, listening to some pretty decent folk music. I went to The Golden Lion with Jett's brother and sister, so the I didn't have to talk to myself. The



Ocean view from Finn's

music there was provided by "Billy Bob - A 10-string duo", the 10 strings being 6 on a guitar and 4 on a fiddle. They are very talented musicians and we enjoyed them very much. We also enjoyed the kids cavorting in the sand in front of the stage.

Either one is fine for music and drinks. But go to The Golden Lion Café for food.



Finn's Beachside Pub



Billy Bob at The Golden Lion

Jett has cancer

30 May 2019

This is a post that I hoped I would never have to write. But the facts are that she has been a heavy smoker for over 50 years and hasn't felt well for 18 months. During that time she has seen her doctor several times and each time her lungs were checked and found to be cancer-free.

That is no longer the case. After we got to Flagler Beach FL on May 6, on the first hop of the TN5, she was experiencing severe abdominal pain. So much pain that she agreed to visit the ER (and if you know Jett, you know that it had to be excruciating for her to make that decision). A CT scan was taken and she went home with some pain medication and a report that suggested that several things seen on the CT scan should be examined further. Upon consultation with a doctor - an oncologist because cancer was suspected - we agreed to extend our planned 3-day stay in Flagler to a full 3 weeks so that 4 additional tests could be performed. A meeting with the doctor on May 23 produced a devastating - but not unexpected - preliminary diagnosis: stage 4 lung cancer, plus a tumor on the spine that had displaced a disc. Incurable and inoperable. But not untreatable. He recommended that she immediately be admitted to the hospital so that her severe pain could be controlled and radiation treatment of the spinal tumor could begin. We went straight to the ER for the intake processing.

At the ER I mentioned to the doctor the symptom that most concerned me: her rapidly deteriorating mental state. In the course of just a few weeks she had developed severe aphasia - she was having a very difficult time remembering names for common objects. She also was, at times, speaking complete gibberish. This was not Jett, a woman who always had the right word when needed and never had trouble communicating. The doctor agreed that an MRI of the brain was indicated.

I didn't have to be told, the next morning, what the MRI showed. I knew it meant that the cancer had metastasized to the brain. The MRI showed 3 brain lesions, plus swelling of the brain. It was recommended that Jett receive steroids immediately to reduce the swelling and to begin radiation treatments of the lesions. We agreed.

She remained in the hospital for 4 days. She is now back in the RV. The aphasia is somewhat improved, as is the pain (on morphine). But the prognosis, though not yet complete, will be grim. It is a terminal condition and the only questions are how long does she have and will her quality of life be good?

But those are questions that apply to all of us.

The TN5 has been aborted. Instead we are now embarked on a journey that we really didn't want to take.



Waiting for the doctor, May 23



Hospitalized, May 23

Showing the family flag

4 Jun 2019



The gathering of the clan

Jett has two sons, a brother and two sisters. When she first became ill and it was obvious that it was serious -

but before we knew just how serious - I notified her sons and siblings and they all wanted to travel from Alexandria VA (her sons) or Boston MA (her siblings) to visit. Her brother was the first to offer to come down. I tried to discourage him saying that there was no need. "Well," he said, "you may not need me there, but I need to be there." And he was on a plane the next day, followed shortly thereafter by one sister and both sons. I dissuaded her older sister, who is nearly 80 and doesn't travel well, by promising to get Jett to MA ASAP.

So while Jett ate next to nothing, our visitors and I shared many meals together. While Jett was losing weight, I was gaining. Both The Golden Lion (previously described) and



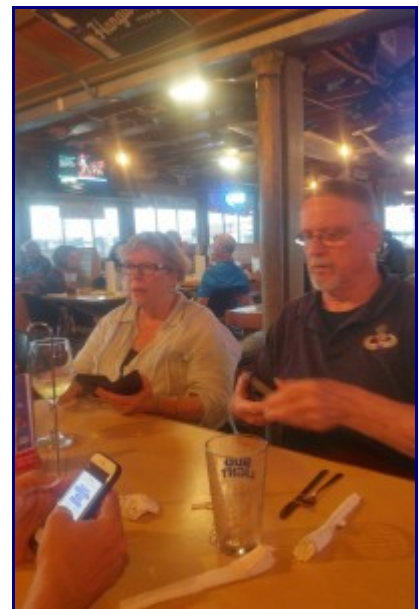
Jett and sons

High Jackers (at the private airport in Palm Coast) provided good meals that sustained us in this difficult time.

All flew into Orlando and drove over 90 minutes to the hospital. This is a relatively inaccessible location which strengthens my resolve to get Jett up to MA. But it also demonstrates the depth of her family's love that they were more than ready to drop everything and make the arduous journey to her bedside.



Hospital care



Dinner at Highjackers

Insulin in our lives

8 Jun 2019

During her second hospitalization it was discovered that Jett's blood glucose level had drifted dangerously high - 244 when 150 is the upper limit for normal. I was there when this was detected and I didn't believe it. I made the nurse do the test again. 242. So insulin was added to her long list of medications.

Apparently messing up blood sugar is yet another side effect of the heavy doses of steroids that the doctor ordered after she was re-admitted.

The side effect for me is that I had to learn how to do the glucose test and administer the insulin since I would be her primary caretaker on the trip north. So after she was released on Monday, the hospital arranged for an RN to come to the RV for follow-up care with Jett and instruction for me on the use of insulin.

The hospital provided prescriptions for the insulin, needles and a glucometer (glucose test machine). I couldn't get the insulin until Wednesday and, though I acquired the glucometer and the other testing supplies on

Tuesday, my training session on Wednesday didn't go well. It turns out that you need to match the test strip to the meter. Because the test strips were more expensive than the meter, I ran back to CVS to get a different meter. By Wednesday night I had everything I needed and ran an actual test of blood glucose - first on myself and then on Jett. Ironically, my blood sugar was high (161) while hers was fine (143).

The rest of the week and even this morning her glucose levels were acceptable, so I have yet to give an actual insulin injection. But I had to demonstrate my competence to the nurse on Friday by actually drawing the right amount of insulin into the



Bag of medicines, pre-insulin



Insulin supplies

hypodermic needle and showing her how I would pinch the skin to do the injection.

The bag of medicines and medical supplies that we have to take north - already large - has just about doubled in size with the addition of all the insulin-related stuff.

I fear that this blog, which was intended as a travelogue, is becoming a medical journal. But medicine is dominating my life right now. And is keeping Jett alive.

Because I know you will be curious, I will tell you that my blood sugar levels have been fine ever since that first anomalous reading.

Solving the Rusty problem

8 Jun 2019

Rusty is a good dog and is rarely a problem. Except when we have to travel by some mode other than truck or car. He is not a large dog, weighing in at 35 pounds, but he is too large to carry on board either a passenger plane or a train. He probably would do fine in a "play" kennel where he could interact with other dogs, but that is only a short-term option. I needed to get Jett to Massachusetts where she could continue her cancer treatment while being close to family and friends. We don't know how long we will be there and if it is months we needed to find a way to get short-term care for Rusty and a way to get him north, too, if it turns into a long-term stay.



Josh and Cristina in the RV, Sunday

The only real solution was to get him to Virginia, to be cared for by Jett's sons, which was where I took him last year during our planned month-long cruise. He loves being there and they seem to love having him, so win-win.

But this time I could not leave Jett to drive to Virginia. So I called Jett's son Joshua and proposed meeting him halfway, in North Carolina, Saturday night. As Jett was hospitalized and would not be released until Monday at the earliest, I had a 2-day window to do the half-trip.

Josh declined my proposition. He said Jett needed me and he would drive all the way to Flagler Beach to fetch Rusty. I couldn't very well refuse his generosity so, true to his word, both he and his fiancé Cristina appeared at the hospital Saturday night and stayed until Tuesday morning, assisting with Jett's release from the hospital.

They left Tuesday morning, with Rusty, solving that critical logistical problem for me.

Thank you, Josh and Cristina!

I am happy to report that following her discharge from the hospital on Monday, Jett had four very good days at home in the RV. She was mentally alert, got out of bed and prepared for radiation treatments every morning with very little assistance from me and actually ate some real meals. Small portions, but real food. All very encouraging.



Jett having an actual meal, Tuesday

Hospital drama and the radical reshaping of the TN5

12 Jun 2019

To say that the fifth trip north (TN5) has not gone as planned would be a massive understatement. The entire trip has morphed from an RV journey to New Hampshire to a rather desperate attempt to get to Massachusetts by any means available. After 5 weeks in Flagler Beach - rather than the planned 3 days - dealing with the consequences of a shocking cancer diagnosis for Jett, with a series of CT scan, MRI and biopsy procedures to fully identify the scope and severity of the cancer (answer: wide scope, critical severity) and at least a dozen radiation treatments designed to knock the cancer back on its heels, my primary goal was to get Jett north where the hospitals were better and her family and friends were available to provide emotional support.

For a while I was far from confident that I could pull it off. She was so ill and so mentally confused for two weeks that I thought she would be unable to travel by ANY mode of transportation. However, she improved markedly. First, some pretty massive doses of steroids were effective in reducing her brain swelling. Second, the radiation treatments took over and reduced the need for the steroids. Third, pain medication - oxycodone, hydrocodone and finally morphine - reduced her pain to a manageable level. By Tue May 28 she was well enough to be discharged from the hospital.

But there was a moment, after she was released from the hospital, when I thought I had lost the battle entirely. The discharge instructions omitted the steroid from the list of medications that she was to take at home. It was marked as "IV only" and since she would have no IV at home the nurse blithely scratched it off this list. I knew, by then, how critical the steroids were and should have noticed the omission. But I didn't. She got no steroid on the day of her discharge, nor the next.

She became more confused, undoubtedly due to increased brain swelling. Besides, dropping a steroid "cold turkey" is a REALLY bad idea.

On Thursday morning, at her daily radiation session, the radiologist noticed her mental confusion and asked me

if she was taking her steroid. I said that we had no steroid prescription. He looked somewhat alarmed and had his assistant look at the list of medications on the discharge order. She noticed the "IV only" notation. The radiologist quickly ripped off a prescription and handed it to me saying "fill this TODAY." I did, but CVS could not fill it until about 6 pm. She was sleeping then and I didn't want to wake her. However, starting around 8 pm I tried to rouse her to take the steroid along with her other medications. I was unable, for 2 hours, to get her to sit up or even utter an intelligible sentence. At 10 pm I called 911. The EMTs were able to drag her out of bed and elicit enough consciousness that I could drive her to the ER. They immediately gave her steroids and admitted her again.

I believe that if I had let her sleep that night without her steroid medication she would have died.

That was Thursday night. Friday morning her oncologist saw her and she had rallied enough to respond intelligently. He emphasized that she must decide over the weekend whether she would begin chemotherapy or go straight into hospice. He told us that we would be receiving a visit from hospice over the weekend to help with the decision. But if chemo was the choice, it had to begin IMMEDIATELY on Monday. "It can't wait" were his words.

We had a rather sober discussion involving life and death on Friday and Saturday. The hospice people arrived Saturday afternoon. They were very nice and very compassionate but also very direct. Without further treatment, they said, Jett would be dead in 10 days. Not the kind of news that makes for a happy Saturday.

Jett's son Joshua and his fiancé Cristina arrived Saturday night, driving all the way from Alexandria VA to pick up Rusty (see previous post). I was glad to have their company and not just to solve the Rusty problem. They were also instrumental in convincing Jett that chemotherapy should at least be tried.

I arrived at the hospital early Monday morning, fully expecting that the oncologist would be eager to hear her decision. However, by 10 am I had not heard from him, nor could I find out if she would receive her scheduled radiation. At 10:30 am I went to the oncologist's office. He was with a patient so I asked the receptionist to see if Jett was scheduled to receive chemotherapy. No, she said, but she had an appointment on June 6. I got agitated, telling her that the doctor had as much as said on Friday that her life was in danger if she did not start chemo right away. She asked if Jett was hospitalized. I said she was. "Well, we can't start chemo until she has been discharged." That was the first I had heard that and I couldn't believe it. "You mean that a patient, critically ill with cancer and hospitalized because of it, can't receive chemo?" She said, yes, that is true. I said it was just about the dumbest thing I had ever heard and left in a huff.

Next stop: radiology. I asked if Jett would be getting radiation therapy. The receptionist looked at the schedule and said yes, she was due to be treated at 11:15 am. I pointed out that the current time was 11:12 and, to the best of my knowledge, no one had arranged to bring her down. "Oh," said the receptionist, "you mean she is in the hospital?"

This was 3 hours after I had told the nurse that Jett was scheduled for an 11:15 am radiation treatment and 2 hours after I had told the hospitalist the same thing. Neither one acted on that information.

At that point I was pretty pissed off and I ripped into the hospitalist. But that time Joshua had arrived and he had my back. He, too, was pretty upset that his mother was not getting the radiation treatment and that the oncologist was showing no sign of the urgency that he himself had said was needed.

Jett got her radiation at 3 pm and the oncologist's assistant provided an explanation and a correction of the statement that "chemo can be given only after the patient is discharged." She said that chemo requires a level of strength that is often incompatible with hospitalization. But, yes, it was possible to give chemo to Jett while she was hospitalized. Later I finally saw the oncologist and he backed off his statement that "it can't wait." In fact he said that starting chemo now (on Monday) might make Jett so weak that she would be unable to travel on Friday. Furthermore, he opined that waiting a week to start chemo would not substantially change her diagnosis.

Not at all the message he gave us on the previous Friday.

Jett was released from the hospital for the second time on Tue Jun 4. She continued to do well the rest of the week and completed her final radiation treatment on Fri Jun 7.

I proceeded with my plan to get her to New York via Amtrak where her brother Ray would pick us up and complete that last 170 miles of the trek to Worcester MA.

Flagler Beach will be forever memorable and not always in a pleasant way. It was time to get out.



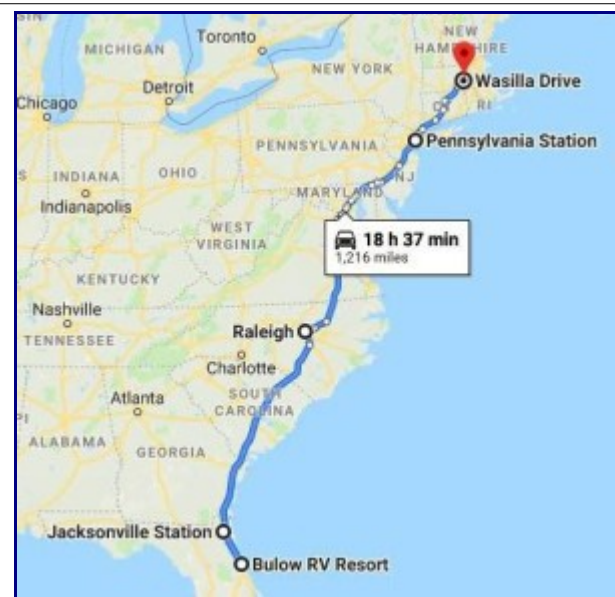
Discharged, Jun 4

TN5 Hop 3: Flagler Beach FL to Worcester MA

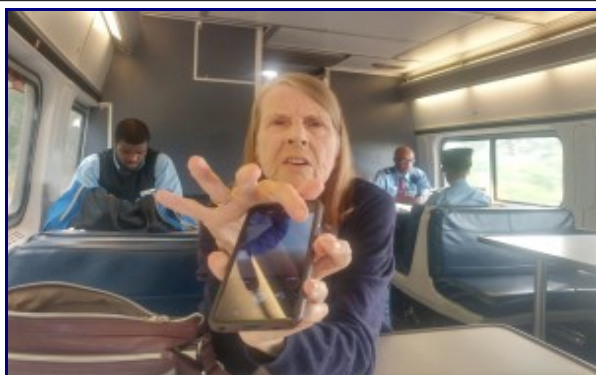
15 Jun 2019

1436 miles via I-95, Merritt Parkway and I-84, about 960 miles on Amtrak and 220 tow miles to return the RV to Ft Myers. Cumulative tow miles: 457. Cumulative truck miles: 1675. The additional truck miles were accumulated in traveling between the Bulow RV Resort and the Jacksonville Amtrak station, visiting the Florida state parks near Flagler Beach and making innumerable trips to the hospital.

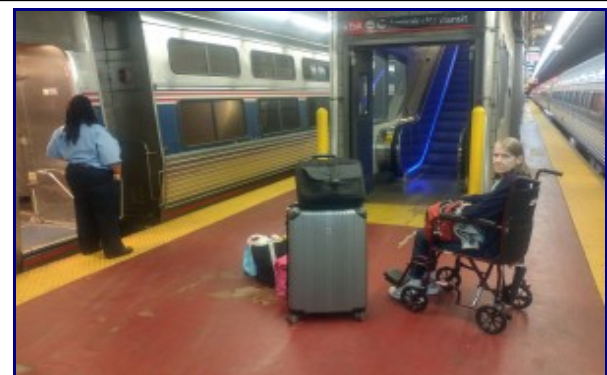
The trip north involved a 75-mile truck trip to the Amtrak station in Jacksonville, a train trip of some 22 hours from Jacksonville to New York's Pennsylvania Station and a 175-mile car trip from New York City to Worcester MA, courtesy of Jett's brother and sister-in-law. Yes, it was a grueling trip, but we made it. And despite the trip being much longer by train than by plane, it was the right decision. I booked a private bedroom on the train, so Jett was able to lie in bed almost the entire way and had access to a private bath. That privacy and comfort more than compensated for the extended duration.



TN5, Hop 3



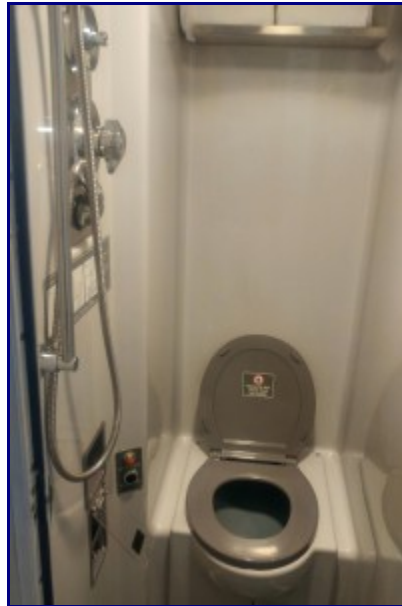
In the Club Car



Waiting for the Red Cap in Penn Station



Jett on her bunk



Bathroom with shower



Smoking break (yes, smoking)

The room was very small, but large enough for our purposes. Our luggage - one large suitcase, 3 small bags (mostly food as we had to clean out the RV of anything remotely perishable), plus a folding wheelchair - fit into the room, but only just barely. The bathroom, to our surprise, included a shower, so I was able to clean up before arriving in New York.

We arrived in Worcester around 1 am, exhausted but happy to have escaped Florida. So my first goal - getting Jett to Massachusetts - is accomplished. Now onto the second goal: finding long-term accommodations. Jett's brother Ray has been wonderful and we are very happy to have a place to land. But we need our own place long-term.

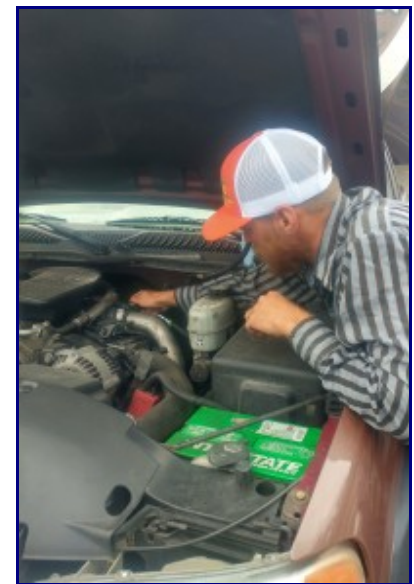
I have included the trip to return the RV to Ft Myers in the TN5. It would be silly to regard that single leg as a separate "trip south." The trip consisted of driving our Corolla to Logan Airport in Boston, flying to Jacksonville, taking a taxi to the Jacksonville train station, driving the 75 miles to Flagler Beach, gassing up, hitching up and hauling the RV back to Ft Myers. It all went pretty smoothly except for the driving rain, the 90 minutes of stop-and-go traffic through Orlando (I HATE I-4!) and the truck breakdown 40 miles from home.

The breakdown - the symptom of which was a loud "pop" and a whooshing sound - was obviously a problem with the turbo charger. I feared that the hose section that we had replaced in Tennessee during the TS4 had ruptured. But when I opened the hood I was relieved to see that the hose was fine but that a clamp had let loose. As I was considering the problem a Good Samaritan appeared and reattached the clamp in under 10 minutes. He refused payment and I was on my way again.

For about half a mile.

The clamp let loose again. Again, a Good Samaritan appeared and fixed the problem again.

For about 2 miles. The clamp let go for a third time and this time I was on my own. I used a Vise Grip to tighten the nut on the clamp. But it was getting late so I didn't dare have a fourth failure. I completed the final 35 miles



First Samaritan

at a steady 40 miles per hour and was very careful to not accelerate hard. I got to our home site around 8:30 pm - a 6-hour trip - and quickly set up in the last light of dusk. It was raining lightly but by the time I got inside it was pouring. I was VERY happy that I wasn't on the side of the road trying to reclamp the hose in the wet darkness.

Thus ended our disastrous TN5.

I fly back north tonight to rejoin Jett.



The dark finish to the TN5

Two weeks in Worcester

25 Jun 2019

I keep looking for ways to return this blog to the topic of travel, but with cancer looming over our heads and having no RV to live in, that is nearly impossible. So I will have to just record our lives and strive to make it less than totally depressing.

Our first residence in Worcester MA was with Jett's brother and sister-in-law, Ray and Kim. We took up residence in their lovely guest room for two weeks. We didn't suffer, for sure: private bath and cable TV with Netflix and Prime Video, among others. I got to binge watch *Monk* which was a treat. An added feature of the accommodations were many truly exquisite meals prepared by Kim. As we told her several times, she should open a restaurant. Yes, she is that good. Among the meals were the best seafood chowder that I have ever tasted and a huevos rancheros breakfast in a bowl that was just superb. I believe I gained 5 pounds in those two weeks. Even Jett ate! I don't think she gained 5



Huevos rancheros



Jett eating chowder

pounds, but I don't think she lost any, which is remarkable under the circumstances.

Ray tried very hard to get us to stay longer, dangling an empty house in front of us (they would be spending the entire month of July at their lovely cabin in New Salem MA). But we needed more privacy, particularly with Jett's chemotherapy about to begin. We had no idea how she would react to chemo and wanted to deal with it in private.

So, after two weeks in the guest bedroom, we moved to a studio apartment at Extended Stay America in Westborough MA. We took a handicapped room, which gave us a larger shower with grab bars and more floor

space to maneuver the wheelchair. The downside is that it has a smaller refrigerator than the regular units, but the manager said she could get us a larger fridge. It hasn't appeared yet but we haven't given up hope.

One thing we have learned in the past 2 months is that you can't give up hope.

The hotel had an "introductory rate" that was very attractive - cheaper than the rent we would have paid if we had brought the RV north - and accepts pets, so Rusty will be joining us in a few days. The family will be back together again.

It is a good thing that we vacated the guest room because Kim and Ray were taking in two new guests on the day we departed: the pet dog of one son and the pet tortoise of another. It would have gotten crowded.

Seriously, we are deeply grateful to Ray and Kim. Getting north and getting set up with life in Worcester would have been very difficult, if not impossible, without their assistance. With their assistance a very difficult two weeks were transformed into a near-vacation. Thank you, Ray and Kim!

The first week was pretty crazy with medical appointments. We got to see Dr William Walsh, the preeminent oncologist at UMASS Memorial Medical Center - a man with 30 years of experience dealing with cancer and a guy who was described to me as "THE lung cancer expert at UMASS." Seems like we are in good hands. And to get in to see him on the Monday after we arrived in Massachusetts is nothing short of miraculous.

Two days later Jett went back to the hospital for more tests: another CT scan (with contrast) and an echo cardiogram.

The first week ended with my quick trip to Florida (see the previous post) - another thing that would not have been possible without Ray and Kim's assistance as they watched over Jett while I was away. The second week had no medical appointments but had a lot of shopping trips to prepare for our move to the hotel. Jett also took the opportunity to get her hair trimmed (which struck me as a waste as it was all falling out anyway, but, hey, if it makes her feel better, great) and a pedicure. She also had two visits from her sisters. On one of the visits I got a great photo of the four siblings together, on Ray's deck.

It was great seeing them all together again.

I tried to repay a bit of their kindness by helping them open their New Salem cottage. The yard was completely overgrown and well beyond my capabilities, so I worked on assembling two new recliners. I managed to complete the task with the reclining mechanism operational and no extra parts, so I count it as a success.



Guest pup and tortoise



Prepping for the echo



Jett, her sisters and Kim



Recliners



The four siblings



Overgrown yard

First chemo

27 Jun 2019

Jett had her first chemotherapy infusion on Monday. She approached it with a great deal of trepidation. She had, of course, heard all the horror stories of violent upchucking and generally feeling like crap. But she was committed to doing a minimum of one treatment, so Monday morning she got showered and dressed, took a deep breath and she went off to take her medicine. So to speak.

The day started at about 8 am with some preparation, including a review of her current medications (I have learned and brought a complete list, which moved things along). They measured her weight and height **3 times** (important to get it right as the amount of chemo is carefully matched to physical size). 98 pounds, in case you were wondering, down from about 130 a year ago. Not good.

The infusion began with cleaning the port and injection of some drugs designed to calm her down and eliminate nausea. The "calm down" drug was Benadryl which actually makes Jett hyper - not quite the intended effect. But Jett decided to take it anyway and it was fine. I think it actually did calm her down as she was asleep about

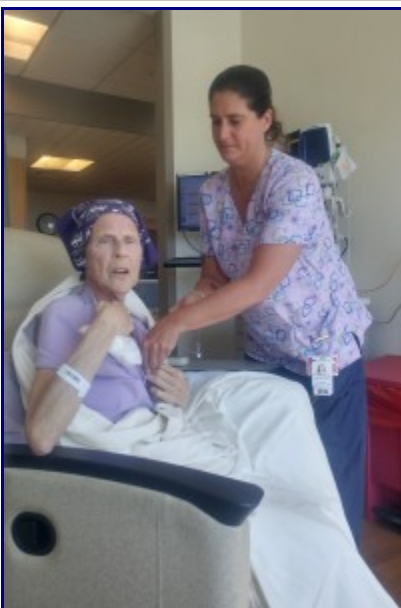
15 minutes after the start of the 4-hour infusion. And she slept until it was over. I did puzzles and slept a bit myself. All in all, a very calm, quiet and drama-free infusion.

Our greatest worry was the morning after. We expected severe nausea but were delightfully surprised when there was none. She did have some tingling in her extremities and a slight headache, but very minor. A non-event, really. The headache was a bit worse the second day, but still not horrible.

Jett now says that she will gladly do more treatments if they are all this benign. That is important because her contract with me and her children was that she would try one treatment and after that it was up to her.



Checking in



Starting the infusion



Happy that it is over

"Dragon" by Clive Cussler

5 Jul 2019

[Copyright 1990 by Clive Cussler Enterprises, Inc., published by Pocket Books.](#)

Another Clive Cussler adventure yarn featuring the intrepid Dirk Pitt. As usual, Dirk gets the girl. Two girls in this case. The interesting part about that is that they have lunch together at the end of the book, as they are tipping a glass to the dearly departed Dirk (no, not really, but they thought he was gone) and one - the long-term squeeze who happens to also be a member of Congress - asks the other whether she and Dirk, um, you know... The other lies and says "no".

Damn! I was really hoping for a knock-down-drag-out catfight in one of DC's finer dining establishments.

This book probably didn't sell well in Japan because the plot involves a nefarious plot by a criminal/industrial group loosely associated with the Japanese government to take over the world via nuclear blackmail. Unbeknownst (wink, wink) to the Japanese government, this group develops a nuclear weapons factory and ships compact nuclear weapons around the world disguised as automobile air conditioners. The cars are marked by being painted shit brown, which should have been a sure-fire giveaway because who buys a shit-brown car? Ok, the US government, sure, but who else?

The US government catches wind of the plot when one of the cars accidentally detonates in the Pacific enroute to LA. The reason it detonated? There was a gunshot fired in the hold of the cargo ship and the bullet pierced

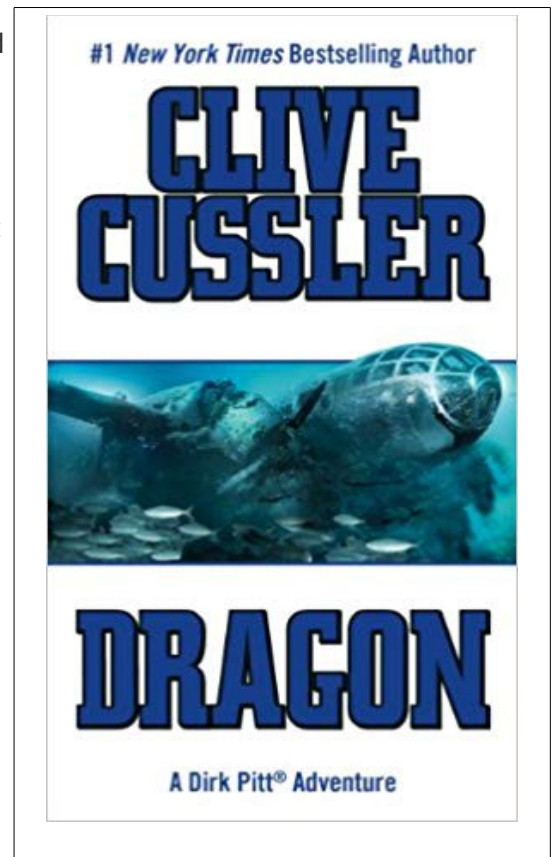
the bogus air conditioner. Hmm... makes me wonder what would have happened if one of these bomb cars had collided with an 18-wheeler while on its way to its final destination. The Japanese apparently knew how to build a sophisticated nuclear weapon but couldn't figure out a way to keep it from detonating accidentally.

An even more implausible plot element is this: the US government learned the location of 4 of the bomb cars, found a way to clandestinely infiltrate the storage area and steal one of the A/C nukes for study, but didn't bother to keep the rest of the cars under surveillance. They didn't even attach tracking devices. So, hours before the control center that could send the signal to explode the nuclear bombs and kill millions became operational, it is discovered that the other vehicles have vanished, leading to a frantic search.

Really? Four nuclear weapons on US soil and putting them under surveillance is too much trouble?

I actually enjoyed this book, but you have to swallow a whole lot of unpalatable nonsense to enjoy the main course, which is, of course, Dirk Pitt single-handedly saving the world and not only killing all the bad guys but sinking their island home into the sea. What a guy! He is definitely catfight material.

7.5 out of 10.



Our family reunited

6 Jul 2019

For a month Jett and I have survived without Rusty. Jett's son Josh took him from Florida to Virginia so that we could get north on the train (where dogs are not allowed) and took very good care of him. He returned him to us last Friday by driving up from Virginia after we took up residence in the [Extended Stay America](#) (ESA) hotel in Westborough MA. I am sure that Josh would have made the trip any time we asked (thank you, Josh!) but he conveniently combined the delivery of Rusty with attendance at his aunt Sybil's 80th birthday party. Sybil is, of course, Jett's sister. She was very happy to have her nephew at her party.

Rusty probably misses the large Virginia house. He is now cooped up in a studio apartment much of the day every day. But he does get out for his regular walks and, of course, gets his regular treats. His tail still wags. And there are other dogs in the hotel, so he can even socialize a bit.

Meanwhile, we are getting settled into the apartment. We have a small kitchen and so are able now to make simple meals. We had to buy a lot of disposable dinnerware because ESA was a bit slow to get real dinnerware to us. And when it arrived it was a pretty paltry set - 2 place settings plus a saucepan - so we had to get more at Wal-Mart. The refrigerator was also very small, but ESA has upgraded that to a 14 cf model which is more than adequate. So we are settling in. We expect to be here until at least mid-September. Maybe longer.

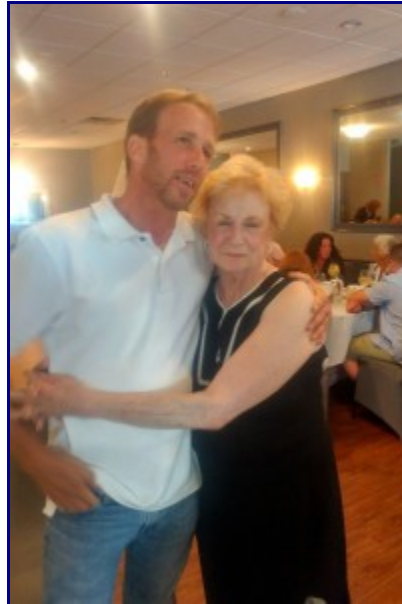
It probably won't be a fun summer. But at least the whole family can now suffer together.



Rusty in his new home



Cristina, Josh, Rusty and Jett



Josh and Sybil at her party



Our first ESA meal

Worcester's EcoTarium

17 Jul 2019

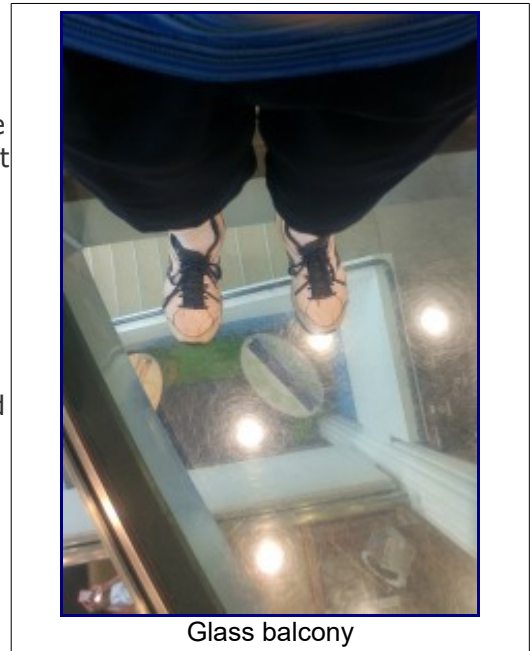
In an effort to get to better know the city where I am doing time this summer - and to, perhaps, make this blog just a little less depressing - I made a brief visit to Worcester's [EcoTarium](#) yesterday. TripAdvisor ranks it as the #2 attraction in Worcester (the #1 attraction, the Worcester Art Museum, was closed for the day). It is described by one TripAdvisor reviewer as "a good place to take young children" so my expectations were low. But I was moderately impressed. It is indeed a good place to take young children, but there were plenty of exhibits that I found interesting as well.

I would characterize the EcoTarium as a science museum with an ecological slant, with some zoo animals added as a sweetener. The zoo exhibits were not very interesting. They had a couple of rescued bald eagles, which might be of interest to people who have never seen a bald eagle up close and personal. There were also some interesting turtle species in their wetlands exhibit. But I was most attracted to the science exhibits which, while small (a shadow of Boston's Museum of Science), were well done and engaging. Too often, in a small museum, exhibits tend to be broken or out of date. That wasn't the case here.

There were small exhibits of the dynamic flow of both fog and wind and a nice explanation of why the top of Mount Washington is so windy. The balcony on the top floor had a glass floor which wasn't actually an exhibit, but did test my trust of the strength of glass.

The grounds are not extensive but are well-kept and had some hiking trails (which I didn't try). There is also a small train that runs around the perimeter, which I also didn't try.

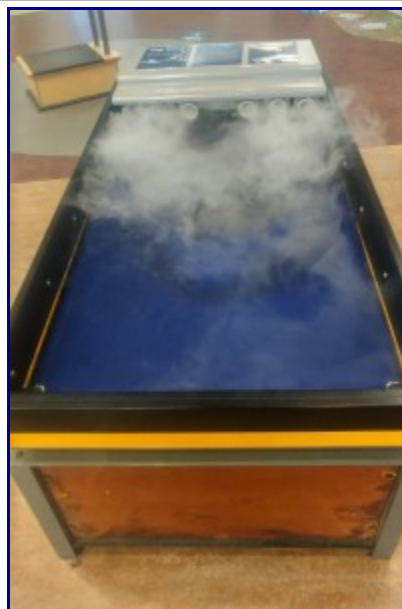
Summary: not great, but not bad. I may bring my granddaughter here, to see how a teen reacts.



Glass balcony



City Science area



Fog flow exhibit



Train



Outdoor playground



Another playground area

Cloning our life

19 Jul 2019

When Jett and I left Flagler Beach, headed north on Amtrak, we took as many of our belongings as we could carry in one large suitcase and four small shopping bags. A few days after we arrived, I returned to Florida to return the RV to its home base and to collect more of our belongings - what would fit into another large suitcase and a small carry-on. I think I did a fabulous job in selecting items to bring north as so far the only thing that regret not bringing is my back-scratcher.

So, for the first two or three weeks in Massachusetts, we were operating with a fairly small subset of our possessions - or "**stuff**" as George Carlin would put it. It was obvious



Bathroom storage



Hamper

that we would have to replace some of the things we left behind if we were to live in Massachusetts all summer without our RV.

When we moved into our Extended Stay America studio apartment, the need to clone our life intensified. We started acquiring things needed to enhance our apartment - a coffee maker (and I chose red because I decided we needed a little color in our lives), additional cookware, silverware, glassware and kitchen utensils. The bathroom, which is spacious with a wonderfully comfortable shower and fine water pressure, lacked any kind of shelving or cabinetry, so I acquired one of those cheap (\$19) three-drawer plastic dresser units. We also started buying additional clothes - underwear, shirts, shorts, slacks - until we had a sufficient quantity that we didn't have to do laundry every four days. A clothes hamper. A DVD player and a few DVDs. Fortunately we will not have to replicate our RV collection of over 500 DVDs as Jett's brother has a large DVD library (alphabetized!) from which we can borrow.

I bought a minimalistic set of 3 golf discs so that I can play disc golf. And just yesterday I purchased, second-hand, for under \$150, a complete set of golf clubs so I can also play real golf.

Most of this will not be going back to Florida with us. The golf clubs will probably be put into our storage unit until I decide whether to bother moving them south. The other stuff will probably be donated or discarded.

But in the meantime all of this duplicate "stuff" will assist us in cloning our life.



New 3-cup Keurig



DVD player

New Salem Old Home Day

24 Jul 2019



The entertainment tent

New Salem MA is a *very* small town - fewer than 1,000 residents. The center of the town consists of a few public buildings and maybe 20 houses. There just isn't much there. But if you ever lived there you are invited to return for the annual "Old Home Day". Presumably it is intended to be a day for reunions of current and former residents, but mostly it is an excuse to party.

This civic party was on July 20th this year. It is a very small party, consisting of some homemade food sales, a luncheon served in the basement of the Congregational Church, a 5-minute parade and, most notably, a really fine book sale at the library and two really fine bands

giving free concerts: the **Bad News Jazz and Blues Orchestra** (18 pieces!) and the **Original Blues Brothers Band** (a Blues Brothers tribute band). Both bands were excellent. Fortunately we had a shady seat near the entertainment tent - important since the temperature was pushing 95 degrees.

We met Jett's siblings Sybil, Christine and Ray there, along with our sister-in-law Kim. A fine time was had by all and ended with a brief (for us anyway) visit to Ray and Kim's New Salem cabin. The book haul from the library sale - 16 books - pretty much guarantees that we won't run out of reading material while we are in Massachusetts.



Keeping cool



Classical school building



Siblings



Mini parade



Food tent (yummy!)



16 books

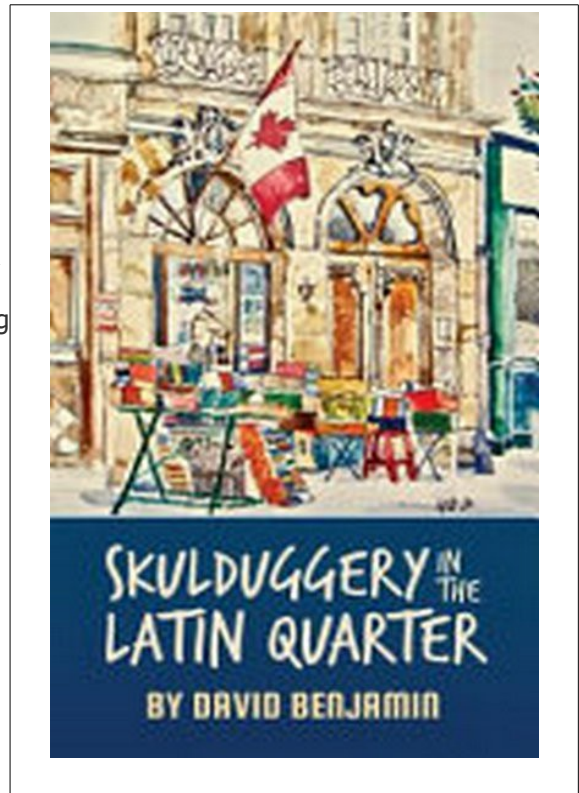
"Skulduggery in the Latin Quarter" by David Benjamin

31 Jul 2019

[Last Kid Books, April 2019. Copyright 2018 by David Benjamin.](#)

If you have read any of Benjamin's other novels - in particular, *Three's a Crowd* which is also a mystery and is also (partially) set in Paris - you will be struck by his growth as an author. While the characters in *Three's a Crowd* are comic caricatures, the characters in *Skulduggery in the Latin Quarter* are very fully formed, complex and distinct. And there is a bunch of them. The plot involves the theft of an extremely valuable T.S. Lawrence manuscript and the efforts of a rag-tag group of book aficionados - and a stripper - to recover it. This seemingly simple larceny spirals into a deadly multi-country chase involving not one but several underworld characters. The body count grows as the plot develops. I lost count, but this is by far Benjamin's most bloody book.

And it has several surprises. The first is that the main protagonist is not Chester Quinn, the guy who runs an English-language bookstore in the Latin Quarter from which the manuscript is purloined, but Circe Evans, a legendary stripper from a legendary strip joint, [Le Crazy Horse Saloon](#). It turns out that this stripper is the granddaughter of [Homer Evans](#), a legendary Parisian detective. Now I need to note that the Crazy Horse is a real strip joint but Homer Evans is a fictional character. Mixing real and imaginary is an interesting literary choice but it is an easy one to swallow.



The rest of the rag-tag posse consists of a painter, another stripper, another bookseller, and a colorful superhero with a cape and a sword (really) who chooses to use the moniker "Bodkin the Bold." He serves as the jester of the group, up to the point where he decapitates one of the bad guys with his blade. Body count.

The author clearly loves both Paris and the English language. He gives the reader a full tour of both. If you don't like loving descriptions of real Parisian streets and haunts, along with some famous landmarks, this book may not be for you. Similarly, if you don't like learning a bunch of words that you have never, ever seen or heard

before, this book is not for you. I would advise keeping a dictionary handy. Some of the 10-cent words that I culled from the last quarter of the book: [postprandial](#), [ecdysiast](#), [hyrax](#), [proscenium](#), [macguffin](#). There were dozens of these. I thought I knew the language, but this book proved otherwise.

Early on, the sheer volume of characters made reading difficult as I had to keep stopping to mentally keep the cast ordered in my mind. The bad guys were very shadowy - to the point where the police didn't believe that they existed. That was also a bit hard to swallow. Why would this rag-tag group be aware of these nefarious characters and the police weren't? There is also an attempt on Quinn's life that I found hard to swallow. But all of these flaws were forgotten in the rather glorious (and, yes, bloody) finale which I found surprisingly satisfying. The final chapter contains the final surprise, which I won't reveal, but everything is (mostly) tied up pretty tightly.

Overall I found this to be an exceptionally well-crafted novel, one that left me admiring the author's skill. It wasn't easy reading throughout, but it was satisfying.

7.5 out of 10.

Still puzzling

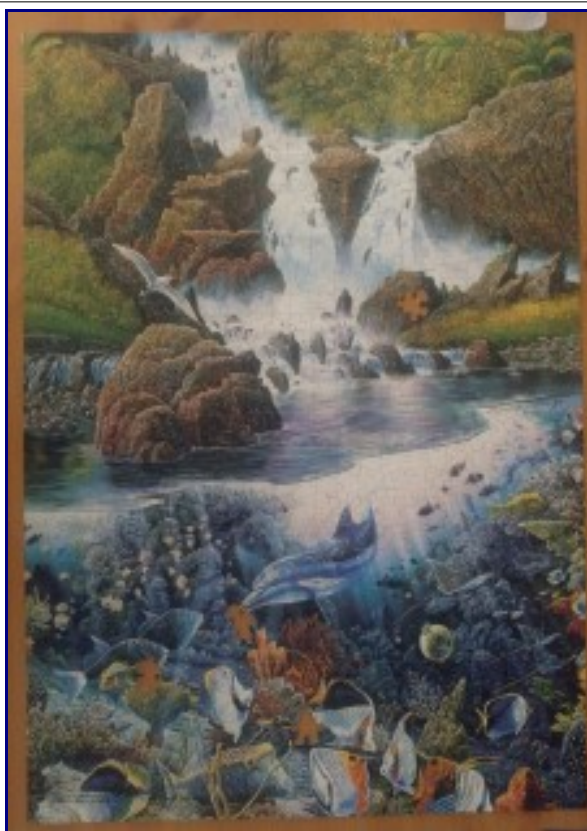
3 Aug 2019

Since leaving Florida - and pretty much while there all winter - the only jigsaw puzzles that I have done were the computer ones. These are 300 pieces with all the pieces correctly oriented. They are fun, but they are a shadow of a real jigsaw puzzle of 500 pieces or more.

So in addition to buying 16 books at the library book sale at the recent New Salem Old Town Day, I also bought a used 750-piece puzzle from a private vendor. Used puzzles almost always are missing pieces. But for a buck... what the heck.

I got a 750-piece puzzle that looked like it might be a challenge (it was). And, true to form, it was missing 4 pieces (my challenge to you: spot them in the photo). Took me about 3 days of spare time. I enjoyed doing it. I may want to do another sometime before I leave Massachusetts.

But the next one will be new, sealed at the factory, no missing pieces.



746 pieces

"The Woods" by Harlan Coben

4 Aug 2019

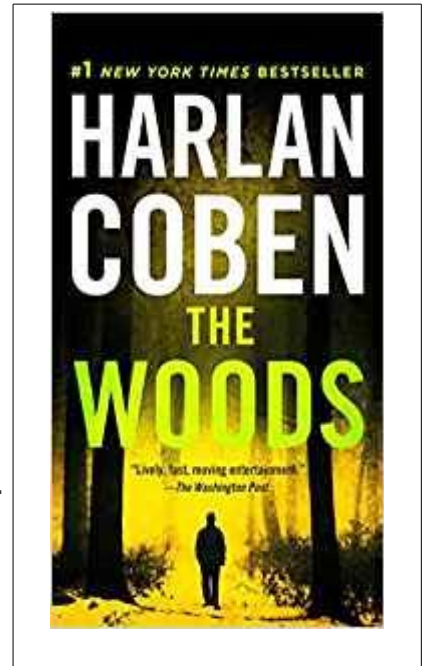
[Published by Signet, 2008. Copyright 2007 by Harlan Coben.](#)

I usually leave my summary rating to the end, but in this case I will put it right up front: 9.5 out of 10. This may be the most satisfying mystery that I have read in many years.

The story centers on the disappearance in the woods (hence the title) of four teens at summer camp some 20 years prior. Two bodies were found, throats slashed. The other two were never found but were presumed dead and buried.

Until a man appears in the morgue, the victim of a murder.

The protagonist, Paul Copeland, was at that camp that summer and is now a county prosecutor. He is called to the morgue as a "person of interest" because papers containing his name, along with newspaper clippings of the slaughter in the woods, were found on the dead guy. He is initially unable to identify the man but then is shocked to see a very distinctive scar on his arm. This is one of the two kids who were presumed dead but whose bodies were never found. The other "presumed dead" person is Camille Copeland, Paul's older sister. If one of the two survived the night in the woods and just disappeared, is it possible that she also survived and just disappeared? If so, why? If so, where is she?



Paul was not completely blameless that night 20 years prior. He was a camp counselor and was supposed to be looking out for the campers that night, but was, in fact, in the woods, too, losing his virginity to his summer sweetheart, Lucy Silverstein. Both Paul and Lucy lied to police about where they were that night and what they were doing, which they justified as a "little white lie" that protected their reputations and had no bearing on the events that evening. But the guilt followed both for 20 years.

Lucy, now a professor at a small college, gets her own shock: an essay, written by one of her young students anonymously, perfectly details her tryst with Paul that night. It can't be fiction, but how could anyone - particularly a student who was a toddler at that time - know what she did that night? The terrifying conclusion: it has to be coming somehow from the murderer. But a serial killer who was also a camp counselor that summer and was strongly suspected, has been incarcerated for years.

And that is only part of the mystery. This story is deep and complex and comes to a very satisfying conclusion.

Highly recommended.

Worcester Art Museum

6 Aug 2019

The [Worcester Art Museum](#) will never be put in the same category as The Louvre or even Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. However, for an art museum located in a small city, it isn't bad. Better than I expected.

Let's start with the building itself. It is rather grand. Neo-gothic, I think, with a sunlit interior courtyard that features a very large Roman mosaic on the floor, plus a few more lining the courtyard walls. Rooms off of this



Interior courtyard with mosaic



Greek statues



Chinese bust



Medieval armor

courtyard contain some very nice collections of ancient art, including Greek, Roman and Chinese artifacts. The exhibits are arranged roughly in chronological order, so as you move clockwise around the courtyard you encounter art that is less and less ancient. However, all of the exhibits on the main floor are pretty darn old.

The second floor is reserved for paintings. Again, moving clockwise the paintings become more modern. There

are not a lot of modern pieces, just a room of impressionist works. But for a small museum the variety and quality of the works are impressive.

The museum also has a rather large library, which I found surprising, and a cafe which I didn't sample but which was very attractive, with an exterior courtyard.

Overall, pretty nice. Expensive for the size - I paid the \$14 senior price and younger adults would pay \$16. But it is free the first Sunday of every month. If you like art and find yourself in Worcester MA, take a look.



Impressionist room featuring Gauguin

"Foreign Affairs" by Stuart Woods

21 Aug 2019

[Copyright 2015 by Stuart Woods. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons.](#)

This is one of Stuart Woods' many books featuring Stone Barrington, lawyer superhero. There are a bunch of these and this is #35 in the series.

I am somewhat facetious when I call Stone a "lawyer superhero." But his character approaches superhero stature. He is, besides a lawyer, an investor, a pilot, a detective and a lover. In this book he plays piano. I suspect that if the situation needed him to weave a Hopi rug, he could do it.

And that is the problem. He is just not believable. Yeah, I know - I am a fan of Jack Reacher and John Puller who come pretty darn close to superhero status. But the difference is this: they don't get calls from a cardinal, the head of MI6, the Director of the CIA and the President of the United States offering their assistance in resolving Stone's problem. And the director of MI6 is one of his lovers. She had better take a number, apparently.

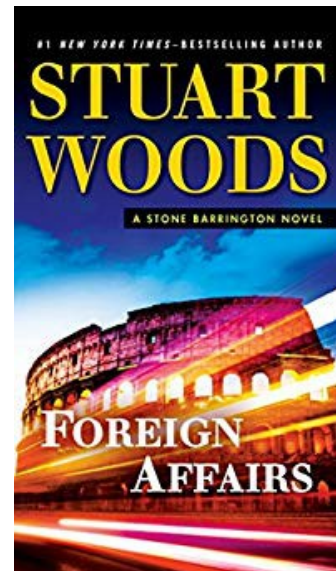
So I didn't much care for the character. What else didn't I care much for? Oh, yeah - the plot.

Stone is an investor in a hotel project in Rome which is being shaken down in a protection racket by an Italian mafioso recently booted from the United States. Now it is not clear what this guy expected to get out of this pretty penny-ante scheme. Certainly nothing to justify kidnapping Stone's current squeeze. Certainly no benefit that justified killing a couple of guys that he thought might sell him out for the reward that Stone posted. Certainly nothing that justifies the intense pressure placed on him due to the concerted efforts of all of Stone's friends in high places.

And yet he persists. But Stone takes him down in the most ridiculous way - by posing as a pianist in a jazz quartet playing at the bad guy's party. The takedown consists of calling the guy onto stage, pointing a gun at him and arresting him. Where is the drama in that?

This is the first Stone Barrington novel I have read. And probably the last.

3 out of 10.



Extended Stay America

24 Aug 2019



Our summer home

Yesterday was our 60th day in residence at Extended Stay America (ESA) in Westborough MA. The plan is to stay 90 days, then head back to Florida, if Jett is well enough to go back home. I think the chances of that are pretty good - better than 90%. While she is still very ill with incurable cancer, the treatment that she has received, first in Florida and then in Massachusetts, has stabilized her condition and, barring a sudden growth in her existing tumors or further metastasization, I think she will be able to travel.

It will be good to be back "home" in our RV. It is not a matter of space - our handicap-accessible room at ESA is larger than our RV; it is a matter of having all our "stuff" back. As I mentioned previously, we have done our best to clone our RV life by buying appliances, utensils, clothing and other things that we needed for a long-term stay, but there is still a lot we left behind. Most notably clothes. We are getting by with a minimal wardrobe. If we stayed until the cold weather hit we would have to buy a LOT of new, warmer clothing.

I will give a review of our stay at ESA, but first let me remind you why we are here rather than in a campground, in our RV. The main reason is that Jett was much too weak and ill to make the 2-week trip north in the truck. I could have gone back down and brought the RV north, alone, but we needed to be close to UMASS Memorial Hospital for treatment and the closest RV campground is over 45 minutes away. Plus Jett would have had to navigate the difficult RV steps, which would be an ordeal. And there would be no cost benefit - every campground within an hour is more expensive than ESA's "introductory rate" (about \$1300 for 30 days).

The trip north in the RV, alone, would have been an ordeal even if the truck had performed well. Given the trouble that I encountered while taking the RV back to Ft Myers, the expected 2-week trip could easily have become a 3-week trip.

So why ESA? We had other short-term stay options, including renting an apartment on a 3-month lease. The problems with those options are: (1) expense (a fully-furnished apartment in the Boston metro area is over \$2,000 per month), (2) the dog (most furnished apartments don't allow pets), (3) utilities (I would have had to arrange for electricity, cable TV and maybe gas), and (4) timing (I had to get a place quickly and some options might not be available for weeks). Just the thought of spending days running around looking at apartments was daunting. The chances of finding a suitable place were small. Meanwhile, the ESA option - perfectly suitable - was there for the taking. No hassle, no fuss. I toured the property two days after we arrived in Worcester and booked it the next day. Easy, peasy.

So what did we get for our money? A spacious, wheelchair-friendly studio apartment with a very comfortable queen bed, a small sofa, a handicap-accessible bathroom with a very nice shower, a kitchen with 2-burner stove, microwave, refrigerator and dishwasher, air conditioning and cable TV (pretty basic but with 2 Showtime channels and NESN so I can watch all the Red Sox games). We were also provided with a puny set of cooking gear - 2 pots (no covers), 2 plates, 2 cups, 2 bowls, 2 spoons, 2 knives and 2 forks. We went out and supplemented that cooking stuff pretty quickly. After 60 days we are comfortable.

Our ESA home also comes with once-a-week housekeeping (we can get fresh towels and linens on other days, by trading used for fresh at the desk), an in-building laundromat (not cheap but effective), a small patio in an attractive courtyard where Jett can smoke and meet others sharing that vice and enough surrounding greenery to keep Rusty interested. We can also get mail delivered to us at ESA.

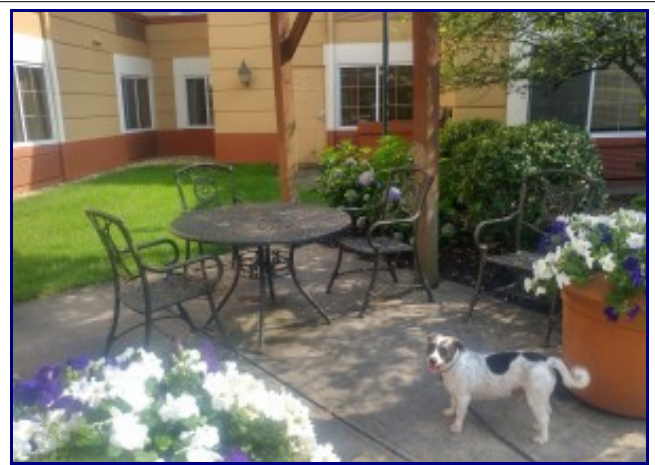
What doesn't it have? First and foremost, there is no pool. Apparently one existed until recently (Google Earth shows one), but it has been filled in. There is also no on-premises restaurant or even one within walking distance. There is, however, an Owen O'Leary's not far away which is adequate if not spectacular in its culinary offerings and has some very nice craft beers.

Combine the amenities, the cost and the location and the result is a very acceptable residence for our enforced vacation in Massachusetts.

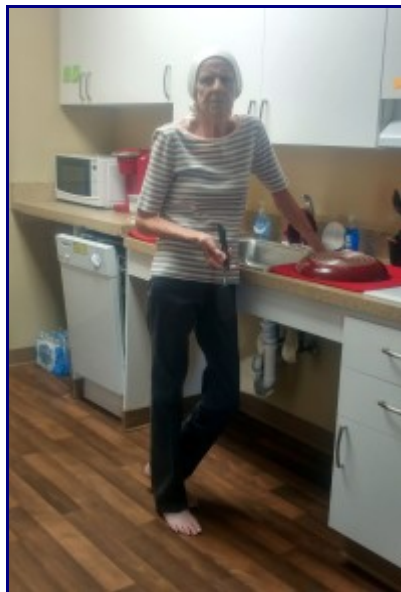
Jett has even suggested the possibility of staying longer than 90 days, primarily to continue treatment at UMASS, which she likes very much. But the "introductory rate" has a 120-day limit after which the price just about doubles. And once you get into November the weather starts getting pretty chilly. So there is a slight possibility that our stay could extend to Oct 21 rather than Sep 21. But beyond that? Ain't gonna happen.

I don't know whether to mark this

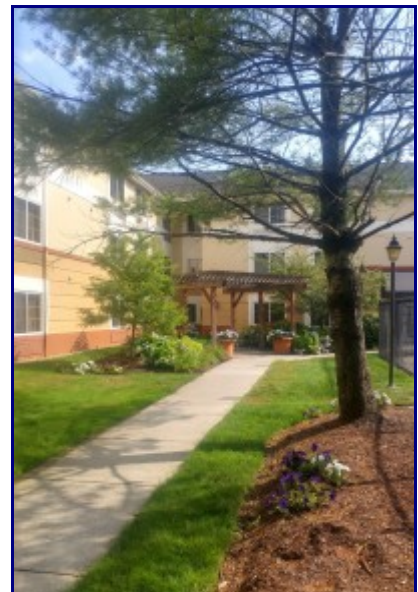
as a plus or a minus, but we have met some very interesting people in our 60 days here. As it is an "extended stay" facility, it doesn't attract a lot of overnight travelers. Mostly the clientele consists of people staying for a



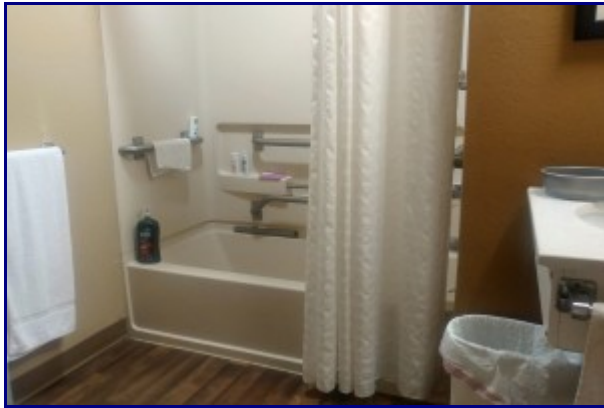
The smoking patio



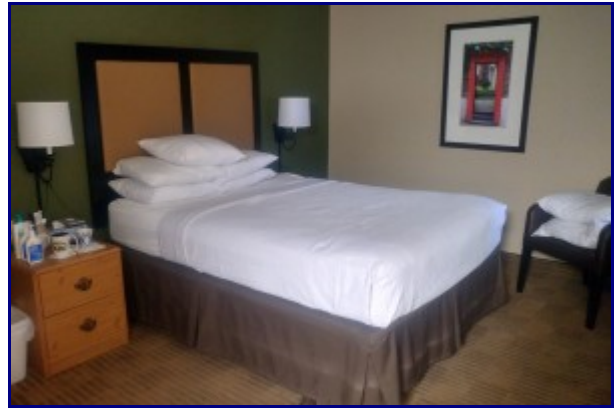
Jett in our minimalist kitchen



The courtyard



Nice shower with grab bars galore



Very comfortable bed

week or more or, like us, one month or more. A lot of the tenants are in town on short-term work assignments. Some are waiting for housing to become available. A few of the more interesting ones are desperate cases who are one small step away from homelessness.

The saddest case was John, boyfriend of April and stand-in father to two very nice young children. We first became aware of John on our first weekend at ESA when he was playing with the kids loudly - and somewhat roughly - for hours on a nice afternoon, down in the patio area which is directly under our window. Jett met him shortly thereafter while on a smoke break. John bummed one of her cigarettes - the first of many. He would have you believe that he was pretty well-to-do, with two recent-model vehicles, but was always scraping for money for food. He had severe medical issues which had him relying heavily on pain pills and was disabled, on SSI. It quickly became obvious that he took more pain medication than was prescribed and that something inevitably happened that he ran out of pills before his next batch became available. One time it was his "daughter" knocking the pills into the sink and down the drain. Another time it was someone breaking into his car and stealing them. He was always desperate for more pills, was always trying to find a way to get more prescribed. And he drank. Heavily. Pills and booze are never a good combination, particularly when you are driving for Lyft (it was actually April who got the Lyft job and he was just "helping out", but she never drove) and had no valid license. Toward the end of his month at ESA he was arrested for DUI and driving without a license and had his car towed. He had to sell his TV to get it back. He was a source of daily drama at ESA and was eventually evicted, along with April and the two kids. We liked the girlfriend and the kids, but had to wonder why she had taken him on. Sad case, but memorable.

Rockport and the "George Stone discount"

5 Sep 2019

Jett and I traveled to Rockport MA a week ago, to visit her mother's grave and to generally enjoy Rockport, her childhood summer home and still one of our favorite places on the planet. Her brother, George Stone, lived there his entire life. He was a bit of a character (an understatement) but a lovable one. Longtime residents of Rockport all remember him fondly. This worked in our favor, unexpectedly, as we had lunch at Rockport's famous [Roy Moore Lobster Company](#), which is more retail lobster shop than restaurant, but does have a few picnic tables out back where you can sit and devour the lobsters you purchase inside. We did just that. I ordered the lobster roll and a cup of fish chowder and Jett had a



Roy Moore Lobster Co

couple of shrimp cocktails. When time came to settle the bill, we were informed that we were receiving the "George Stone discount" which slashed our tab from over \$30 to just \$20. A pleasant and unexpected bonus to our day in Rockport. All I can say is thank you, George, for being so lovable.

We also strolled the length of Bearskin Neck, the artsy-fartsy road to the jetty, consumed some ice cream, watched the waves and bought some candy at [Tuck's Candy Factory](#). The usual stuff. We hadn't been to Rockport in 2 years and found that very little had changed.

And that's a good thing.



Jetty



Bearskin Neck



Lunch



Jett resting after ice cream



Rockport harbor and Motif #1

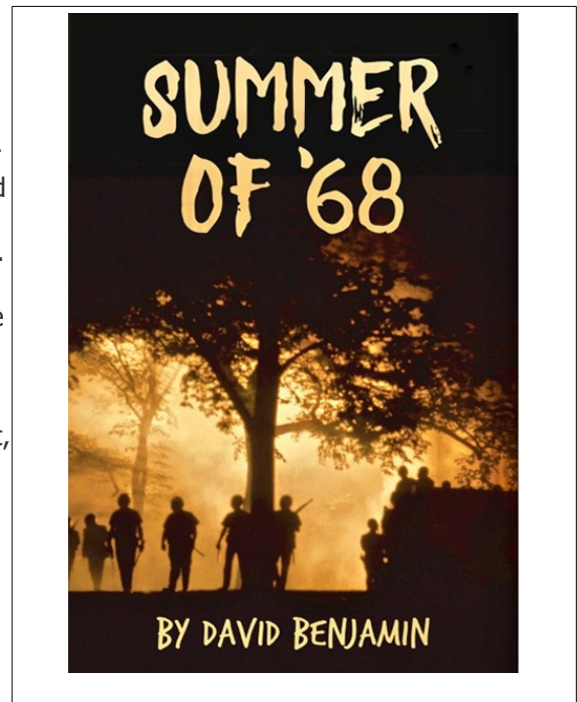
"Summer of '68" by David Benjamin

8 Sep 2019

[Copyright 2018 by David Benjamin. Published by Last Kid Books, Madison WI.](#)

I have mentioned before that the author is my bff from high school. I have read all of his books and have followed his career closely. He is, in the words of my sister-in-law who has also read at least one of his books, a "wordsmith." He really knows the language (actually, several languages) and can craft a fine story. I think his best book is his collection of essays, [Almost Killed by a Train of Thought](#), but this novel now ranks second, close behind.

The story centers on a summer camp in the woods of Wadsworth County, WI, in the summer of 1968. The protagonist, Franklin Roosevelt Cribbs, or "Cribbsy", is an 18-year-old counselor, a freshly-minted high school graduate who is eagerly anticipating his entry into college. But for the summer he is responsible for "Smith 3", one of the cabins housing 16 11- to 15-year old boys with an artistic streak, most of them refugees from the darkest, most dangerous streets of Chicago. Besides the counselors, the camp is run by a contingent of "Work



Campers" who are, without exception, paroled felons doing community service to prove that they are trustworthy enough to be allowed back into society. The elements are in place for a rather "interesting" summer. Which also happens to be the summer of turmoil: the murders of MLK and RFK and the police riot that characterized the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Layered on top of this societal and political angst is the presence of a 14-year-old girl who becomes deeply infatuated with Cribbsy. Pathological kids, felonious Work Campers, a hippy-dippy camp director and a jail-bait teen bent on seduction. What could go wrong?

A lot.

Cribbsy skirts with statutory rape, the kids of Smith 3 come close to mob murder and Cribbsy discovers, eventually, that he is not nearly the complete loser that he had convinced himself he was. This is all related in a compelling sequence of chapters, each focusing on one of the more interesting characters in camp, punctuated by entries in Cribbsy's journal and poems penned by the girl. The dialog is realistic, the stories believable. And it is all wrapped in some pretty insightful commentary on the state of America in the summer of '68.

The commentary on racial relations were, in my view, particularly insightful. One example: the young girls at Camp Nantoka liked to run their fingers through the hair of Cribbsy (blond) and the other counselor in Smith 3 (redhead). They had never felt soft hair. I had never thought that soft hair would appeal to young black girls, but it rings true. Did the author have that experience in real life?

That question - which of these experiences were derived from David Benjamin's life? - was in the back of my mind as I read the book. I, after all, spent most of that summer with him (and he was *not* a camp counselor that summer). I even worked at the Oconomowoc Canning Company with him, so I know that those experiences that he included in the book were true because I shared them with him. There were many other scenes in the book that I know are autobiographical, but I won't mention them. You can read the book knowing that *some* of it is true. But which parts?

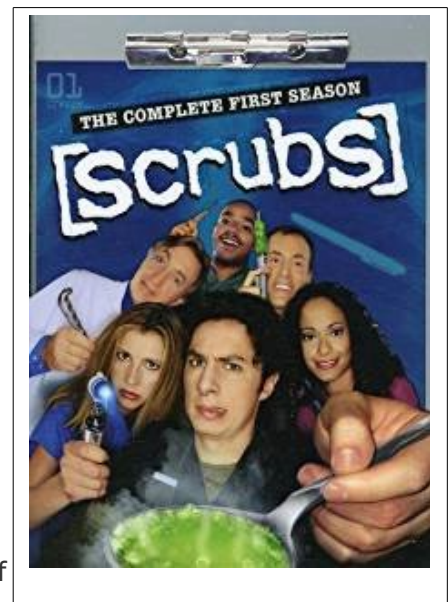
7.5 out of 10.

Scrubs

16 Sep 2019

[Scrubs](#) - the TV series - ran for 9 seasons, from 2001 to 2010. It was popular, of course - any series that runs that long has to be popular - but I was never a regular viewer. This summer it has become an entertainment respite. Jett has been spending a lot of time in bed and the cable TV has been minimal. So when we bought the first season of *Scrubs* at the New Salem Library yard sale in July and enjoyed it, we started looking for the second season. Then the third season. And the fourth. We are currently awaiting delivery of the seventh season DVDs.

One unique thing about *Scrubs* is the use of fantasy. John Dorian (J.D., played by Zach Braff) is forever imagining things. For example, it occurs to J.D. that residents and surgeons have a natural competitiveness, like two gangs, so cut to surgeons and residents dancing down the hall of the hospital, like the Jets and the Sharks. And lots of visual gags, many involving Janitor (Neil Flynn). But I hadn't fully appreciated the role of music in the series. Every episode has some good music, sometimes featuring original artists. But the entire cast - with the exception of Braff and Flynn - are really fine vocalists. Singing doctors. The modern version of



singing cowboys, I guess.

In any case, I am now a big fan of *Scrubs*. I would have to rank the series ahead of *Friends* and pretty close to *Cheers* in terms of its comedic quality.

Jett's folding wheelchair

18 Sep 2019

While still in Florida, it became painfully obvious that Jett was going to need a wheelchair - first to get her north on the train and then to get around to her medical appointments and social engagements. The main requirement was that it be **light** - I didn't want to wrestle with a full-size wheelchair on the train. It also had to be easily folded so that I could fit it in the trunk of our Corolla. Durability, though nice, was not a major requirement as it was unclear how long it would be needed or how often it would be used.

It also had to be available within 5 days in Flagler Beach Florida. One obvious source was WalMart. They offer, via their website, a wide variety of wheelchairs and all of them can be had within a few days via pickup at a local store. I ordered the [Drive Lightweight Steel](#)

[Transport Wheelchair](#). Price was not a huge factor, but the price on this one - under \$120 delivered - solidified its place at the top of my list.

I picked it up at the local WalMart - about 10 miles from our campground - the day before we boarded the train and was immediately impressed by its quality construction, its light weight (15 lbs) and the ease of folding it for transport. Jett says it is very comfortable. We have used it a lot and continue to like it very much. A good decision and a purchase that has made our difficult summer just a bit easier.



Lightweight wheelchair

Text messages from my truck

21 Sep 2019

My mother, bless her heart, never learned how to use her cell phone to send text messages. It was just beyond her technical abilities. My truck, on the other hand, sends me text messages frequently. Does that mean that my truck is smarter than my mother? I certainly hope not.

Actually, it is not the truck that sends the messages; it is the Verizon Hum device that is plugged into the truck's diagnostic port. It constantly monitors the truck's status and sends me regular reports on the quality of my driving (quite good, thanks for asking). It also sends me a text message when it detects something amiss.

A week ago it sent me a message to let me know that the battery voltage was getting low - not a surprise as the truck had not been started since the middle of June. It warned me that the voltage was so low that the engine might not start. This was a problem as I really needed the truck to be in running condition in the event that a hurricane approached. So I sent off a note to the resort office offering \$20 to anyone who would take my truck key, go to my site and start the truck, then let it run for 20 minutes. I got no response.

As luck would have it, I received an email two days later from our new neighbor that we have never met. His name is Joshua and he wanted to let me know that he was in Ft Myers and that everything looked good on our

site. He sent me some photos (see the two attached) that not only showed that both the site and the RV were in good shape but induced some serious homesickness in both Jett and me. He also said that he would be there for 2 weeks and was there anything that he could do for us while he was there?

Hmmm... an offer too good to ignore. So I asked if he would mind getting the truck key, try to start it and let the engine run for 20 minutes if it should start. He said he would be happy to do so, reported that the truck started right up, let it idle for 30 minutes and returned the key to the office. He also declined my offer of a \$20 payment.

I feel much better now. I know that the truck will start in an emergency and will almost certainly start when I get back to Ft Myers.

Joshua - I owe you!



The truck, after texting me



The RV at rest, photo by Joshua

"Judgment Call" by J.A. Jance

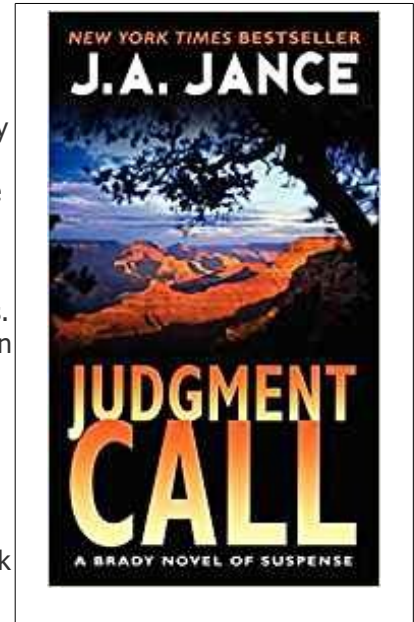
25 Sep 2019

Copyright 2012 by J.A. Jance. Published by HarperCollins, New York.

This is one of Jance's mysteries featuring Joanna Brady, sheriff of Cochise County, Arizona. This is a long series - this is apparently the 15th - so it is very popular. Sheriff Brady is petite, so she isn't capable of overpowering anyone like Jack Reacher or John Puller can do when necessary, but she is tough. She commands well and has a clear head about what needs to be done.

There are several plots here. The main one involves the murder of the principal of Bisbee High School, found in the desert with four gunshot wounds. This is followed the next day by the murder of a woman who is in charge of an artist conference and painting exhibition. What is the connection? Is there a connection?

The secondary plot involves the death of a copper miner many years before. This one ultimately involves the death of Joanna's father who was once a miner who became sheriff. This is ancient history. This plot helps advance Joanna's character and history, but smacks of being thrown in to give the book more weight.



I liked the characters in the book and think that Jance is a fine author. But the plot seems thin to me. The motive of the murderer (spoiler alert: the murders were committed by the same person) seems very thin, on the verge of unbelievable. The motive in the cold case is more believable but less central to the book. And in both cases the identities of the culprits were uncovered due to actions of outsiders rather than due to the diligence of the police. To me this makes the plot rather unsatisfying.

5 out of 10.

Cleared for a return to Florida

4 Oct 2019

After a single round of chemotherapy back in June, the doctor switched her to immunotherapy due to concern over neuropathy (the loss of feeling in her fingers). She has received 4 immunotherapy infusions. Last week she underwent a round of tests to assess the effectiveness of the immunotherapy. Jett was understandably nervous about what the tests would reveal. If the treatments were not effective it would be a death sentence. And we would not be able to return to Florida for the winter.

Fortunately, the assessment was generally positive: while her cancer is not in remission and may never get there, the progress to date has been "miraculous." Yes, the doctor actually said "miraculous." All tumors have shrunk in size. When asked if she was well enough to return to Florida for the winter, he said "absolutely."

So we are currently working out the details of how to get there and how to continue treatments uninterrupted. It is likely that I will drive the Corolla south with Rusty aboard (it is really the only way to get him there), leaving Oct 23 and arriving Oct 26. Because I won't be towing the RV and won't be doing much sightseeing (except, perhaps, visiting the Civil War battlefield in Chancellorsville), I won't treat it as a "trip".

I will load as much stuff in the car as will fit without crushing the dog. Anything I can't fit (like my new golf clubs) will go into the storage unit in MA.

Jett will follow, via a nonstop JetBlue flight, arriving Oct 27. She will likely be accompanied by her sister Christine. She will stay with Christine while I am away.

At this point the greatest immediate threat to Jett's health is her weight. She has lost a couple more pounds and is now in danger of dropping below 90. The doctor is concerned, of course, as she is approaching starvation. He told her if she can't gain weight she will have to go on an IV feeding regimen. She is now taking the threat seriously and is eating every chance she gets, with the aid of a new anti-nausea medication.

She is not out of the woods, but there is now reason to believe that the forest is not as dark and dense as it once appeared.

She is now looking forward to getting back to Ft Myers - especially since the nighttime temperatures in Massachusetts are now dipping into the 40s.



Immunotherapy infusion

“Inferno” by Dan Brown

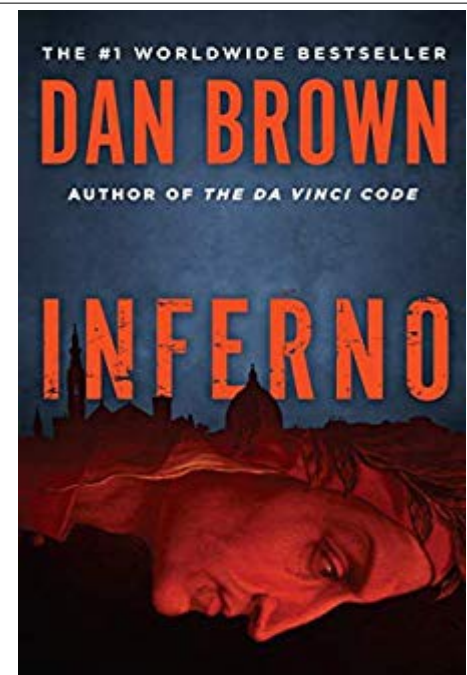
14 Oct 2019

[Copyright 2013 by Dan Brown. Published by Anchor Books, a division of Random House LLC.](#)

This is the 4th book featuring Robert Langdon, the Harvard professor and expert in medieval symbols, the most famous being *The DaVinci Code*. The plot in this one is centered on a brilliant genetic scientist who is a big fan of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and believes that the human race is on the brink of extinction due to overpopulation. His solution is to concoct a new plague that will "thin the herd." He wants to kill a third of the people on earth.

Initially Langdon's role in thwarting this plot is unknown as he is, at the outset, suffering from amnesia. He wakes up in a hospital room in Florence, Italy, with no recollection of the three days prior. He remembers nothing after an evening walk across Harvard Yard. He is apparently involved in something serious as shortly after he regains consciousness a young woman shoots her way into his hospital room, killing a doctor. Langdon barely escapes with his life in the company of another doctor, a young American named Sienna Brooks.

What follows is an epic chase, through Florence, Venice and Istanbul, with Langdon barely escaping numerous times from a black-clad group of assassins who are just one step behind. This book has been made into a movie, apparently, and I can only imagine that it is one long, non-stop chase scene.



My objection to the book, initially, was that the chase was implausible. A Harvard professor and a doctor successfully eluding a large team of assassins? My other objection was that it reads like a chase scene through

a Fodor travel book. The chase visits all the great tourist sites of all three cities. Yes, it did make me more interested in visiting all three cities, but great tourism seems tangential to a plot to kill billions. My feeling, halfway through, was that Dan Brown must have been able to take some very long vacations in Europe and write it all off as "research."

So two-thirds of the way through, my opinion of the book wasn't very high. But he saved up the best for the last third of the book. Nothing is quite what it seems. Unraveling what is going on - and who the bad guys are - becomes very engrossing. He is a fine storyteller and he kept me guessing in this one.

After finishing the book I am left with just one complaint: that Langdon, despite being central to the plot, really doesn't do anything to affect the outcome. The result would have been the same if Langdon had never left Harvard. But, still, the book was well-written and very thought-provoking.

8 out of 10.

UMASS Memorial Medical Center

19 Oct 2019

Our summer in MA has consisted of (1) numerous visits with Jett's family, (2) 4 months of hotel living at Extended Stay America (ESA) and (3) about one visit per week to the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center. I have blogged previously about ESA and have mentioned her family several times - though not each and every visit - so now is a good time to talk about our experience with [UMASS Memorial Medical Center](#).

We love it!

When we were deciding, back in May, how to deal with her new cancer diagnosis, one of the options I considered was renting an apartment close to downtown Boston so that she could be treated at [Dana Farber Cancer Institute](#), the premier cancer treatment center in Massachusetts and one of the finest in the world. A combination of factors, including cost of housing, difficulty in family getting to her to visit and, if we didn't live in Boston, the difficulty getting her into Boston for treatments led me to decide to seek treatment at UMASS Memorial Medical Center in Worcester. At the time I felt that I was opting for a second-best treatment facility due to its logistical superiority.

I no longer think that it is a second-best anything.

I learned, when we went to UMASS for Jett's first meeting with her new oncologist, that UMASS was partnered with Dana Farber and provides the same level and quality of cancer treatment as Dana Farber. That was very comforting, as was the fact that her oncologist was, to quote one of the nurses, "THE lung cancer expert at UMASS" with over 30 years of experience treating difficult lung cancer cases.



Jett's final UMASS infusion



The UMASS ACC

The UMASS facility consists of four large buildings on a beautiful large hillside campus overlooking Lake Quinsigamond. Jett's infusions took place in rooms with a lake view, a soothing panorama that made the somewhat traumatic experiences just a bit more pleasant. This is a teaching hospital and one of the 3 Level 1 Trauma Centers in Massachusetts, so two of the buildings are the medical school and the ER. The main building is the hospital. The fourth building - and the one where we spent 90% of our time - was the Ambulatory Care Center, for outpatient care. The top two floors of this 6-story building are almost exclusively devoted to cancer care. The parking garage is attached, so we could park and get treated without needing to go outside. Very convenient.

The staff? Consistently friendly, pleasant, upbeat, caring, considerate and efficient. We never had the kind of poor communication and misunderstanding that tainted our stay in Flagler Beach. The initial plan for chemotherapy didn't work out well due to a pretty severe neuropathy (numbness in the fingers) side effect, so the plan immediately switched to immunotherapy. I was initially concerned about this because my amateur medical sleuthing suggested that 100% immunotherapy was not nearly as effective as a combination of chemo and immuno. But after the one chemo treatment and four immuno treatments, her tumors had all shrunk, a result which our doctor characterized as "miraculous."

She just received her fifth immunotherapy treatment and we are now headed back to Florida - a place that, back in June, when we took the train north to Massachusetts, I doubted that Jett would ever see again. The fact that she is getting another winter in Florida is due, I believe, to the quality of care she received at UMASS. The plan is to continue the immunotherapy treatments in Florida, then return to MA next summer.

Worcester will be our summer home again next year. And it is because of UMASS that we are now able to talk about "next year."

A visit from the kids. And the grandkid.

21 Oct 2019



Kids and grandkid

For no good reason other than that they love their mother, Jett's two sons came up from Virginia a couple of weeks ago to spend some time with us. They brought Jett's youngest grandchild, Zachary, as well. As usual, a lot of food was consumed over the course of the two-plus days that they were with us. My goal of losing the weight I have gained this summer took a hit. A real punch in its (pudgy) stomach.



Jett and family at Harry's



Kimball Farms



Disc golf

One of the meals was a fabulous breakfast at [Harry's Restaurant](#), a real old-fashioned diner just down the road from our hotel. If you are ever in Westborough (and why would you be?), this is the restaurant that we would recommend. We also made a trip to [Kimball Farms](#) to get some of their outstanding ice cream. Because I needed those extra calories. I did do a disc golf outing but that was just token resistance to the flood of calories.



Jett with family

Seriously, it was great having them around. They are good people who, despite being fans of the Washington Redskins and the Dallas Cowboys, tolerate my Patriots fandom. We watched the Patriots game on the TV during lunch at [Owen O'Leary's](#). Yes, another meal.

Mostly back in Florida

28 Oct 2019

Rusty, the Corolla and I are all back in Florida. Four days, about 1750 miles. The best thing that can be said about the trip is that my back isn't too sore. And no breakdowns and no near-disasters. The worse thing that happened was that I took a couple of wrong turns. They added a few minutes and a few miles to the trip, but no big deal. I did end up crossing the Hudson River via the GW Bridge, which is never fun, but I made it.

On the last leg I stopped for 2 hours in Ocala to visit my son, Tony. We went to lunch. I hadn't seen him for nearly a year, so it was nice catching up.

Jett was supposed to fly in last night, but, as usual, her flight was delayed for hours. She will join us today.

I was pretty apprehensive about what I would find when I got into the RV. Mice? Spoiled food in the refrigerator? Dry toilets? Well, yes, the toilets were dry, but the seals seem to be okay. Likewise, the refrigerator didn't seem to be harboring any bacteria colonies



Tony, at his place in Ocala



Back home, a few minutes after arriving (notice the crumpled bougainvillea)

(though I will let Jett decide what freezer food can be kept). I even opened the half gallon of ice cream that had been in the freezer for 5 months and it was delicious. So my biggest fears were unfounded.

There were, however, a couple of unexpected problems. The water tasted terrible. I tried making coffee with the tap water and it was undrinkable. I used bottled water for the first cups, then let the water run for about 20 minutes to flush the lines. My coffee this morning, made with tap water, was good.

The other unexpected problems had to do with the TV and internet. The router, located in the shed, was off. All of the general outlets in the shed were out. Something happened during the electrical inspection that resulted in the outlets being disabled. I haven't figured out what happened yet, but in the meantime I was able to move the router to the A/C outlet, which still had power, and get the

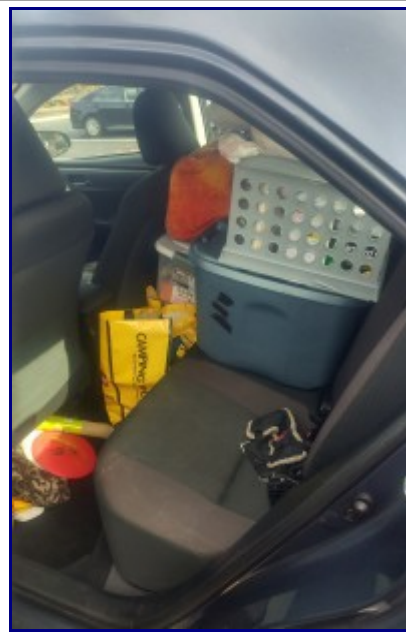
internet back. I had to re-enter my ID and password to connect to Netflix, but I now have internet and Netflix.

I had been notified a few days ago that my beautiful bougainvillea bush had broken free from its support and was doubled over. I straightened it up and reattached it to its supporting stake. Hopefully it will survive as it is a beautiful bush.

I had loaded the car with as much stuff as would fit, leaving the storage unit (downsized from 5x10 to 5x5) only



Downsized storage



Loading the Corolla

half full. I think I might be able to fit what is left into a large SUV. Then I can close out the storage unit and save \$68 per month.

So, I am pretty much back in residence in Fort Myers and, hopefully, today Jett will be able to say the same. She will continue her immunotherapy treatments here. She already has a meeting set up with the oncologist on Friday.

Today the high temp in Chelsea MA will be in the 50's; it will be nearly 90 here. Jett will like that.

First Florida infusion

7 Nov 2019

On Monday Jett received her first immunotherapy infusion in Florida. It was performed at the [Regional Cancer Center](#) of Fort Myers, a very nice facility less than 15 minutes from our Florida home. All went well, though she felt weak for two days afterward.

The big accomplishment, from my perspective, was that all of the arrangements could be made in a short period of time so that she didn't miss a beat on her every-three-weeks infusion schedule. I had to find a facility, make initial contact, arrange with UMASS to get her medical records sent to Florida, arrange an initial meeting with a new oncologist, get the Medicare paperwork done and then, finally, schedule the infusion. Most of the work could be - and was - done while I was still in Massachusetts. But then I had to rely on this new facility to follow through.

They did.

So there was more than a little sigh of relief when we first visited the facility and we discovered that it was much larger than we expected (indicating, in my view, that they really knew how to care for a cancer patient) and when Jett met the new oncologist and declared "I really like her!"

The actual infusion - sorry, I neglected to take a photo - occurred in a very large, open infusion room with at least 32 infusion chairs. We didn't much like the open concept - it was a bit like getting an infusion on the floor of a convention center. But the nurses were very nice and the infusion was only 30 minutes (actually more like 90 minutes, but I think the next one will be faster) so we can tolerate the openness for 30 minutes every three weeks.

So, great relief and a renewed confidence that the forces are in place to continue the cancer battle.

"The Black Widow" by Daniel Silva

13 Nov 2019

[Copyright 2016 by Daniel Silva. Published by HarperCollins.](#)

This is my first Daniel Silva novel. Unlike most of my reading material (mysteries), this is a novel of international intrigue and suspense. The protagonist is Gabriel Allon, an Israeli spy and assassin who is slated to become the next head of Israeli intelligence. But first he has one last operation to run in the field: insertion of an Israeli spy into the heart of ISIS.

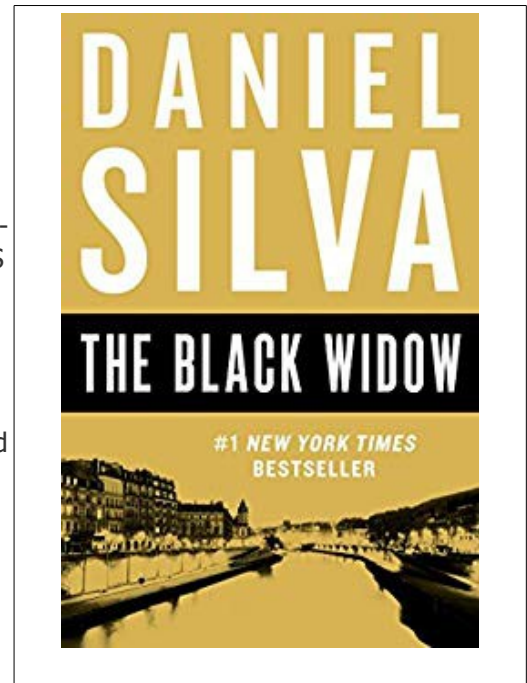
It becomes apparent in the first 50 pages, that this is one of a series of novels featuring Gabriel Allon. As I learned after finishing the book, it is one of a **long** series of novels featuring him: this is the 16th book in the series.

I was impressed with Silva's skill as an author. He kept me interested, both with his characters and his plot. In part because so much came before, the oblique references to his history were somewhat lost on me. If I read more of this series I will start at #1.

The plot in this case was realistic: an ISIS plot to attack Washington DC and kill as many Americans as possible. The insertion of the spy - a female Israeli doctor of Palestinian heritage - into the heart of ISIS - was intended to discover plans for the next terrorist attack being planned by a shadowy ISIS leader named Saladin. The spy was successful in infiltrating ISIS but was not successful in preventing an attack. The result was harrowing. And sobering.

It wasn't a fun book to read, probably because it was all too real and too possible. But I guess that is a tribute to Silva's skill.

7.5 out of 10.



Jett's first wig

22 Nov 2019

Jett finally broke down and purchased a wig. This was, in part, due to the unexpected assessment from her oncologist, that her hair loss may be permanent. Not good news, but we agreed that a good life without hair was still a good life.

Anyway, we visited a wig shop and she picked out one that was (1) short and (2) closely matched her eyebrows (which she hasn't lost). She is pretty happy with her selection and so am I.



Front

Back

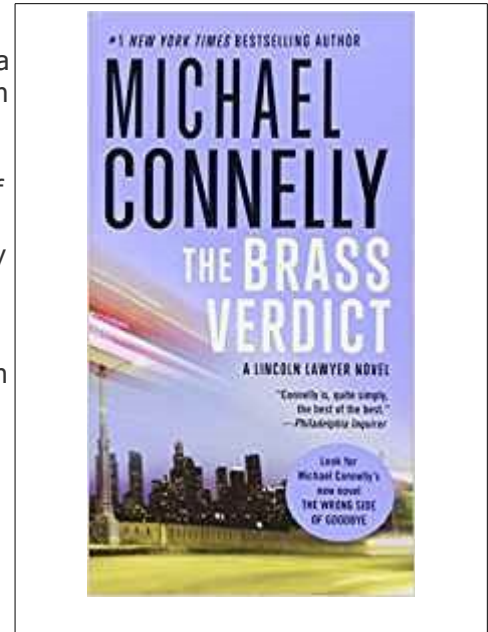
“The Brass Verdict” by Michael Connelly

11 Nov 2019

[Copyright 2008 by Hieronymous Inc. Published by Little, Brown and Company, New York.](#)

This is one of the series of mysteries by Michael Connelly featuring Hieronymous Bosch, LAPD detective. But this one has a twist: Bosch is a supporting character. The main character is Mickey Haller, a lawyer fresh out of drug rehab who gets his career resurrected in a big way when another lawyer dies (shot to death) and he inherits his portfolio of 31 open cases. The big prize in that caseload is the pending murder trial of Walter Elliot, the head of a small-but-growing movie studio. So Haller is immediately thrown into an intense, high-profile murder trial. Some way to ease back into legal life.

Bosch is the detective who is investigating the murder of the lawyer. Haller first encounters him as he enters his inherited office to find Bosch poring over case files. He immediately kicks Bosch out of the office, but soon realizes that until the person who murdered his predecessor is caught he, too, might be in danger. This suspicion is heightened when, after working late in the office, he is attacked by a man in the parking garage - the same man that Bosch had shown him a picture of just a few days earlier. He ultimately teams up with Bosch to unmask the murderer.



So there are several mysteries here. Who murdered the lawyer? Why is Elliot adamant that there be no delay in the trial? Why is Bosch asking Haller about the FBI? All of these questions are nicely intertwined and completely resolved. I can't say it is the most puzzling crime novel I have ever read as I correctly guessed the main culprit early on, but it moves along nicely and has more than the usual number of surprises.

The biggest problem, from a reading enjoyment perspective, is that Haller's career reboot is ultimately not very successful. I found myself rooting for him and was disappointed that things did not work out so great. But such is life, I suppose. The lack of a nice, neat resolution makes the story all the more believable.

7 out of 10.

"The Soul of America" by Jon Meacham

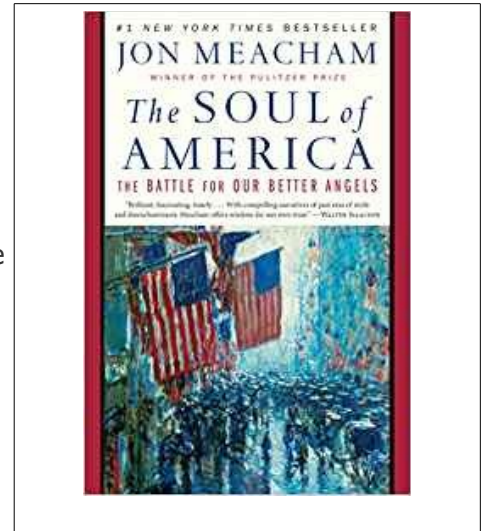
30 Nov 2019

[Copyright 2018 by Merewether LLC. Published by Random House.](#)

It seems that the purpose of this book is to make us feel better about having Donald Trump as President by pointing out other times in our history when things looked similarly bleak. Because the country has survived other bad times and bad leaders, Meacham tries to give us hope that "this, too, shall pass." But I found it more depressing than comforting. I honestly hadn't known much about some of the political travails in our early American history, nor some of the more recent seminal characters like Huey Long. I also hadn't known the extent of the Jim Crow lynchings by the KKK and others - over 3,500, over which fewer than 100 were prosecuted and 12 were convicted. Depressing.

So the book is an interesting history read. But uplifting? Not for me.

5 out of 10.



Farewell, inverter, we hardly knew ye

2 Dec 2019

For those one or two of you who read this blog regularly, you may recall that I complained some time back - certainly in the summer of 2017 and perhaps earlier than that - that our RV inverter - the electronic device that is supposed to provide AC power to our residential refrigerator while we traveled - wasn't working. In fact it never, ever worked. Not once. Each time it cut in it almost immediately cut out, apparently due to what it perceived as an overload of its circuit. Consequently we have never been able to have the refrigerator operating while we traveled, which added an extra level of stress to each trip. We could be pretty comfortable with trips of less than 4 hours because the freezer was still below freezing when we arrived. But as we approached 5 hours on the road the freezer temperature crept close to 32, running the risk of things thawing and bacteria growing. At the very least all of the ice in the ice dispenser would start to melt, creating an ungodly mess.

You might also remember that I complained about this to Camping World. It wasn't really Camping World's fault - it should have fallen on the manufacturer, Thor Industries. But it cost us \$67 to have the less-than-brilliant technicians at Camping World look at the problem and declare that the culprit was a weak battery. Uh, guys, what part of "never, ever worked" (even when both the inverter and battery were brand new) did you not understand?

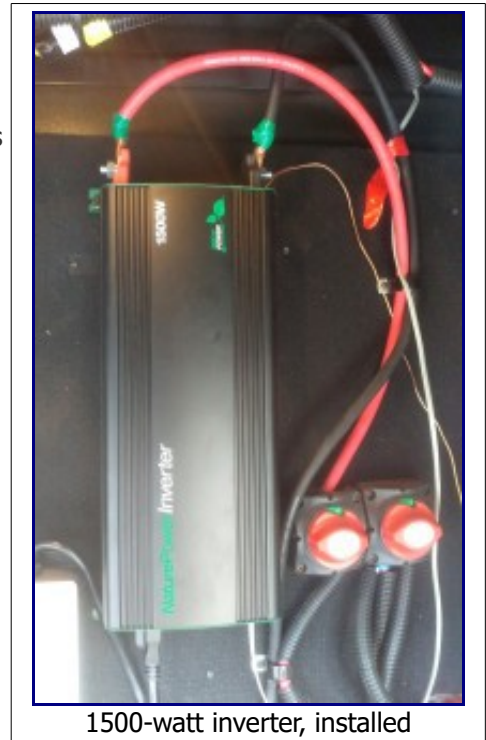
Beyond annoying. Infuriating.

Anyway, for a long time I thought that there was something wrong with the inverter. I eventually came around to believing that the inverter was fine but undersized for its job. The refrigerator was rated at 977 watts continuous consumption and the inverter was rated at 1000 watts continuous output. But the margin - 23 watts - was so small that if either rating was even a little bit off, or if the overload trigger was a little too sensitive, that it could fail to do its intended job. I concluded that simply replacing the inverter with a beefier model - 1500 watts - would solve the problem.

So I bought a 1500-watt inverter for \$212 delivered and installed it today. Installation was a breeze - attach the 12-volt power lines and a ground, plug in the dynamic switch (the thing that switches seamlessly to use inverter power when the regular power is disconnected, either as a result of travel or a power failure) and mount it on the utility board in the front basement. Took about an hour. Initial tests suggest that it will work fine.

But I really won't know for sure until we travel again.

If anyone needs a lightly-used (damn near never used) 1000-watt inverter, speak up.



1500-watt inverter, installed

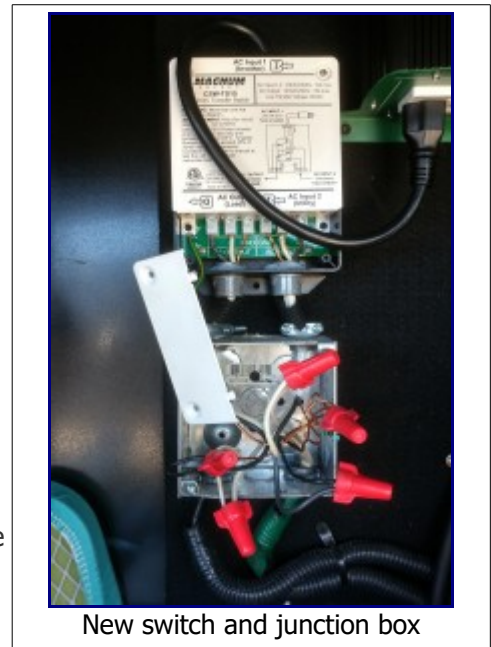
The inverter switch

8 Dec 2019

Now that I have told you all about the inverter, let's take a step back and deal with the more critical electrical problem: the failure of the inverter switch. The problem manifested, about 10 days ago, with the refrigerator suddenly and unexpectedly losing power. I was panicked at first, thinking that the refrigerator itself had failed - a problem that could potentially cost more than \$3,000 to fix. But after trying several things (checking circuit breakers, jiggling wires, voodoo incantations) that were unsuccessful, I, on a whim, flipped the inverter (the old one that never worked) on. It still didn't work, but it failed in a comfortably familiar way - the refrigerator came on, briefly, until the inverter overloaded and quit. This was pretty solid proof that there was no problem with the refrigerator (whew!) and that the problem was somewhere in the rather complex circuitry that powered it.

So I got, from the file of RV stuff that we keep, the documentation on the inverter and, along with it, the documentation on the inverter switch. This is the electronic component that automatically switches the power on the refrigerator circuit between regular (land) power and inverter (travel) power. It didn't take a genius to figure out that this switch was likely misbehaving. I pulled the cover off this box and the

junction box below it, just to get an idea of the circuitry. I tried various things that sort of worked for a little bit, but then the circuit would fail again. I eventually gave up, re-routed the circuit to bypass the switch entirely and hooked it up to an external outlet. Then I ordered a replacement switch.



New switch and junction box

After a week of running the refrigerator on a jury-rigged circuit, I received the replacement switch. It took about an hour to install it. Much to my relief the refrigerator ran perfectly on both land and inverter power.

Total cost of the inverter and switch: about \$300. But now, for the first time, I am confident that the refrigerator will have power when we travel.

Now we have to go somewhere and test it out.

As much as I hate spending good money on things that shouldn't break, I am deeply grateful that it failed while we were in residence. Had that switch failed while we were up north, we would have returned to a refrigerator filled with thawed, rotting food. It would have been an unholy mess and I can't imagine what the smell would have been like or how long I would have had to toil to make the place livable again. So if it had to fail, it picked a good time to do it.

Chancellorsville Battlefield (Oct)

19 Dec 2019



Chancellorsville battlefield

The end of the year is approaching and I am going back through my photos trying to spot any posts that I should have made but didn't. This is one - my brief stop at the Chancellorsville Battlefield on my way south with

Rusty in October. We had to get both the dog and the car to Florida for the winter, so I drove both down. Mostly it was long hours of tedious driving, but I did stop in Chancellorsville after my overnight in Alexandria VA.

I was pressed for time so I didn't do much more than tour the visitor's center and drive part of the self-guided auto tour.

For a detailed description of the Battle of Chancellorsville, I refer you to the Wikipedia article [here](#). The nutshell summary, though, is that this was a major Confederate victory just months before Gettysburg. Some historians describe this as Robert E. Lee's "perfect battle" due to his brilliant strategy in outwitting and outfighting a vastly superior Union force. But he lost his best general, Stonewall Jackson, and the confidence in his invincibility that was engendered here may have resulted in his catastrophic loss at Gettysburg just two months later.

The Battle of the Wilderness, fought a year later, was very close to the Chancellorsville battlefield - just a few miles down the road. That was also a major Civil War battle that interests me but I did not have time to visit it. Next time.



Photos in the museum



Visitor's Center



Auto tour marker

Travel doodling, MLB edition

20 Dec 2019

While the summer of 2019 was intense in terms of medical drama, it was light on time-consuming activities. No softball, not a lot of golf or disc golf. Few outings to restaurants, theaters or even family events. I had spare time on my hands and the travel bug ate away at me. So I devoted a few hours to "travel doodling" - imagining a long RV trip. But it had to be travel with a goal. I decided that a worthy goal would be visiting all 30 major league baseball stadiums in a single season.

The rules were:

1. Start and end in Fort Myers FL.
2. Travel no more than 300 miles per day when traveling.
3. Stay in an RV park within 20 miles of the ballpark (exception: an American RV park was needed for a

Toronto game). Due to the proximity of two stadiums each in San Francisco/Oakland, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, the tour would require just 26 hops to visit all 30 ballparks.

4. Arrive for a game early in a homestand and stay at least one additional game, to allow for rainouts.

The question was: how difficult would it be to complete the tour in a single season?

I started with the 2019 season and found that it was relatively easy to achieve the goal. Specifically, I concocted a tour that would finish on 9 Sep 2019, nearly a month before the end of the season.

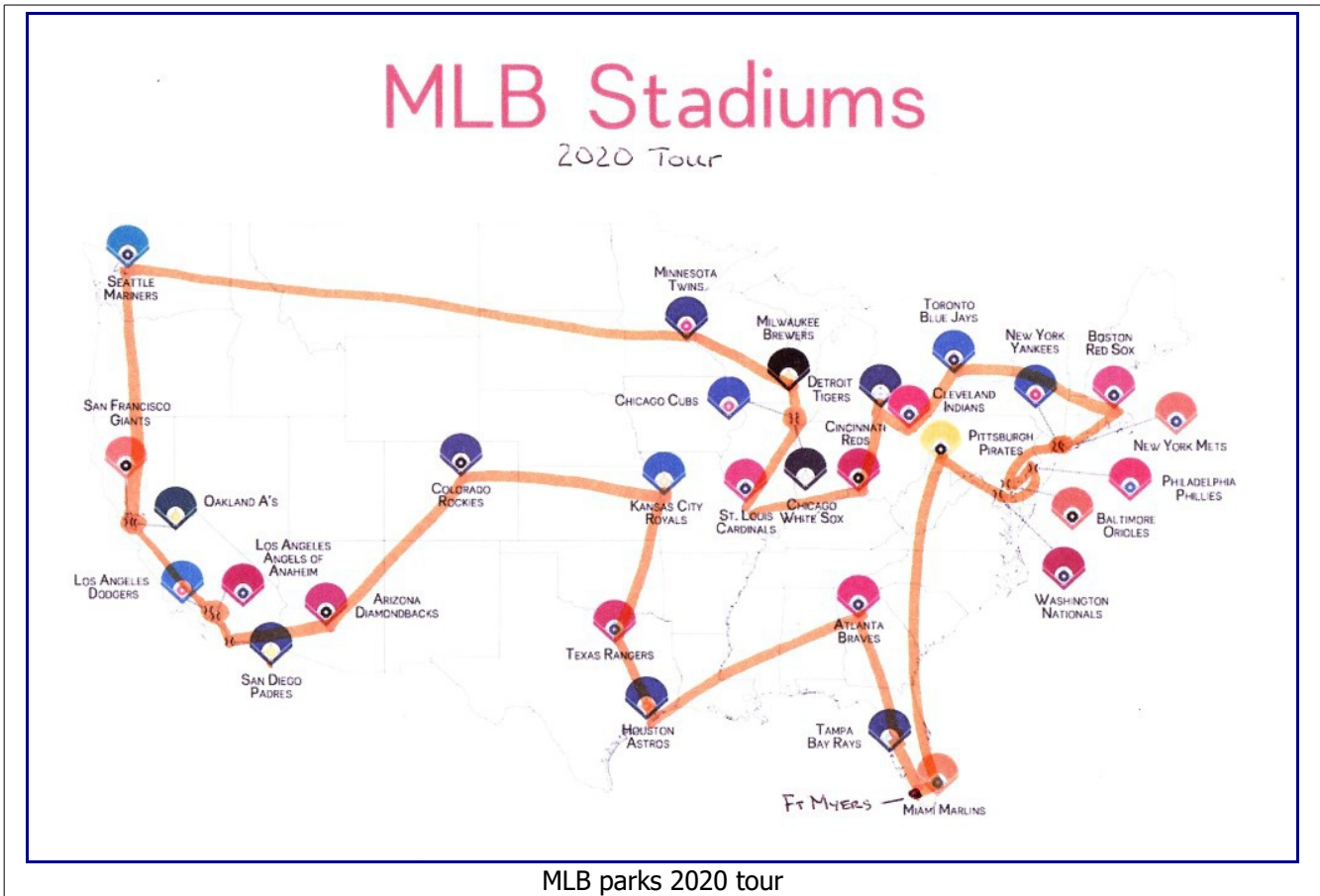
Just about the time I reached this conclusion the 2020 MLB schedules were released, so of course I had to repeat the tour using the 2020 schedules. This was easier as could pretty much replicate the sequence of cities that worked in 2019. That sequence, with some minor changes, still worked in 2020: I would finish this imaginary tour on 23 Sep 2020 - closer to the end of the season than in 2019, but still eminently feasible. The reason that the 2020 schedule was more difficult was that I had to wait long periods for teams to return from travel. For example, there are 11 days between the game in Detroit and the game in Cleveland, despite needing just a single travel day to get to Cleveland. Guess I would have to find something fun to do in either Detroit or Cleveland to kill the time. Easier said than done.

This is the 2020 sequence of cities, dates, games and approximate travel miles on the hop:

1. 3/28, Tropicana Field, St Petersburg FL, Pirates vs Rays, 113
2. 4/3, Georgia State Stadium, Atlanta GA, Marlins vs Braves, 477
3. 4/7, Minute Maid Park, Houston TX, Mets vs Astros, 791
4. 4/9, Globe Life Park, Arlington TX, Astros vs Rangers, 256
5. 4/13, Kauffman Stadium, Kansas City MO, White Sox vs Royals, 559
6. 4/18, Coors Field, Denver CO, Cardinals vs Rockies, 608
7. 4/28, Chase Field, Phoenix AZ, Astros vs Diamondbacks, 866
8. 5/1, Petco Park, San Diego CA, Dodgers vs Padres, 356
9. 5/4, Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles CA, Cubs vs Dodgers, 157
10. 5/7, Angel Stadium, Anaheim CA, Nationals vs Angels, 0 (same RV park as for #9)
11. 5/16, Oracle Park, San Francisco CA, Braves vs Giants, 426
12. 5/19, The Coliseum, Oakland CA, Rangers vs Athletics, 0 (same RV park as for #11)
13. 5/29, T-Mobile Park, Seattle WA, Braves vs Mariners, 808
14. 6/16, Target Field, Minneapolis MN, Brewers vs Twins, 1655
15. 6/22, Miller Park, Milwaukee WI, Blue Jays vs Brewers, 366
16. 6/26, Guaranteed Rate Park, Chicago IL, Athletics vs White Sox, 108
17. 6/29, Wrigley Field, Chicago IL, Brewers vs Cubs, 0 (same RV park as for #16)
18. 7/3, Busch Stadium, St Louis MO, Brewers vs Cardinals, 302
19. 7/10, Great American Ball Park, Cincinnati OH, Pirates vs Reds, 358
20. 7/17, Comerica Park, Detroit MI, White Sox vs Tigers, 263

21. 7/28, Progressive Field, Cleveland OH, Royals vs Indians, 169
22. 7/31, Rogers Centre, Toronto ON, Orioles vs Blue Jays, 291
23. 8/10, Fenway Park, Boston MA, Twins vs Red Sox, 547
24. 8/14, Citi Field, Queens NY, Phillies vs Mets, 213
25. 8/17, Yankee Stadium, Bronx NY, Rays vs Yankees, 0 (same RV park as for #24)
26. 8/21, Camden Yards, Baltimore MD, Red Sox vs Orioles, 201
27. 8/25, Citizens Bank Park, Philadelphia PA, Pirates vs Phillies, 199
28. 8/28, Nationals Park, Washington DC, Phillies vs Nationals, 134
29. 9/1, PNC Park, Philadelphia PA, Brewers vs Pirates, 248
30. 9/21, Marlins Stadium, Miami FL, Reds vs Marlins, 1173

I didn't actually identify the RV parks that would be used, so I used the distance between the ballparks as a proxy for the travel required for each hop. The total travel mileage for the 2020 tour: about 11,670 miles (including the 155 miles from Miami to Ft Myers to complete the circuit). Whew! The longest hop is Seattle-to-Minneapolis, a distance of 1,655 miles - about 15% of the total mileage.



Travel doodling, national parks, monuments and memorials edition

21 Dec 2019



National parks

I guess because the 11,600 miles needed to visit all 30 MLB ballparks was not a sufficiently large challenge, I looked for a larger one. Visiting all **46 national parks in the contiguous US** (well, 50 if you include Dry Tortugas National Park, Channel Islands National Park and Isle Royale National Park which are accessible only by plane or boat and Biscayne National Park, which is underwater) is a challenge in itself, but if I were to undertake this challenge I would probably include the **116 national monuments** and maybe the **30 national memorials** as well. This would be a monumental (so to speak) undertaking involving nearly 200 destinations, probably more than 100 travel hops and at least 8 months of travel - long enough that park winter closings become an issue. Whether it is feasible in a single year is an open question. But I did go so far as to plot a route that would get me to all monuments and memorials efficiently in one very long tour. This route would get me close to most of the national parks, too, so adding them would probably not boost the travel miles by more than another 1,000 miles. But national parks are not one-day destinations, so including them adds at least another 2 months to the timetable. My rough estimate for the monuments and memorials only: about 17,000 miles (plus maybe another 4,000 truck miles getting to the destinations from the RV parks) in 77 hops and 6 months.

A truly massive undertaking. And it makes me wonder: has anyone done it?

This is probably not something for which there is an official "done it" list. Part of the problem is that it is a moving target. The list of monuments and memorials changes frequently. In fact, it is likely that the list would

change by the time I finished the tour.

Again, not a tour that I am likely to actually make. But, damn! Wouldn't that be the fodder for some really good blog posts?



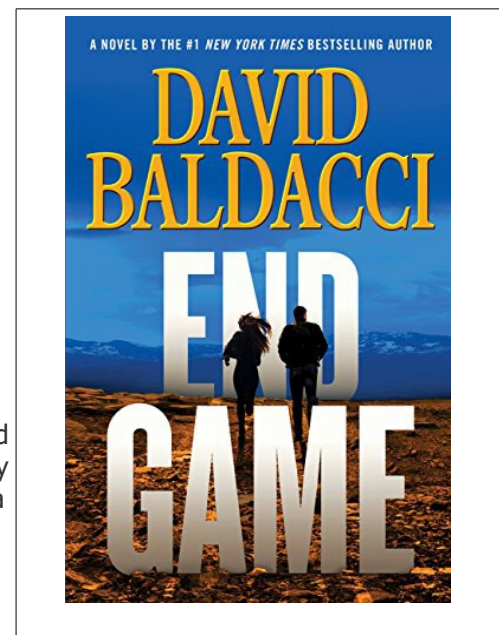
“End Game” by David Baldacci

31 Dec 2019

[Copyright 2017 by Columbia Rose Ltd. Published by Grand Central Publishing.](#)

This is the 5th book in the series featuring the one-man army named Will Robie. The book starts with Robie in London single-handedly wiping out a band of 16 terrorists. But he is on the outs with his equally-lethal girlfriend, Jessica Reel, who while Robie was occupied in London was in Iraq wiping out about 40 insurgents, including a bunch in armored cars. She was the only one of her team of 16 to survive, but her mission was counted as a success. So the body count is hovering around 70 before the main story even begins.

What is the main story? "Blue Man" - the boss of both Robie and Reel - has gone missing while vacationing in Colorado. They are both called back to the US and sent, together, to Colorado, to find Blue Man. They encounter a small town in which the law - a sheriff and a deputy and a few remote state troopers - are outnumbered by skinheads and survivalists. They make little progress for several days, but then have some run-ins with the skinheads. They kill a few and eventually are



captured by them. They are seconds away from dying when they are miraculously saved. Who saves them? Well, I won't reveal that, but it is just one of several surprises that pop up as the body count continues to soar. The deaths in this little town are coming so fast that bodies have to be imported from outside just to replenish the population.

It is all great action and fun, if you like death. The whole thing was a bit over the top for me. But it did keep me turning the pages.

Spoiler alert: they kill all the bad guys, find Blue Man and return him to Washington, safe and sound, and their romance is rekindled. But you knew that. That is just how Robie and Reel roll.

6 out of 10.

A minimalist Christmas

23 Dec 2019

Jett and I will be in our RV, alone, on Christmas. There isn't a lot of Christmas spirit in our "house on wheels" this year due, largely, to Jett's health. Or lack thereof. But we are making a feeble attempt. Jett insisted that I pull the box of Christmas decorations out of the shed and set them up. It took about 30 minutes, in warm weather, so it was a mere shadow of the day-long effort in sub-freezing temperature of years past. And it was an opportunity to see if the switched external outlets on the shed work.

They do.

So we have a minimal set of Christmas decorations in place. Which is more than some - many have no decorations at all. But to remind us of our place in the Christmas decoration universe, our neighbor around the corner put us to shame. Our two sites, side-by-side:



Ours



Theirs

Genealogical research status at the end of 2019

24 Dec 2019

As 2019 draws to a close, my count of known American ancestors stands at 353, with 211 being immigrant ancestors. Jett's counts are 556 and 330, respectively. There were no major breakthroughs this year, though I did change my opinion as to the identity of her Egan great-grandparents. A deep look at the Egans that I had originally identified revealed some troubling discrepancies. Some research by a findagrave.com volunteer - an incredible amount of work from someone who had no skin in the game - convinced me that I had the wrong couple in her tree. It is amazing, first of all, that a complete stranger would invest so much time and effort in helping me out (thank you!) and, second, that after several years of research I can discover that I had the wrong great-grandparents in her tree. That branch is still a dead-end as I could discover nothing at all about their parents.

As part of this deep research into Jett's recent ancestors - her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, I took a detailed look at all the supporting documentation and discovered a few interesting details that I had missed on the earlier passes. For example, one of her great-grandfather's middle name was 'Scribner'. Not exactly a common name and probably a family name. But there were no Scribners in her family tree, so where did it come from? Answer: from her great-great-grandfather's first wife, Mary Scribner. She is not an ancestor, but he honored her memory, after her death, by giving his firstborn from his second wife her name as a middle name. Touching.

I also found a map of Otisfield ME where this branch resided, so I can now find their actual farm if I ever get up that way.

I also found some new mysteries. Her father, for example, was born in Victoria BC from an American father and a British mother. His citizenship, as listed on his first entry into the US, is 'UK'. I am not sure about the rules of birthright citizenship, but it is possible that he was never an American citizen. I can find no record of naturalization. But he traveled out of the country a lot so he must have had a passport. His birthplace on one of the immigration entry records is "Cambridge MA" which is false. It is possible that they simply asserted US citizenship for him and were never caught. Mystery.

A second mystery: I discovered that her grandfather Edward had at least two children by a first wife. Jett never knew that she had a half-aunt and half-uncle. I didn't try real hard but found no further record of them. Tracking them down might be interesting.

I will likely be teaching a genealogy class at the resort in 2020. That will show me, I am sure, how little I really know.

Health status at the end of 2019

25 Dec 2019

Jett still has cancer and it is still incurable and inoperable. But what nearly killed her in May is now, if not in remission, at least at bay. The evaluation testing done in MA and FL has been very positive. All tumors have shrunk. No one is making any promises or even venturing a prognosis, but the fact that she is in no immediate danger is a big win.

But she remains very weak and often feels pretty crappy. She actually got angry at me when my joy at her recent positive test results was muted. I explained that I would be truly joyful only when she felt better and

was able to resume a more normal life.

She and I do share one serious health issue: weight. She is too thin and I am too fat. If medical science could provide us with a quick, painless way to transfer 20 pounds from me to her, we would both be very happy.

Other than the weight, I am healthy. I am hoping for a healthy 2020 for both of us.

And for you.

Christmas meals

29 Dec 2019



Lunch with Tony



Christmast dinner at the resort

I had two Christmas meals this year: the traditional Christmas dinner at the RV resort and lunch on Dec 26 with my son in Ocala. The Christmas meal was quite good - and free! We only had to bring a pot luck dish; the turkey and ham was provided by the resort. Jett didn't come as she was not feeling well enough to be out in public, but I took a very nice plate home to her and she declared the turkey to be "the best ever." Quite a compliment from someone her age.

The following day I took the truck to Ocala to have lunch with my son Tony. That was about 7 hours of driving for a 2-hour lunch break. I wouldn't have done it were it not for my need to gain some confidence in the truck's health as we may need to use the truck to get to our cruise in February. And it needed the exercise: it had traveled less than 200 miles in 6 months. I am happy to report that the truck performed flawlessly. And it was nice to share a meal with my son. In case you are wondering, he has his hand over his beer to keep the bees out. We had several bees buzzing about and one took a dive right into his beer about 15 seconds after it arrived at the table. I fished it out and it staggered away.

Hair!

31 Dec 2019

Jett began losing her hair in June and it was pretty much completely gone by July 4 (though she never lost her eyebrows, for which she was very grateful). In early November her doctor told her that her hair might never come back; that she might be permanently bald. While that was not good news, it was not devastating news. We both agreed that a good life without hair was still a good life.

But in the past few weeks her hair has started to reappear. She still looks like an inductee into the Marines, but there is no doubt that the hair is returning.

That is a good way to end 2019.



New hair!



Sunrise in Flagler Beach

