



# **OurWanderYears 2020**

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Cover photo: Grandson Zachary at Jett's viewing, Gloucester MA, October 2020.

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# A slow start, but a start

11 Jan 2020

2020 has started slowly, which is not necessarily a bad thing. We skipped the New Year's Eve dance and dinner and celebrated quietly at home. The theme of the celebration was "happy to be alive" because being alive at the start of 2020 is something that, for Jett, seemed unlikely back in May.

My Genealogy Group also started slowly, in part because it didn't get into the resort's events calendar. Don't ask me why. So a day before the first meeting I posted a notice in the resort's activities Facebook page. That drew two people to the meeting and expressions of interest from several others. A third person showed up at the second meeting, so the group is growing by 50% each week.

I also had my first softball game of the season. I think I had only one legitimate hit in 5 at-bats, but I scored 3 runs to help the team to an 18-12 opening day victory. I feared that the team would be offensively challenged, but that was not the case. Hopefully the offense - especially my offense - will just get better as the season goes on.

So everything is starting slowly. But successfully.

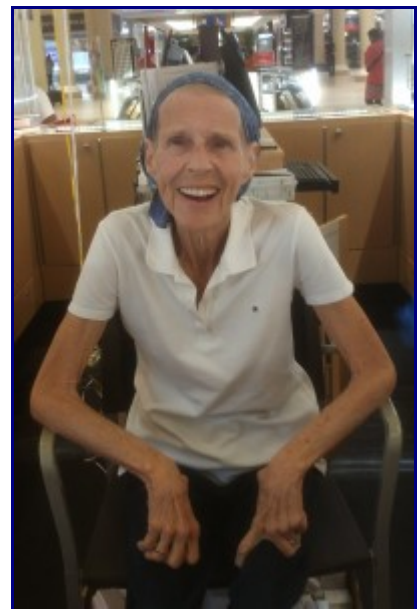
## Earrings

19 Jan 2020

This may not seem like a big deal, but it is. Jett got her ears pierced a few days ago and is now wearing earrings again. It is a big deal because she had to remove her earrings back in May when radiation treatments began and has had to keep them out due to CT scans and MRIs. Getting her ears pierced and starting to wear earrings again is a sign of both recovery and defiance - she is not going to let cancer rule her life.



Getting pierced



Happiness is new earrings

# Another try at a cruise

20 Jan 2020



MSC Meraviglia

We like cruises. They are, in our view, very relaxing and generally a good value. We have always had a good time. Even our aborted attempt at a 27-night transatlantic/Mediterranean cruise last April, interrupted halfway through by Jett's hemoglobin problem, was fun until it wasn't. So we are going to try again. This time it is a 14-night cruise on the MSC *Meraviglia*, a huge (4,500 passengers) and new (built in 2017) ship. It is actually 2 back-to-back 7-night cruises (in the same cabin!) with different Caribbean itineraries:

## First week:

- Day 1 · Miami Depart 5:00pm
- Day 2 · Cruising
- Day 3 · Costa Maya, Mexico Arrive 8:00am - Depart 5:00pm
- Day 4 · Belize City, Belize Arrive 8:00am - Depart 6:00pm
- Day 5 · Roatan, Bay Islands, Honduras Arrive 9:00am - Depart 5:00pm
- Day 6 · Cruising
- Day 7 · Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve (private island) Arrive 9:00am - Depart 11:55pm
- Day 8 · Miami Arrive 7:00am

## Second week:

- Day 1 · Miami Depart 7:00pm
- Day 2 · Cruising
- Day 3 · Ocho Rios, Jamaica Arrive 9:00am - Depart 5:00pm
- Day 4 · Georgetown, Cayman Islands Arrive 8:00am - Depart 4:00pm
- Day 5 · Cozumel, Mexico Arrive 10:00am - Depart 6:00pm
- Day 6 · Cruising
- Day 7 · Ocean Cay Msc Marine Reserve (private island) Arrive 9:00am - Depart 11:55pm
- Day 8 · Miami Arrive 7:00am

We have been to many of these ports on previous cruises, but have never been to Ocho Rios or MSC's Ocean Cay, so we are especially looking forward to those. On the first week we will be accompanied by Jett's sisters, Sybil and Christine. It will be our first cruise with them, so that should be fun, too. But I will be outnumbered, so

wish me luck.

We will bring Jett's wheelchair, to eliminate the need for her to walk if there is any roll while at sea. But we are hoping we won't have to use it much. Sybil will bring hers, too, for the same reason.

We are *really* hoping that we complete the full two weeks without any medical issues. I guess one of the advantages of the back-to-back cruises is that we will never be more than 7 days away from Miami. But, just in case, we have purchased the trip insurance.

One of the most difficult aspects of arranging this trip was getting to the ship. We booked the cruise, out of the Port of Miami, departing Sunday, February 2. That just happens to be Super Bowl Sunday, played this year in... yes, Miami. So our usual plan of staying overnight near the cruise port suddenly became very expensive, both for us and for Jett's sisters - over \$400 for a single night in a hotel. So Plan B was to have Sybil and Christine fly into Fort Myers, stay overnight there and we would all drive together to Miami in the morning - a 2.5 hour trip. The only problem with that plan was that the Corolla was simply not large enough to take 4 adults, their luggage and 2 wheelchairs. So we will have to take the truck. I will park it at the Crowne Plaza, which is where I left it for the last cruise, so I know that the plan is feasible. But I certainly would rather have traveled to Miami the day before. The truck has been working well (as evidenced by the trip to Ocala), but it is less reliable than the Corolla. I will just have to keep my fingers crossed.

## "One False Move" by Harlan Coben

20 Jan 2020

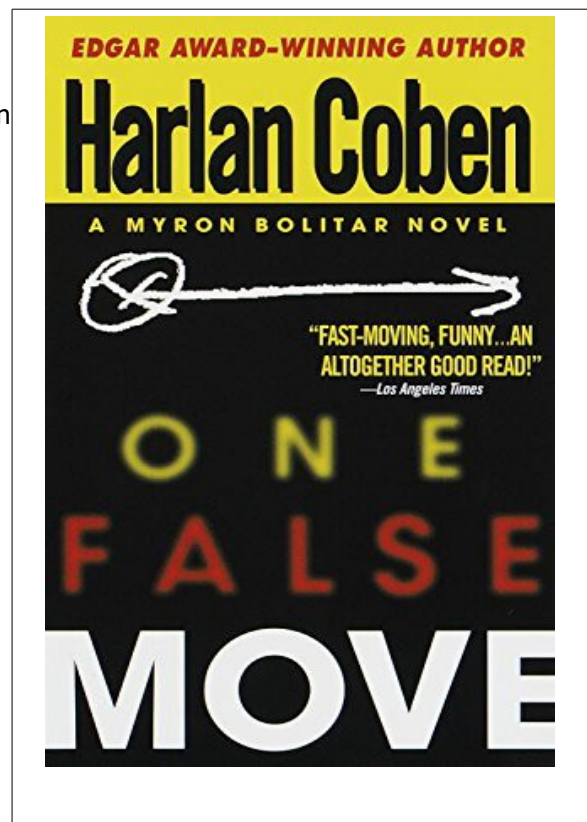
[Copyright 1998 by Harlan Coben. Published by Dell, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.](#)

Some (a few?) of you may recall that I reviewed another Harlan Coben book, *The Woods*, back in August and raved about it. One of the best mysteries that I have read in many years. Well, this is the same author but a different protagonist, Myron Bolitar (5th in the series). I am not raving about this one.

Myron Bolitar is a sports agent, forced into that profession by an injury that ended his short NBA career. He is good at what he does. In this book he is representing a young professional female basketball player, Brenda Slaughter, the star of a new women's league. She is not only talented but is also beautiful and Myron falls for her. But this is not just a simple pro/agent romance; she is also being harassed by person or persons unknown and, shortly, becomes the prime suspect in her father's murder.

Not much of what Myron can see initially makes much sense. Why was her father murdered? Why did her mother disappear 20 years prior when Brenda was just 5? Why is she now getting anonymous phone calls telling her to find her mother? What, if anything, does this have to do with Arthur Bradford, her mother's employer when she disappeared and who is now running for governor of New Jersey?

It is a complex tale and it takes nearly 400 pages for Myron to unravel it. He figures it out eventually, with the help of his sidekick, Windsor Horne Lockwood III ("Win" for short) who is an unlikely combination of financial



advisor and preppy headcracker - he saves Myron's butt more than once. He is one of these literary characters who could be tied to the tracks with a freight train just seconds away from crushing the life out of him and he would be smiling and cracking wise because somehow he will find a way out of the predicament. I suppose he is fun as comic relief, but it is hard to take a book seriously with a character like him.

So this should have been a book that I couldn't put down and yet I did. Many times. In the end I admired the complexity of the plot and will concede that most of the loose ends (but not all) were tied up. And I didn't guess the culprit. But it wasn't a fun read.

5 out of 10.

## Pre-cruise prep

3 Feb 2020

As I write this we are sailing away to Mexico. I will write about the boarding process shortly. But this post is about the final pre-cruise preparations. Most important among those preparations was arranging care for Rusty. Most honored stepson Joshua once more rose to the occasion, driving all the way from VA in 2 days, arriving after dark on Saturday (after visiting a hospitalized friend in Miami and going to the wrong RV park in Fort Myers) and left at dawn on Sunday, so he didn't exactly get to see our home in its best light. Or any light, really.

He drove straight through to VA on the return trip. 14 hours. My back aches just thinking about it.



Josh loading up at dawn's early light



Dave and Cooper

That was one week ago. The rest of the week was pretty busy with other preparations. Pack. Prep the truck. Clean the car. Charge the walkie-talkies. Get medications. Pay bills. I also had a medical appointment, two softball games, a genealogy meeting, a voter registration event and various other non-trip activities. Busy week.

Two of the most pleasant activities of the week were get-togethers with Dave and Melissa, a wonderful couple that we met last year at the dog park. Not only are they dog lovers and full-time RVers, like us, but Melissa is a *Mayflower* descendant, like Jett. So we have much in common. Dave even blogs about their travels, like me ([roadsfordiscovery.com](http://roadsfordiscovery.com)). They were back in the park for a month and we were delighted to see them.

Because the ship departed from Miami on Feb 2 and because Feb 2 was also the date of the Super Bowl - in Miami - it was impossible to book a room near the cruise terminal the night before sailing, which is our preference. So Jett's sisters, who will accompany us the first week, flew into Fort Myers, stayed in a hotel overnight and rode with us to Miami Sunday morning. Because we had to transport 4 people and a boatload (almost literally) of luggage, I had to use the truck. So perhaps only for the second time in the

nearly 8 years we have owned the truck we had human passengers in the back seat.

I am happy to report that the truck ran flawlessly and delivered us all safely to the cruise terminal. But I will cover that when I report on the first day of the cruise, which I will designate 'MSC1' because it is our first cruise on MSC.

## MSC1 Day 1: Embarkation

4 Feb 2020

The day began with final chores: finishing the packing, loading the bags into the truck, shutting windows, turning on the air conditioning, turning off the water and hot water heater, locking up. Then a short drive to the hotel to fetch Jett's sisters and their luggage. It all fit. Barely. A stop at Starbucks then two boring hours on I-75 traversing "Alligator Alley" where no alligators are ever seen. The final 20 minutes was spent in a traffic mess at the Port of Miami, but the luggage and sisters were deposited at the ship by 11:15am.



The truck at the Crowne Plaza

Parking the truck was a breeze. A 15-minute drive to the Crowne Plaza hotel, a few minutes to pay the bill (just \$7.50 per day - a bargain) then into the hotel to figure out how to get back to the ship. As I was discussing taxi and Uber options with a receptionist, a couple overheard me and offered me a ride in their Uber. They were on their way to a Norwegian Cruise Lines ship that was departing at the same time. I accepted their kind offer and had a lovely chat with them during the 40-minute trip back to the port (very heavy traffic and the tunnel was closed). They were from Lake Elsinore CA, near Temecula which was my home away from home the first winter on the road, way back in 2013. The Uber cost \$15 and I gave the driver a \$10 tip.

During that Uber ride I learned that Jett and her sisters were afforded "priority boarding" thanks to their use of wheelchair and walker. There may not be many advantages to having limited mobility, but this was one.

So far things had gone swimmingly, but that was about to change. The Uber driver let me out at the entrance to Terminal F and there was a line out the door. That, in my cruise experience, was a first. I have never had to stand in line outside a terminal before. But I had no limited mobility, so I used my perfectly fine legs to walk to the end of the line. Which was down the sidewalk, across two driveways and around the corner. At least a tenth of a mile. And it kept growing. By the time I had moved up to within a hundred yards of the entrance the line had snaked around, turned back on itself twice and was stretching into the parking lot.

No one was happy with the situation. The weather was fine, if a little cool, but if it had been a hot day people would have been collapsing. There were very few places to sit so it was an ordeal. I can only imagine how unpleasant it would have been if it had been raining. I chatted with my fellow sufferers and one of my line companions was getting agitated at people "cutting the line" or somehow, in his eyes, misbehaving. I figured that I already had my cabin reserved and there was no way the ship was going to leave without me, so I just had to endure the interminable wait.

I was optimistic that once I got through the doors to the terminal (after waiting outside about 90 minutes) that it would get better. Wrong. Getting through the door just allowed me to enter a zig-zag line approaching security. Another 45 minutes in line. Another 45 minutes listening to my line-mate harping about the situation.

When I finally got to the passport checkpoint (just 2 people checking the 4,500 passengers) I was amazed to discover that they were manually comparing everyone's passport against a printed list of numbers. The list looked to be at least 10 pages of very small print. Don't they have an app for that? The passport checkers, not surprisingly, seemed to be uninterested in their tedious jobs and felt no urgency. Annoying.



The line behind



The line ahead

I lost my line buddies at the passport control. They got hung up there - I don't know why - but they were still at passport control when I was through the X-ray machine and on my way up to the check-in. I don't know if they ever made it onto the ship. Haven't seen them yet.

Check-in and the health screening took another 45 minutes. Total wait time before I actually stepped aboard the ship: 3 hours. I was tired and very hungry when I finally got to my cabin around 4pm. The hunger was sated with a quick trip to the buffet but the tiredness would have to wait.

We were late to the muster drill because we had to assist Sybil down 4 flights of stairs and along a stretch of the promenade. But we made it and were underway, about an hour late due to the long line at security, just at the sun was setting.

That, however, was not the end of the bad news. The balcony cabin turned out to be distressingly small and our assigned dinner time was 5:15pm - not the 7:30 seating that we requested. I spoke to the maître 'd who took down our cabin numbers and request but made it clear that because we had chosen the "Fantastica" experience (less than the Aureal experience), we were not guaranteed a dinner seating of our choice. Seems that Fantastica might not guarantee a fantastica experience on board the ship. Nothing could be done until the next day, if then, so we had to dine at the buffet restaurant.

But that was pretty much the end of the bad news for the night. The buffet food was quite good and the ship carried the Super Bowl at several venues, including on the very large and very high resolution screen on the pool deck. It was a chilly night, but it was a pleasure being able to watch the game under the stars. Good game, too. Congratulations, KC.

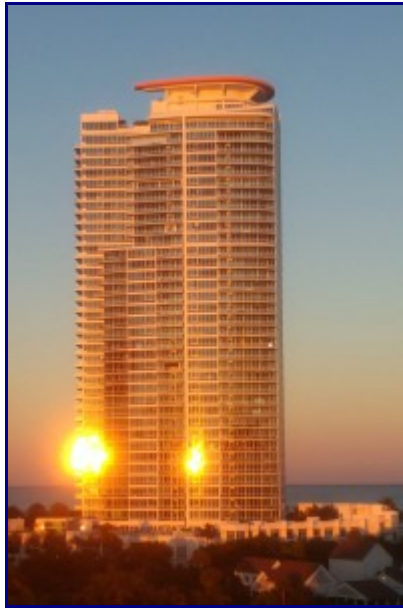
We played some Hand, Knee and Foot in the buffet restaurant and took advantage of the table bar service there several times. A good time was had by all.

We were all in bed - quite comfortable - before 11pm.

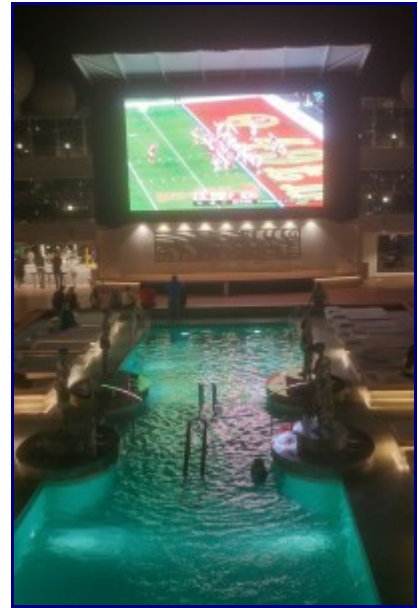




Leaving port in last light



Reflected setting sun



Super Bowl at the pool

## MSC1 Day 2: At sea

5 Feb 2020

The first day was spent entirely at sea, cruising along the north coast of Cuba. The weather was considerably warmer - in the high 70s - and mostly sunny, so it was a lovely, smooth day to cruise the Caribbean Sea. We slept in until after 8, then I embarked on a search for cappuccino. I knew there had to be some on board an Italian ship and I was right. But there was nothing on the ship map that said "Coffee Bar" or "Get Your Cappuccino Here". So I went to the reception area and corralled a staff person who was speaking to another staff person at the nearby bar. When I asked where I could find cappuccino he said, "Well, here, for one," pointing at the bar. Sure enough, the bar had a cappuccino machine. I got a cup, along with a few pastries, and returned to the cabin.

Jett's verdict: weak. And she was right. The cappuccino was very bland compared to other cappuccinos I have tasted, both on board ships and on land. Very disappointing. Fortunately, the free coffee available in the buffet restaurant is quite good. I made a second trip out to get a large cup of that brew, along with more pastries. That sated Jett.

I then spent some time exploring the ship, partly on my own and partly in the service of Jett. She sent me down to the "grand opening" of an EFFY jewelry section of the boutique which was handing out free pendants. More standing in line, but I am getting good at it by now. We napped and before dinner checked out the Irish pub, "Brass Anchor". They have some decent ales and stouts and surprisingly inexpensive pub fare - a cheeseburger or a small fish and chips for \$5 each. Very tasty.

My appeal for a later dinner seating was successful so we had some time to kill before 8:30. We decided to drop a few bucks in the casino - which, much to our surprise and Jett's joy - has a smoking section. She lost a few dollars but I had my best casino day ever, winning over \$570 - most of it coming on some "free spins" on a 50-cent machine.

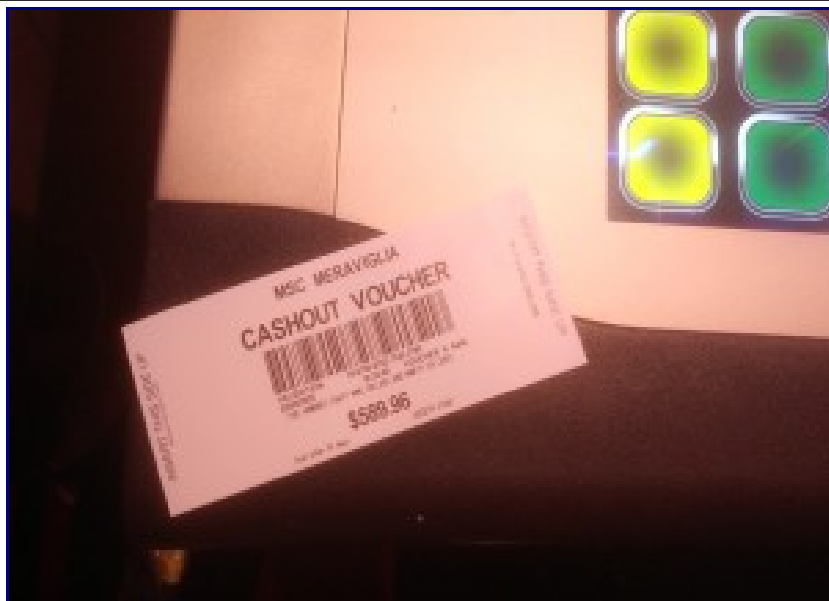
We met for dinner at the Panorama Restaurant, at the stern of the ship. It was dark at 8:30pm, of course, so the panorama was a pitch black wall. But the food was quite good and the service was outstanding.



First morning at sea



Waiting for free jewelry



Proof of winnings

After two days on board the *Meraviglia* I can make some comments about it. First, a few things that set it apart from every other ship we have been on:

- The size. With 4,500 passengers, this is nearly twice the size of the next largest ship we have sailed. The is neither a plus nor a minus, just something that makes it different. The only negative due to its

size was the horribly long boarding line and for that I assign some of the fault to the Port of Miami.

- The lack of an entertainment staff. On every other cruise there was a cadre of entertainers who ran daily events and put on evening shows. On this ship the featured entertainment are two extra-cost *Cirque de Soleil* shows. This ship has a cruise director, but no entertainers and no shows (at least no free ones). The director's job seems to be limited to making announcements. I am sure he has many other responsibilities, but he is much less visible than cruise directors on other ships.
- A dearth of elevators. Or, more to the point, a dearth of elevator locations. There are enough elevators, but they are clustered in just two locations: forward and midship. There are no elevators in the stern half of the very large (and long) ship. This became immediately apparent on the first day as we had to make the long trek to our cabin in the rear quarter. Jett calls it the "death march". We have gotten used to it now, but I am still amazed that the designer didn't see a need for aft elevators.
- The plainness of the dining rooms. Most of the other ships had grand dining halls with high ceilings and glitz. Not much of that on the *Meraviglia*. The dining rooms (4 of them) have low ceilings and are not grand at all. They are pleasant, but the tables are more crowded together and it they feel more like family restaurants than grand venues.
- There is a Japanese restaurant (extra cost, of course), complete with hibachi tables.

I am not sure any of this is bad, just different. There is much to like about the *Meraviglia*.

- The casino is bright and pleasant (and the slots are not stingy). And it has a smoking section, a big plus in Jett's view. It is also placed in the rear of the ship rather than in the middle which makes it less "in your face" than on other ships.
- The shopping/dining arcade is spectacular, with an arched video ceiling which can be alternately classy and dazzling.
- The Irish pub, "Brass Anchor," is very nice with an excellent variety of draft beers and inexpensive food.
- The buffet offers a wide variety of food, all of which has been very good to excellent. The pizza is, in my opinion, some of the best I have had anywhere. Who knew that Italians could make good pizza?
- We have no need for them, but a large section of the ship is devoted to kid's clubs. This looks like it would be a good ship for young children. Or teens.
- There are bars galore, with different themes. The overriding theme is white faux leather, which probably wouldn't have been my first choice, but it is consistent, visually striking and very comfortable.



The arcade with classic ceiling



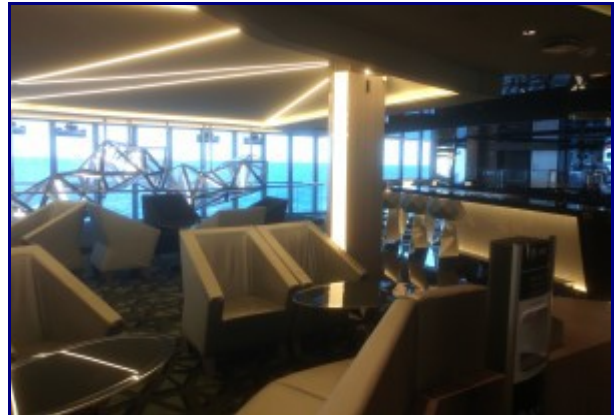
The arcade with pastel ceiling



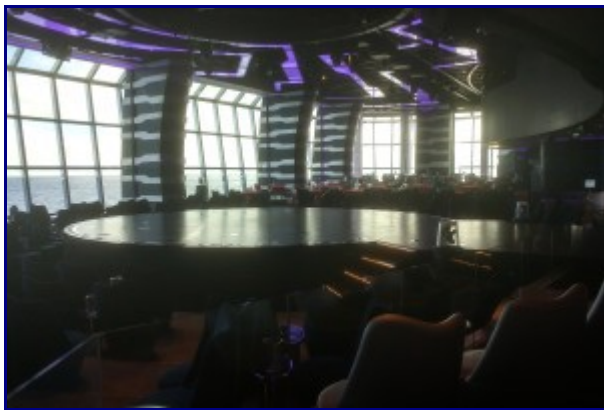
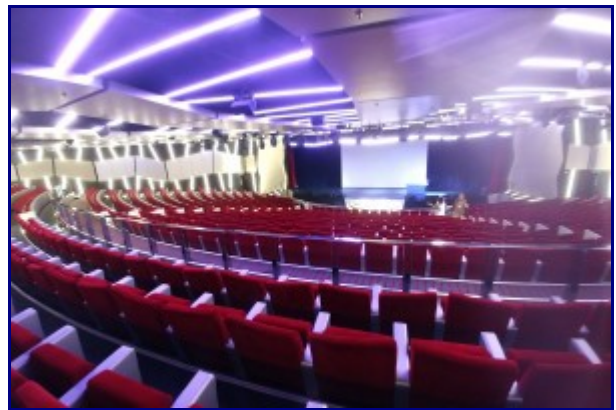
Looking down on the arcade



A fish tank on a ship



The Champagne Bar

The *Circe de Soleil* stage

The Broadway Theater



Shopping arcade



Chocolate shop

## MSC1 Day 3: Costa Maya, Mexico

6 Feb 2020

Our first port of call was Costa Maya, Mexico. We have visited Costa Maya twice before and we still don't like it. It is fine as a place to embark on an excursion, to a Mayan site or a snorkeling adventure, but it useless as a

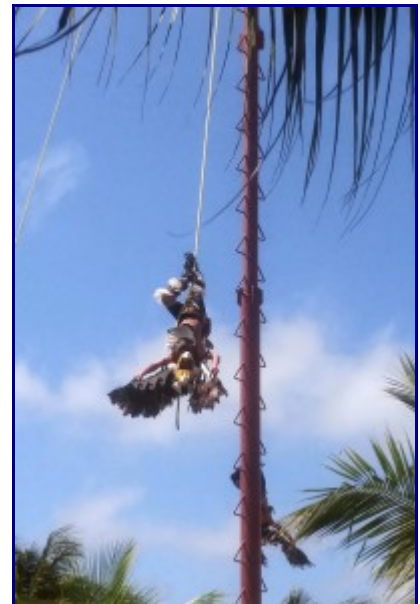
destination. There is nothing there but souvenir shops and some overpriced (\$18 tacos) restaurants and bars.

And, as with just about every cruise port in the Caribbean, a Diamonds International store. If you want to drop a lot of money on a precious stone, you can do it here. Jett was jonesing for some tanzanite studs, so that was our first stop once we got ashore. That happened after a leisurely breakfast and a short ride on the trolley that traverses the very long pier (probably 300 yards). She found some nice stud earrings for under \$300. Less than I won at the casino a day earlier, so I couldn't get too upset.

While she was buying, her sisters and I watched the native Mayan tower performance. Four guys in native costumes climb to the top of a 75-foot tower, then descend slowly, dangling inverted from ropes. I don't know how traditional this performance is - seems hard to believe that the Mayans did anything like this 700 years ago - but it is a captivating spectacle.



The very long Costa Maya pier



Dangling natives

The only other activity of interest was consuming some very tasty mojitos with guacamole and chips. Expensive, but a pleasant time. We had a table near the pool in the middle of the port area, so it had a bit of a "beach bar" feel to it.



Guacamole and chips



Port pool

We had another fine dinner on board. I had a seafood cioppino entrée that was superb.

We did have a surprise though, delivered just before dinner - a gift of a bottle of champagne and a plate of

chocolate-covered strawberries. Jett's sisters got the same gift delivered to their cabin. The benefactors were two people that Jett and I had never heard of and were convinced that a mistake had been made. But Christine knew at least one of the names - the niece of her daughter-in-law. Furthermore, she knew why we had all received such a generous gift from a fairly distant (for us, anyway) relative: she held a high-level position at the corporate level at MSC and could easily request special treatment for guests on one of their ships. It turns out that this was just one of a series of gifts that we were to receive, the result being that we are now viewed as some kind of VIPs among the staff. Totally undeserved, of course, but nice nevertheless. It pays to have friends - even unknown ones - in high places.



Seafood cioppino



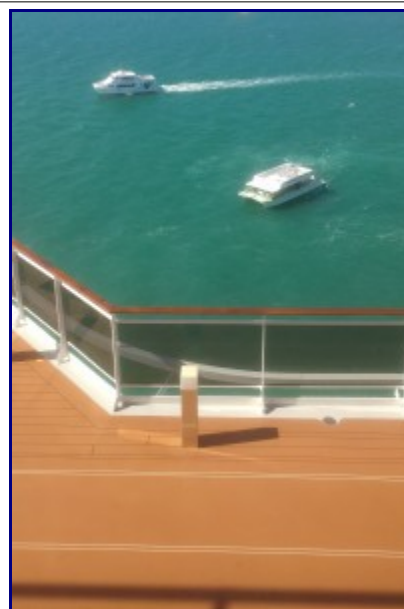
Bottles of champagne, plates of strawberries

## MSC1 Day 4: Belize City, Belize

**6 Feb 2020**

Another day, another port that we don't like all that much. Belize has some wonderful places to visit, but Belize City is not one of them. It is like Detroit which, as a friend once put it: "You have to get out of the city to find something to do."

We didn't really want to take a long and expensive excursion in Belize, but did want to set foot in the country, so we went ashore and wandered the port area for a couple of hours. Jett left her wheelchair behind as we had to take a tender (or, if you prefer, ferry) to land and she didn't want to deal with the hassle of getting on and off a small boat with a wheelchair. However, we didn't think we had that option with Sybil. She is unsteady everywhere and really needed to take the walker with her. So I took responsibility for getting the device on and off while staff assisted her. We made it, but were thankful for a calm day. If the water had been choppy she might not have been able to get to Belize.



Arrival of some tenders



Belize port shopping mall

So what did we do in the Belize City port area? Shop and eat, of course. I bought a nice T-shirt for my teen granddaughter and we all enjoyed a light lunch at a small Mexican BBQ place. We all shared orders of conch ceviche and nachos with BBQ chicken. Both very good. I also tried the local beer, Belikin. Also very good. And very cheap (\$2).

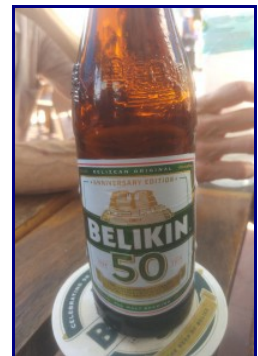
I should mention that our trip to Belize City aboard the tender was assisted by another unexpected gift: priority boarding passes delivered to our cabins, courtesy of our mysterious (to me, anyway) benefactor. We didn't have to wait in the long line to board the tender; we were ushered on immediately.



The harbor in Belize City



Boarding passes



Tasty local beer

After lunch we strolled along the waterfront for a bit, then we returned to the ship. Christine and I attended our second trivia contest in the pub and came in second. Then we got ready to attend the 6:15pm showing of the onboard *Cirque de Soleil* show. Which is where we received our next gift: an upgrade to front row center. If we had been any closer we would have had to wear costumes. Photography was banned in the theater but I did manage to sneak in one shot of the warmup act, a guitar and drum duo. Not a great photo, but it shows how front-and-center we were. I also got one shot of the theater on the way out showing the dynamic video wall behind the rotating stage.

The shower of gifts was not yet finished. When we arrived in the dining room at 8:30pm we were presented with a plate of hors d'oeuvres (including caviar and lox) and a complimentary bottle of prosecco. Unbelievable.

We ended the day with a brief stop at the casino (no luck at all, but only \$40 lost) and another brief stop at the Skylight Lounge to listen to a jazz singer recommended by Christine. She was good and the pianist was excellent, but I was too tired to fully appreciate it.



Warm-up act



Hors d'oeuvres



The theater



Jazz singer

## MSC1 Day 5: Roatan Island, Honduras

7 Feb 2020



Roatan Island from our balcony

We have been to Roatan Island before and we like it. The people are laid-back and friendly and the island, though not exotic, has some beautiful beaches and fine houses. It also has a distressing number of shacks. But it still ranks higher, in our eyes, than either Costa Maya or Belize City.



And it has a dock. Two, actually - one exclusively for Carnival Cruise Lines and one for all others. We docked at the "for all others" one in bustling downtown Coxen Hole. This is a little hamlet consisting of one street along the harbor lined with small shops. The port complex completely dominates the town.



*Meraviglia docked in Roatan*

We started the day with breakfast at Waves restaurant where we were actually served breakfast from a menu rather than grabbing it from a buffet line. We then collected our things and proceeded to the TV Studio and Bar to start our 3.5 hour "no barriers island tour." Because we weren't sure how much walking would be involved and because a "no barriers" tour suggested that it would be wheelchair-friendly, we brought both the wheelchair (for Jett) and the walker (for Sybil). Good thing that there were no other "disabled" people on the tour because the 12 people in the group completely filled the small van. The wheelchair and walker had to be folded and put into the front passenger seat. It was a tight fit.

The first stop was "The Buccaneer", a beach tourist spot. It featured a museum which we all ignored, a coffee shop that served very tasty iced Honduran coffee and an expansive verandah overlooking a shallow inlet from the sea. It was high tide, which put about two feet of water in the inlet but it likely is just a sandy beach area much of the day.

The next stop was an iguana farm. Yes, they breed and raise iguanas, just to show them off to tourists. Elsewhere on the island iguana meat is featured on the menu, but at the farm they are just for show. Wall-to-wall iguanas. It is hard to avoid stepping on them. In fact I stepped on one's tail. I apologized.



Three sisters in the van



The flooded Buccaneer inlet

The third stop on the tour was Pristine Bay. This was just a photo op at the top of a hill overlooking the lowlands on the south side of the island. Nice view.



The inlet from the verandah



An iguana



The view from Pristine Bay

The fourth and final stop was a "beach stop" of an hour. Since none of us were interested in either sun or sand, we figured to spend the time having lunch and a drink. Good plan, but the restaurant was unprepared for the number of lunch guests. We got neither food nor beverage in that hour. Since all of these shore excursions are booked days, if not weeks, in advance, it is hard to understand how the restaurant could be surprised by the volume.

The dinner was preceded by an "African dance" by a group of 6 musicians and dancers, all of whom appeared to be bored to distraction. A total waste of 15 minutes. And why an African dance in Honduras?

In short, the last stop was a bust. The tour overall was interesting and satisfied our need to do \*something\* in Roatan, but at \$70 per person it was, like most other cruise excursions, overpriced.

We made it back to the *Meraviglia* in plenty of time for a pre-dinner nap. I also caught the end of the sunset and got a nice photo of the final colors of the day and the first star (probably Venus, actually). Look carefully.

The daily gift was dinner for 4 at the "Butcher's Cut" steakhouse. Sybil, Jett and I all had an 8-ounce filet mignon and baked potato. The beef was one of the finest cuts of meat that I have had in years. Tender and perfectly grilled. Jett had the same opinion. Plus a bottle of wine. We got a second bottle and added in a generous tip for the waiter, but I did not mind spending \$86 for a dinner that should have cost us about \$300. A very fine dinner.

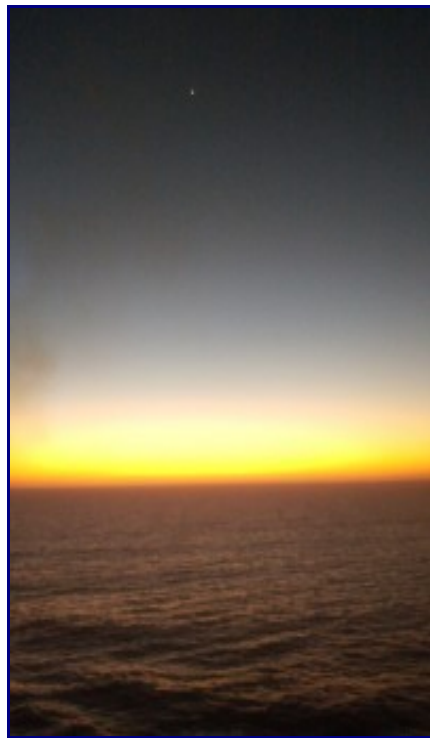


Jett on the verandah



A bevy of hammocks

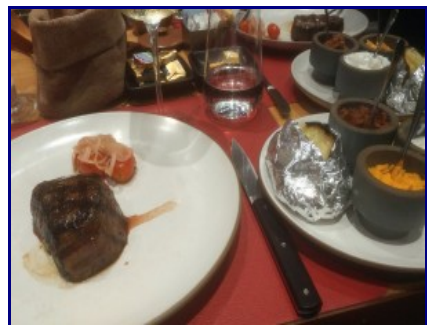
We also caught the brief "dome show" on the arcade ceiling. This one was an undersea fantasy where a submarine dives, then the roof peels back to reveal all sorts of aquatic life, including mermaids. Beautiful.



Last light



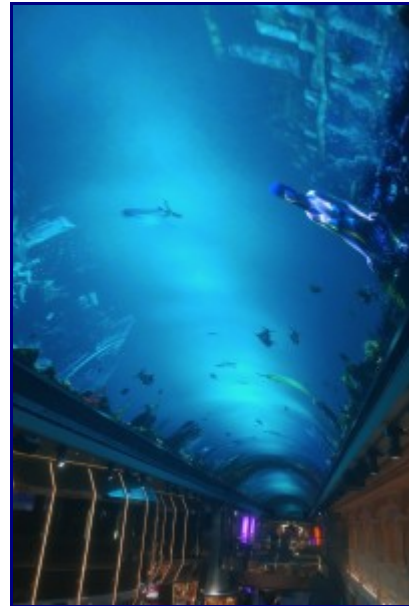
African dance troupe



Filet and potato



Dome show, inside the sub



Dome show, roof peeled back

## MSC1 Day 6: At sea

8 Feb 2020

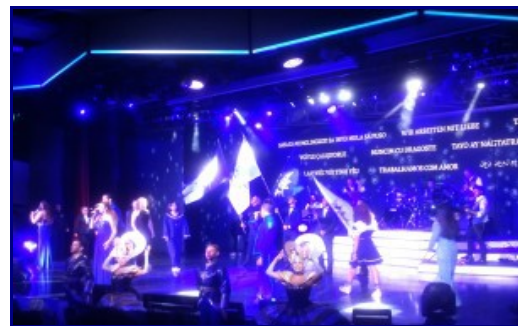
This was a card day. A windy card day - the ship was rocking enough for me to wear my wrist bands for the first time. But I never felt seasick.

After a late breakfast, we started playing Hand, Knee and Foot at 11am and didn't stop until it was time for trivia (4pm). Again, second place.

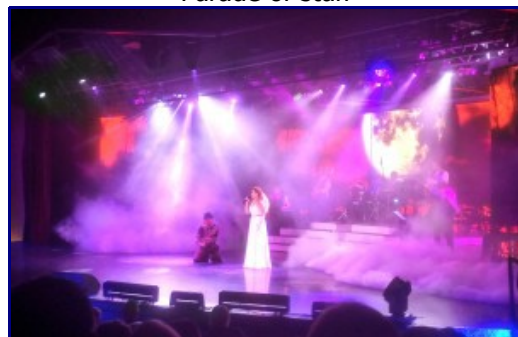
I caught the show before dinner. Yes, contrary to my earlier statement there ARE shows on the *Meraviglia*. This one was titled "Meraviglioso Amor" and consisted almost exclusively of Italian love songs. The voices were good, the dancers were competent if not inspired and the show ended with a small parade of staff. All very nice. So shows exist on the *Meraviglia*, but are not promoted as heavily as on other ships.

Dinner was very nice. I had chicken Kiev and so did Sybil and Jett. Very tasty. On the way out of the dining room we stopped so I could take a couple of "experimental" shots. I really didn't think they would turn out well due to the backlighting, but they were actually pretty nice.

We took on the casino again and pretty much broke even.



Parade of staff



Show scene



Jett after dinner



Christine

## MSC1 Day 7: Ocean Cay, Bahamas

9 Feb 2020



*Meraviglia* docked at Ocean Cay

Ocean Cay is MSC's private Bahamian island. It is brand spanking new, just opening for use in December 2019, about 2 months ago. It is still a work in progress as there are at least three major construction areas on the island. But what is there is quite nice. Pristine beaches, crystal clear water, brightly painted shops and eating/drinking venues. There may not be enough of the latter as the lines at the buffet got very long by 1:30pm, but I think a second buffet location is one of the areas that is under construction.

And, because it is an extension of the ship experience, all of the food in the buffet (except for beer and wine) is free. And anything in the shops or at the bar can be purchased using the ship card. Very convenient.



Buffet lines

And, because it is an extension of the ship experience, all of the food in the buffet (except for beer and wine) is free. And anything in the shops or at the bar can be purchased using the ship card. Very convenient.

Unfortunately, our day on the island was marred by two things: the weather (cloudy and cool; see the gray in the photos?) and the failure of Sybil's walker. She got tired walking back to the ship, so I offered to let her sit, with me pushing. We were moving along pretty good when I hit a rut with the front left wheel, which almost tipped her over backward (I saved her from that scary almost spill) and some cracked spokes on the plastic wheel. At first I thought that the walker was completely disabled (and may have needed a walker itself), but I was able to muscle the broken spokes back into near-alignment so that it could continue to function as a walker. But no more riding.

The day at Ocean Cay could have been a long beach day, culminating in a bonfire and a light show on the lighthouse. But because it was so cool we opted to return to the ship and play Hand, Knee and Foot. And drink our other free bottle of champagne. Sybil and I got schooled by Jett and Christine, but the champagne was enjoyed by all.



Outer space dome show

Dinner was bittersweet, of course. Our last night together on the ship. We all selected the swordfish steak and the Asian salad, both very good, though the salad was light on the sesame dressing (the waiter got us more). We caught the last 15 minutes of the "One Night More" show of Broadway tunes. What we saw was exceptionally good - particularly the 3 *Les Miserables* songs, which always bring goosebumps.

Then we said goodbye because Christine and Sybil were planning on leaving very early, in the "express checkout". They needed to get to the Enterprise office to get a car and drive the 2.5 hours back to Ft Myers. Because Christine had booked a round-trip BOS-RSW ticket, forgetting that we would not be able to drive her back. Oops.

Jett and I played slots a bit and lost a bit. But not much. We ended the week still up over \$300. I don't think we have ever finished a week at sea with casino winnings.

Just one of the many ways in which we had a fine time.

# MSC1 Day 8: Miami, Florida

10 Feb 2020

Normally this would be "disembarkation day" - the end of our week at sea. But this time it was "back-to-back" day, the day when we transitioned from Cruise 1 to Cruise 2. It was a more complex transaction than we expected.

We had received a letter outlining the process. It contained two "back-to-back" vouchers, the purpose of which was somewhat murky but clearly had to be kept on our person as we navigated the process. That process began with a visit to the reception desk to receive new ship cards. That had to be done between 6am and 9am and I did it - or tried to do it - early, around 6:40am. I am always awake early so why not get 'er done?

For Christine and Sybil this was disembarkation day and they got an early start, leaving their cabin at 6:30. I was listening for them and was dressed and shaved and ready to help. I met them in the hallway and took one of the suitcases to the 6th floor for an "express" exit (which meant getting at the end of a line about 100 people long - how "express" could it be?). Christine was a bit worried about getting to Fort Myers for their 3pm flight. As it turns out she needn't have worried as they were off the ship and at the door of Enterprise Car Rental by 8am. It didn't open until 9, so they had a leisurely breakfast, got the car, drove to Fort Myers and were at the gate for their flight by 1:30pm. They had a nice flight and made it back to Boston safely.



Sybil awaiting disembarkation

Meanwhile, I was striking out at the reception desk because Jett had to be present to take a new photo. To capture the vast facial differences that a week at sea can induce, apparently. Whatever. So I had to wait until an hour when I could safely roust Jett from her slumber. Meaning about 8:20am. I killed this time by blogging and catching up on emails. One of the advantages of being in Miami was that our cell phones worked again, so I could surf the 'net without using our shipboard WiFi. It didn't really matter as we had finished the week using just 4.5GB of our 6.0GB internet package's data allotment.

Speaking of internet packages, I started the cruise with the intention of waiting until the last minute to book the package for the second week. I figured I should wait and see the rate at which I was using data onboard. It was a good strategy, but required that I book the second week by Thursday night - a detail that I remembered Friday morning when it was too late. So I had to wait until we reboarded to book the internet package for the second week. I thought that meant only that I would have to pay a 15% service charge, but was surprised to discover that the package itself changed. For the same \$99 that bought 6GB the first week I could get only 3GB for the second week. And only 2 devices rather than 3. So I will have to be careful about internet usage this week. Shorter posts with fewer photos?

Anyway, back to the process. When Jett got up and ready, we proceeded to the reception desk to get the new cards. We had to show passports (again, because they might have changed during the first week?) and get our new photos. We were given our new cards, then we had to kill 90 minutes until we gathered with other "back-to-back" guests to disembark, then re-embark. We got coffee, Jett had a cigarette, we chatted and engaged in some texting with friends and relatives. Then we made our way to the *Cirque de Soleil* theater to finish the (rather silly) process.

The group - about 200 of us - left the ship *en masse*. There was a long line at the customs checkpoint but some people - the ones going into Miami for the day - were escorted to a much shorter line. We decided to join

them even though we were not at all certain that we would be going anywhere. We got through customs in about a minute and exited into the bright Miami sunshine.



The back-to-back gathering



Outside Terminal F

Our main goal was to find a place to have lunch that wasn't the *Meraviglia* buffet. We briefly considered taking a taxi to South Beach, but didn't have a lunch destination in mind. So while contemplating that option I noticed a very unimposing building across the street - looked like a temporary barracks. It was the "Seaman's Café" and offered breakfast and lunch. I walked over to check it out and decided that it was acceptable. I walked back to collect Jett and we went over to the café.



Seaman's Cafe



Seaplane, ready for takeoff

Jett ordered a cappuccino with a shot of espresso and I ordered a "Seaman's Club" - a very nice club sandwich with ham, turkey and bacon. I intended to share it with Jett, but she declined. She did say that the cappuccino was quite good. And strong. This one required 6 sugars instead of the usual 3. We dined on the cafe's patio, in the sun, which Jett, who is perpetually cold, found very soothing.

We then walked back across the street to re-embark. I should mention that the street was virtually void of traffic. I found this extremely surprising. After all, a week earlier, at the same time of day, it was jam-packed with cars, buses and taxis and was pandemonium. Every dock was occupied and the line was out the door and around the corner at Terminal F. But on this day only 2 ships were in port and there was no traffic and no line. I thought that, perhaps, the lack of a line was due to a later departure - the MSC rep that I asked said we should plan on being back on board by "5 or 5:30". Turns out we could have missed the ship if we had believed him - the ship was underway by 5:30.

The "back-to-back" vouchers came in handy during re-embarkation. We showed them and were escorted through the passport control, the X-ray machine and the health scan expeditiously. What had taken me 3 hours a week earlier was completed in under 20 minutes this time.



We napped a bit, then went to the Smoking Lounge as the ship sailed away. I intended to view the departure from the Skylight Lounge, adjacent to the Smoking Lounge on the 18th deck, but it was closed for a "private event" - a gathering of high rollers. So I watched from the Smoking Lounge. It was another cool, cloudy day and not great for photos. I did get one earlier, before the overcast arrived, of a seaplane taking off. I didn't know that our Port of Miami canal doubled as a runway. I wondered where one would go on a seaplane. A private island in the Bahamas?

I vowed that I would drink less wine and consume less food in the second week. However, that intention was immediately tested with the arrival of yet another complimentary bottle of champagne and a plate of chocolate-covered strawberries, apparently a gift from MSC to acknowledge our special "back-to-back" status. Damn, those strawberries are good!



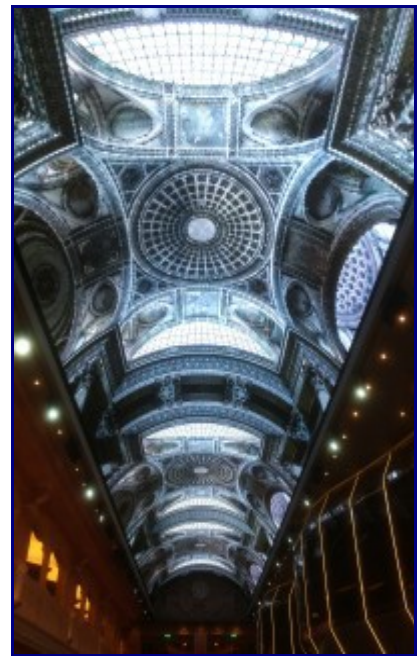
More complimentary stuff

We were anxious to meet our new dining companions. We needn't have worried as no one joined us. That could change tomorrow, but on this Sunday we dined alone. I finished the half-bottle of wine remaining from our Saturday dinner. Jett received a complimentary glass of prosecco from Ghiocel, the dining room manager. She actually took a couple of sips.

After dinner I went back to the reception desk to request an itemized Week 1 bill. I got it and it was in order. About \$670 in charges. Not too bad. I took the opportunity to take photos of a classy dome display and the underside of the Swarovski staircase. I thought the staircase photo might make an interesting jigsaw puzzle.



Complimentary prosecco



Classy dome

We lost money at the casino, but, again, not much. Still comfortably ahead.

## MSC1 Day 9: At sea

11 Feb 2020

This was a lazy day. It can be described easily: sleep, eat, read, gamble, sleep some more, eat some more, gamble again, eat again. The casino was not kind; we lost \$100. But we got new dinner companions. Harvey

and Shirley, a newly retired lawyer couple, new residents of south Florida. We all love dogs and dislike Aruba. We will have some nice dinner conversations, I think.

## MSC1 Day 10: Ocho Rios, Jamaica

12 Feb 2020



Jett going ashore in Ocho Rios

Ocho Rios is the only port on our 2-week cruise that we have not visited previously. So it is a highlight if for no other reason than we can increment our country count by 1. I am sure it has many wonderful attractions and I

would like to see some of them someday. But Jett is still pretty fragile, so we contented ourselves with browsing the shops in the port area, having a drink at the Margaritaville establishment and dipping our toes into the warm and very clear water.

It was a sunny, warm day so I got some very nice photos on our very short trip ashore. Our first stop was for some strong Jamaican coffee, which I judged to be mediocre. Jett ordered hers with milk and sugar and it was so sweet that she found it undrinkable. I combined half of it with half of my black coffee and it then wasn't bad.

At Margaritaville I ordered a banana margarita which tasted pretty much like any other margarita I have ever had. Maybe a bit sweeter, but not much of a banana flavor at all. Jett had a virgin margarita. She was feeling a bit unsteady already and didn't want any tequila to make matters worse.

After our drinks we took off our sandals and dipped our toes into the water. Wonderful! If the weather is warm on Saturday we will do some actual swimming.

Jett purchased a Jamaican handbag for \$23. Very colorful.

After drinks we returned to the ship and napped, as usual. Then, after we left port, we gambled. Lost \$50 which is also our usual.



Me and my banana margarita



Jett with Jamaican handbag



Jett testing the waters



The towering *Meraviglia*

Our new dinner companions did not appear for dinner, so we dined alone. But we had many visits from not one but two different head waiters, plus the restaurant manager. He gave Jett a complimentary glass of prosecco and obtained two plates of a seafood pasta dish that was not on the menu. Jett didn't like it much but I thought it was terrific. To each his (or her) own.



Leaving Jamaica

## "The Reversal" by Michael Connelly

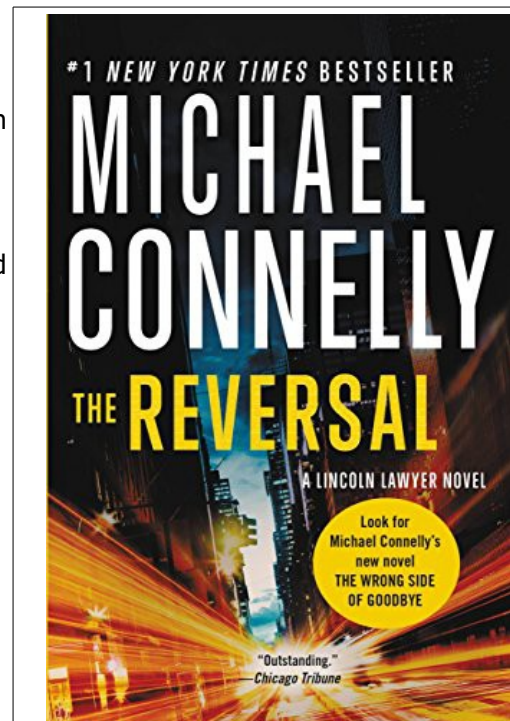
12 Feb 2020

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This is number 3 in the series of "Lincoln Lawyer" books by Connelly, all featuring Mickey Haller as the lawyerly protagonist. In both of the books in the series that I have read he teams up with LAPD homicide detective Hieronymous Bosch, the protagonist in many of Connelly's other mysteries.

This book is about Haller's involvement in the retrial of a convicted child killer who has spent 24 years in prison for a crime he swears he did not commit. His conviction was overturned because the semen stain on the girl's dress, when finally tested for DNA, turned out to be not his, as was alleged in the first trial, but her stepfather's. So he gets a new trial, this time with one less crucial piece of incriminating evidence and one new path for giving the jury reasonable doubt.

For reasons that are not totally convincing, the LA DA asks Mickey Haller, a lifelong defense attorney, to act as special prosecutor. It gives Connelly an opportunity to have Haller and his ex-wife, Maggie McPherson (or "Maggie McFierce"), a very capable prosecutor herself, to be on the same side for a change. This is a once-in-a-lifetime reversal of roles for him: prosecutor instead of defense. So does the eponymous "reversal" refer to his unusual



courtroom role or the overturning of the conviction? Take your pick. Maybe both. A twofer.

Haller jumps to the prosecution with gusto, convinced of the man's guilt. But one of the first things he does, when they finally get to the courtroom, is to give the man his freedom by declining to oppose his release on personal recognizance. A convicted killer released without even a bail bond? Unheard of. And probably unwise. But necessary to move the story along. Haller's reasoning: he wants to give the killer a chance to do something stupid. Uh, yeah. Put the public at risk.

The released convict gets round-the-clock surveillance, something which I am sure the LAPD did not have in their budget and would not endear Haller to them. But follow him they did and while he didn't commit any further crimes while under surveillance, he did take some odd trips at night to secluded locations which gave rise to the suspicion that he was revisiting crime scenes and might be a serial killer. But was bail revoked then? Nope, not then and not when they observed him probably buying a gun. This seems like either prosecutorial malpractice or police acquiescence, neither being something to admire.

I won't reveal the outcome of the trial, but, as with the other Haller book that I have read, it doesn't turn out in the best possible way for him.

The book started slowly and, at least in the paperback edition, the print was exceptionally small which made reading a chore. But it picked up steam about a third of the way in and, with the help of better reading glasses, I read the last half of the book in a single day. It wasn't the best book - or even the best Connelly - that I have ever read, but it did keep my interest.

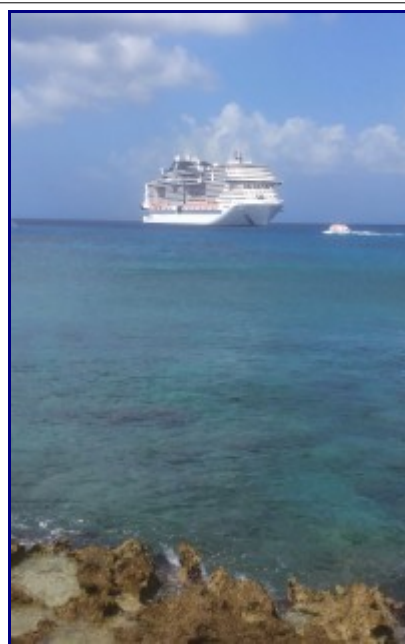
6 out of 10.

## MSC1 Day 11: Georgetown, Grand Cayman

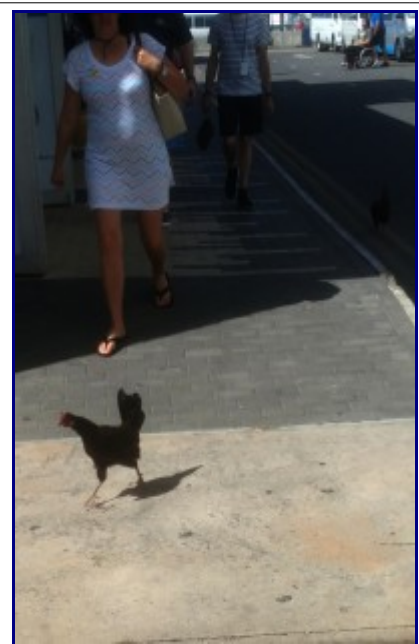
13 Feb 2020

We had breakfast in our cabin, as has become our habit, then got ready to go ashore. Georgetown is a tender port, so we had to board a smaller boat for a short trip to shore. This trip was much shorter than Belize - about 5 minutes. And, unlike most people, we didn't have to wait for our number to be called. We had two more "priority boarding" passes, a perk, apparently, due to our "back-to-back" status.

Georgetown is an upscale port. No poverty here. It is also a great place to snorkel and swim with the stingrays. The fountain in downtown is a tribute to the importance of stingrays to the local economy. However, the chickens roaming the streets belie the upscale nature of the city.



Meraviglia from Georgetown



Chickens crossing the road

We had a light lunch at the Paradise restaurant, right on the shore with a clear view of the 5 ships in port: *Carnival Paradise*, *Holland America Nieuw Statendam*, *Celebrity Reflection*, *Royal Caribbean Liberty of the Seas* and the *MSC Meraviglia*. That is a combined capacity of well over 15,000 passengers so the port was very busy. With both tenders and people. I think the chickens would have been wise to run and hide.

We did some shopping but didn't buy much. Souvenirs and trinkets mostly. The most interesting part of the shopping experience was the table at the entrance to the Harley Davidson shop - a glass top on a huge V-12 marine diesel engine.



Marine V-12 engine table

Upon return to the ship Jett went in for a nap and I went down to get the banana gelato and homemade hot chocolate that I had been jonesing for from Day 2 when I spotted them. I was mildly disappointed with both - the gelato was too sweet and the hot chocolate wasn't a lot better than Swiss Miss.

Our new dinner companions again were MIA. We may be dining alone the rest of the cruise. But that is fine. We discussed both of our families and may have found ways to fix all of you.

The casino was unkind again. We are getting dangerously close to break even. But, as the gambler said, "I am glad I broke even. I need the money."



Homemade hot chocolate and banana gelato



Sunset west of Grand Cayman

# MSC1 Day 12: Cozumel, Mexico

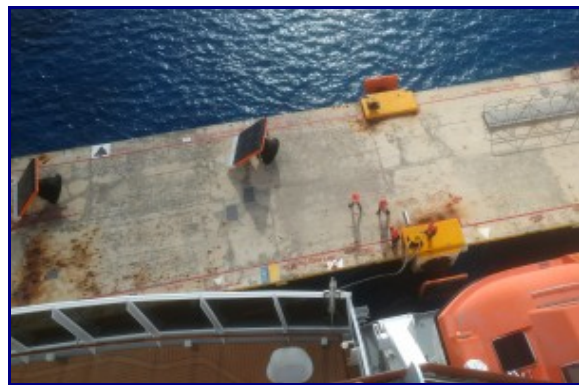
14 Feb 2020



*Meraviglia and Nieuw Statendam from Cozumel*

Our first trip to Mexico, over 20 years ago, included a day trip to Cozumel. We had a great day and since then Cozumel has always been one of our favorite places on earth. So yesterday, despite not feeling great, Jett rallied so that we could go ashore. We didn't do much - had a taco lunch and window-shopped - but it was a beautiful day in a place we love.

Before heading ashore I watched the very delicate process of docking a huge ship. Some of the work of tying it down was done right below our cabin so I got a good view.



The lines being set

One of the little shopping tasks was finding something for Cristina. Just as we got ashore we saw a vendor who was hawking bracelets with custom names. So we asked him to make one for her, which he did while I watched. Took about 10 minutes. The guy has done this before.

In all of our trips to Mexico I had never had tacos, so I thought it would be a good time to taste an authentic Mexican taco. We ordered a sampler with chicken, beef and shrimp tacos. They were fine but very plain - none of the sour cream, lettuce and black olives that Jett puts on hers. I like Jett's better.



Making the bracelet



Taco sampler



Proof that Jett made it ashore

Before heading back I had a quick beer with an ex-pat. He raved about life in Cozumel. If we were to ever move to Mexico, Cozumel would be our home.

Jett was pretty pooped by the time we headed back to the ship, so we took advantage of one of the "tips only" bicycle jitneys that roam the pier.

On our way back to the room we took the wrong elevator, so had to traverse the ship above the pool. It is embarrassing to admit it, but this was our first view of the pool in daylight. Looks inviting.



Taking a bike ride back



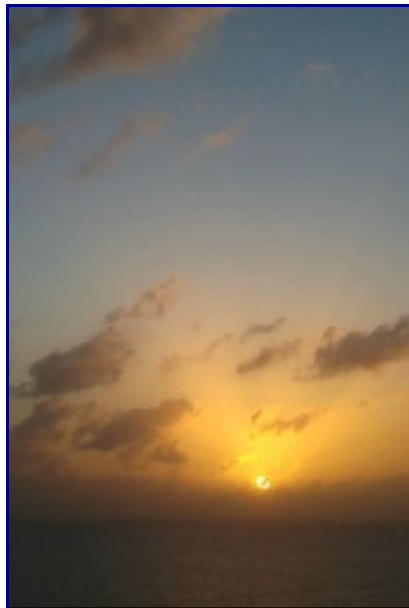
The pool – little used by us

Dinner was "Italian Night." My lasagna was mediocre but the fried calamari that preceded it was outstanding - tender and tasty.

We made it to the 10pm show which was a rather impressive display of magic tricks, plus some dancing. The Italian magician did some very convincing tricks, including cutting a woman in half and squeezing a woman so that her feet were up to her chin. I was baffled - couldn't see any way it could have been done.

Lost another \$50 at the casino. That \$500 win last week is a distant memory.





Another Caribbean sunset



Magician with floating table

## MSC2 Day 13: At sea

15 Feb 2020

A day at sea is, almost by definition, a slow day. A relaxing day. A day to sleep, eat, read, gamble and do sudoku puzzles. And that is what we did. The casino, as has been the case all week, was not kind, making us cough up another \$100, mostly due to my inability to find a game that paid off in even small amounts. Jett worked the machines three times as much and lost a third of what I did.



Crowded pool

While she napped in the afternoon I took a brief tour of the ship, seeing some things that I had not seen before. The pool, of course, was very crowded. And I found a small pool in the bow that was also very crowded but which featured an odd fat bather statue. I also wandered through the kids area and was impressed. The indoor gym was outstanding - the only indoor gym I have ever seen on a ship. The kids area also had a small computer room and a cute little bench made entirely of Lego blocks.

I took a few photos of the casino which was kind to us last week but has been cruel this week. As I mentioned before, it has a smoking section which makes it one of Jett's two most favored places on the ship (the Smoking Room being the other).



Fat lady statue at the pool



Huge indoor gym



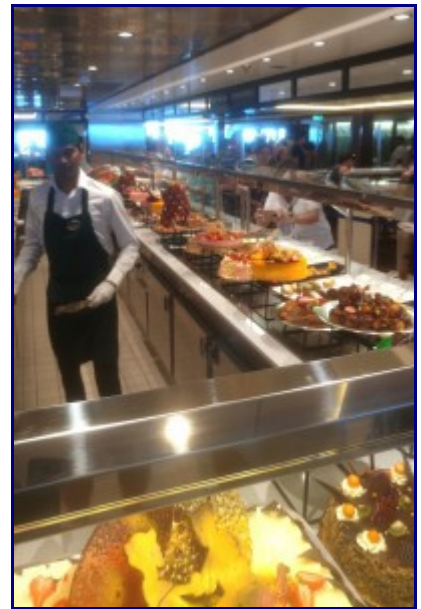
Casino entrance



Jett at the (anti?) money machine



Valentine's Day cappuccino



Sweets for the sweet



Lego settee



Kids computer room

Dinner was, again, solo. We both had the chicken Kiev and enjoyed it very much. Because it was Valentine's Day, Jett's cappuccino arrived adorned with a heart. There were also oodles of sweets in the buffet and kissing swans towel art on our bed.



Kissing swans towel art

## MSC1 Day 14: Ocean Cay, Bahamas

17 Feb 2020



Lighthouse on Ocean Cay

This was our second bite of MSC's private Ocean Cay island in the Bahamas. The weather this time was considerably better than the cool, cloudy, damp day we got last week. There were still lots of clouds, but with enough sunny breaks that we could spend a few minutes on the beach (one of the 6 or 7 on the island). I even took a brief swim in the crystal-clean water. Jett dipped her toes.

We went to the casino in the afternoon and lost more money. Then we packed and had our final dinner on board. We took photos of the people who had served us so well for 2 weeks: Ghiocel, the restaurant manager, Asook, the head waiting and Theresa, our waiter. Kudos to all for making us feel so welcome.

We found some nice farewell towel art in our cabin after dinner, then took in the full Broadway tunes show. Very well done. The do a great job with "staging" using photographic backdrops. The voices and dancing were quite good, too.

A fine cruise. And no hospital visits.



Proving I was there



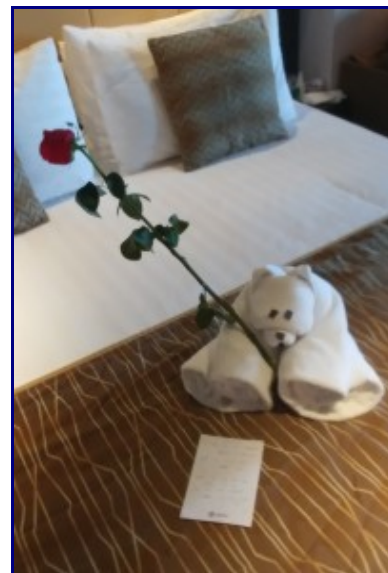
The beach we actually used



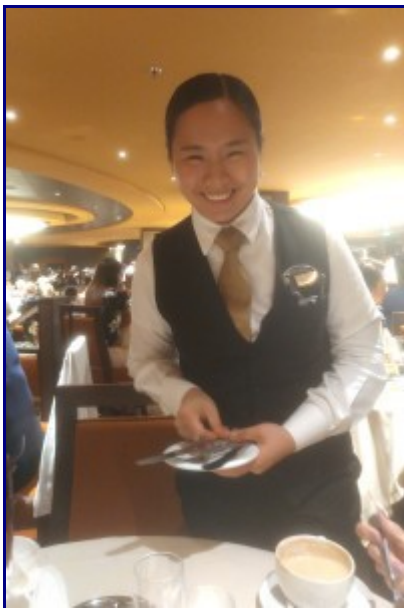
The beach closest to the ship



Jett testing the water



Farewell towel art

*West Side Story scene**Les Misérables scene*

Theresa



Jett and Asook



Jett and Ghiocel

## MSC1 Day 15: Disembarkation

**20 Feb 2020**

Getting off the ship was a lot easier than getting on. Maybe a bit too easy. We were assigned to the first group after the elite Yacht Club folks to disembark. We were told to be in the theater by 8am. We got there at 7:45 and then I went out, hoping to get a final itemized bill (which they said would be delivered to me by 8pm the previous night, but which never appeared). So I was at the other end of the long shopping mall when our group was called and I had to hustle back to find Jett, fighting against the flow all the way. She was a bit miffed when I got there, feeling abandoned, I guess. But all was well. We were escorted to the front of the line (thanks, wheelchair!) and were through customs and in a taxi by 8:30 and at the truck before 9am.

The hardest part of the trip back was finding fuel. I probably had enough to make it, but running out of fuel in Alligator Alley (50 miles without a gas station) was something to be avoided, so I wanted to fill up. The first place I tried had diesel at a reasonable price, but accepted cash only. The second place was a RaceTrak advertised before an exit on I-75, but I couldn't find it. The third place turned out to be nearly 3 miles from the

exit, so I got back on and kept going. The fourth try was the charm, sort of. But I pulled in behind two utility trucks who proceeded to occupy the only 2 diesel pumps in the place. I was cursing a blue streak by that point and it must have worked because one of the trucks pulled out without refueling. I pulled in and loaded up with 22 gallons. That meant that there were 8 gallons left in the tank, which would have gotten me to Naples, but I would have been gnawing on my fingernails.

The rest of the trip was uneventful.

Jett went in for a nap (she felt a cold coming on) while I went out and bought \$82 of groceries. I came back, unloaded and then went to meet our new neighbors, Joshua and Gary, a gay couple who were enjoying their new tiki hut which was constructed while we were away. I enjoyed meeting them. Nice guys.

That evening I started getting the "coming down with a cold" feeling. That led into a stretch of 3 days in which I was as sick as I have been in many years. Running nose, cough and profuse sweating. 3 miserable days. Jett was pretty sick, too, but she got on Tamiflu on Monday and that seems to have helped a bit. But because she was ill her infusion was delayed for a week.

Anyway, it is now Thursday and while I can't claim to be fully recovered, I have concluded that I am going to survive.

Hell of a way to end a vacation.

## Spring training, 2020

3 Mar 2020



Mike, me and Dave at JetBlue Park

My old softball buddies from Massachusetts, Mike and Dave, once more came to Florida for Red Sox spring training. As has become our custom, we each hosted one game. The schedule this year:

- Mike - Phillies vs Red Sox, Thu Feb 27
- Me - Red Sox vs Twins, Fri Feb 28
- Dave - Atlanta vs Red Sox, Sun Mar 1

Two games at JetBlue Park, the Red Sox home field, and one at CenturyLink Park, the Twins home field.

The weather didn't exactly cooperate. Last year we got to just two games as one was rained out. This year we got to all 3 games, but it was very cold - especially for the first game. The temperature for that game was low 60's with a strong breeze. It wasn't just chilly; it was COLD. The stands were empty by the 9th inning, a combination of the cold and the Red Sox playing so poorly. Final score: a 12-5 loss.

The game at CenturyLink was a bit warmer, about 68 degrees, and we sat in the sun. The Red Sox pitching was better, but the hitting wasn't (except for JD Martinez who hit a triple and a home run), so they lost that one, too, 4-1. The seats were great, though - right behind the Red Sox dugout. And in the sun.

The third game's weather was just slightly cooler than normal, about 72 degrees. Apparently the Red Sox pitching liked the warmth and they ended up winning this one 4-2. It should have been 4-0 but the excellent pitching melted down in the 9th, giving up 2 walks, 2 hit batters and a single. The game ended with the tying run on second base. Our



JD in the dugout, right in front of us



JD hitting a triple

seats for this game were right down the right field line - an interesting perspective on the game. We were kind of hoping to get a foul ball, but no such luck. Perhaps we should be careful what we wish for because the foul ball that came closest hit a woman on the arm. EMTs escorted her away, probably for X-rays.



Our view from right field at JetBlue

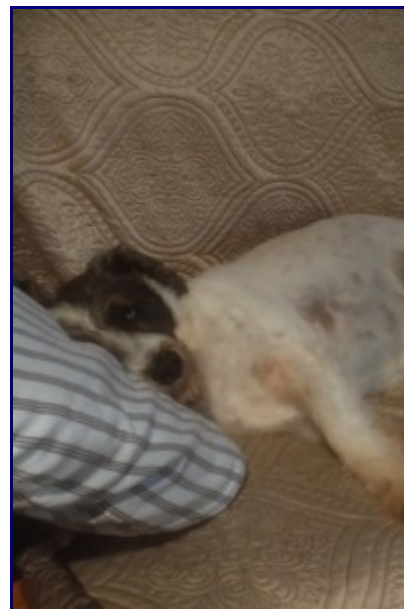
## Winter potpourri

6 Mar 2020

This has not been a winter season of great events. Jett has rarely gotten out of the RV for any reason other than to get to medical appointments. We haven't had any visitors, with the exception of my softball buddies (see previous post) and a quick visit from son Josh, to return Rusty.

Yes, Rusty is back with us. If you recall, Josh drove all the way from VA to FL to pick up Rusty in advance of our cruise. I felt that it would be unfair to ask him to also make the trip to return Rusty, so my plan was to drive up to get him. The post-cruise cold killed that plan, however. Rather than delay the return, Josh and Cristina made the trip to get the boy back where he belongs. We are truly grateful. Thank you, Josh and Cristina!

When we returned from the cruise we met our new neighbors, Joshua (yes, another Joshua) and Gary, from Georgia. If you recall, they were in Ft Myers while we were still in MA and saved our bacon by starting the truck when the battery ran low. I was thrilled to meet them and thank them in person for that. I think we will get along great. We are blessed with two wonderful neighbors. While we like many of the residents of the park, we don't like them all. We could easily have gotten neighbors that we would have a hard time being civil to. Not a problem we have to deal with, thankfully.



Rusty back home

We lost both of our small trees at the front of our site - the purple bush that blew over in the wind before we arrived and the beautiful red hibiscus. Apparently the hibiscus was diseased. The purple bush has been replaced by a similar red bush and the red hibiscus has been replaced by a yellow hibiscus. The new hibiscus is small now, but I am assured that it will become fairly large - maybe 5' tall and 5' wide.

The park had a Mardi Gras parade this year. It was larger than I would have expected but consisted mostly of decorated golf carts. No lawn chair brigade, ala Rockport. Unbeknownst to us, it was associated with a pet shelter fundraiser so I felt a little bad when



New red flowering tree



Yellow hibiscus

the truck with food donations rolled by at the end of the parade and I had nothing to give.

I tried to start a genealogy group at the park. It has sputtered and has probably died. Only 3 people came in the first 3 weeks, then I had the cruise and the cold, so it has been a month with no meetings (unless those 3 met



without me). A nice try, but I will count it as a failure.

Much of my spare time, both before the cruise and post-cold, has been spent taking photographs in the [Lee Memorial Park](#), a large cemetery for over 10,000 souls. I noticed that it had over 1,800 unphotographed graves and I took it as a challenge to cut into that number this winter. Walking this large cemetery is both good - and free - exercise and attaching photographs to the memorials in findagrave.com gives me a feeling of accomplishment. I believe I have photographed over 800 so far. Thankfully, digital photography is basically zero cost. I never could have done this with film.



Mardi Gras parade

Softball started in January and, with the exception of the 2 weeks on the cruise, I have roamed the outfield in every game. The team has not done well and my performance has been spotty, at best. But, again, good exercise.

Add in the medical appointments and that covers much of what has kept me busy since we arrived in Nov. Not exciting, but better than shoveling snow, right?

## My last colonoscopy

8 Mar 2020

Yes, I had a colonoscopy on Friday. I was overdue - I was on the "5-year plan" and it was at least 7 years since my last one and perhaps as long as 9. I don't enjoy colonoscopies any more than most; it is just something that needs to be done occasionally. Probably similar to breast exams.

As always the preparation was the worst part of the experience. Drinking 4 liters of what seemed like diluted antifreeze is not fun. But I got it down successfully, finishing it off 3 hours before the procedure.

Jett is unable to drive right now, so I asked my neighbor, Mark, to pick me up. He graciously agreed to do that and even more graciously offered to drive me there, too - 30 minutes each way. I thought this was asking too much and because I thought there would be perhaps a 3-hour interval between dropoff and pickup, it would mean 2 round trips. Too much to ask.

So Plan A was to take Uber. This would be an adventure as I had never taken an Uber anywhere before by myself. I downloaded the app, got the payment details set up and was ready to schedule the ride Friday morning. But when I tried to do that -



HealthPark Hospital atrium

about 8 times - I got an error stating that the payment could not be completed. Don't know why. Something to figure out before my next attempt at using Uber. In the meantime, I have been charged \$50 for my Uber account which is still unused.

Plan B was a conventional taxi. So I called at 8:30am to arrange an 11:40am pickup. I would meet the taxi at the gate to avoid the complexities of getting into the community and finding my site. So I was at the gate by 11:40am but by 11:45am had not seen a taxi. I called the company, asking if a taxi was *en route*. No, they said, but I would get "the next driver who was in the area." The driver would call when he was on his way. As I had no expectation that any driver would EVER be "in the area" I had to move on to Plan C - call Mark.

Mark was at McDonald's, but agreed to pick me up and drive me to the hospital. Which he did (THANK YOU, MARK).

Plan D, if it had been needed, was to drive myself and worry about recovering the car on Saturday.

I was a few minutes late getting to the hospital - and they called me at 12:32pm to see if I was planning on being there. I assured them that I was just a few minutes away.

The taxi driver called at 12:39pm - one hour late - and I told him that his services were no longer needed.

I got through registration and into my gown by 1pm and was immediately taken into the procedure room. The anesthesia was administered shortly thereafter with the warning that "this will sting a little." It did and my last conscious thought was "how long will the sting last?" and then I was out. Some 30 minutes later I was suddenly awake - 1:37pm by my watch - and was informed that the colonoscopy was finished. Mark received a call at 1:39pm to pick me up. Amazing efficiency. I was in Mark's truck, on my way home, a few minutes after 2pm - exactly 1 hour after I was rolled into the procedure room. Obviously my expectation of a 3-hour procedure was wildly off target.

Mark, wisely, had not left the area. He used the time to pick up dinner - lobster rolls - from the [Cape Cod Fish Company](#). He had thoughtfully gotten lobster rolls for Jett and me, too. Delicious! And a nice way to break my fast.

So all of this was interesting in a "my, how things have changed!" sort of way. But the most memorable part of the whole experience was afterward, as the tubes and electrodes were being removed, when the nurse told me that I had completed my "last colonoscopy." Because the colonoscopy had gone so well - no polyps - I was back on the 10-year plan. And because they don't do colonoscopies on anyone over 80, I would never need one again.

She said this with a smile and I could see how she thought this was great news. But to someone my age, being told that this was, without any question, the last time I would experience this in my lifetime was quite sobering. It was like an official notification that I have entered the End Stage of Life.

As a memento of the occasion I was given a postcard-sized photograph of the interior of my large colon. I can't imagine why anyone would want to possess such a thing and I certainly am not going to include it here (you're welcome). But I haven't completely ruled out using it as my 2020 Christmas card photo.

## Life in the time of corona

**13 Mar 2020**

Two weeks ago if you had said "corona" I would have said "beer." Now? Maybe "death." How quickly things can change!

I am not panicked. I think the extreme actions taken in response to the coronavirus pandemic - cancellation or

postponement of sporting events, shutting down Broadway, closing Disneyworld - are probably overreactions. But appropriate overreactions. The downside of taking no action - death for thousands of elderly - is worse than the downside of taking action - economic disruption.

We had an HOA meeting on Tuesday to elect our first Board of Directors. That meant a gathering of over 200 mostly elderly people in one room. This is a group of very healthy elderly folks, but I have to admit that I was very sensitive to the sound of coughing. Fortunately there were very few coughs during the 90-minute meeting, but every time I heard one I was speculating whether Typhoid Mary was in attendance.

Even our senior softball games have changed slightly. Instead of the after-game high-fives it is now a line of elbow bumps. I guess we are fortunate in that we never have more than 10 spectators, so we aren't running afoul of any "large gathering" restrictions.

Anyway, wash your hands, stay at least 6 feet away from me and hopefully we will both survive the next couple of months.

## "The Steel Kiss" by Jeffrey Deaver

17 Mar 2020

[Copyright 2016 by Gunner Publications LLC.](#)  
[Published by Grand Central Publishing, New York.](#)

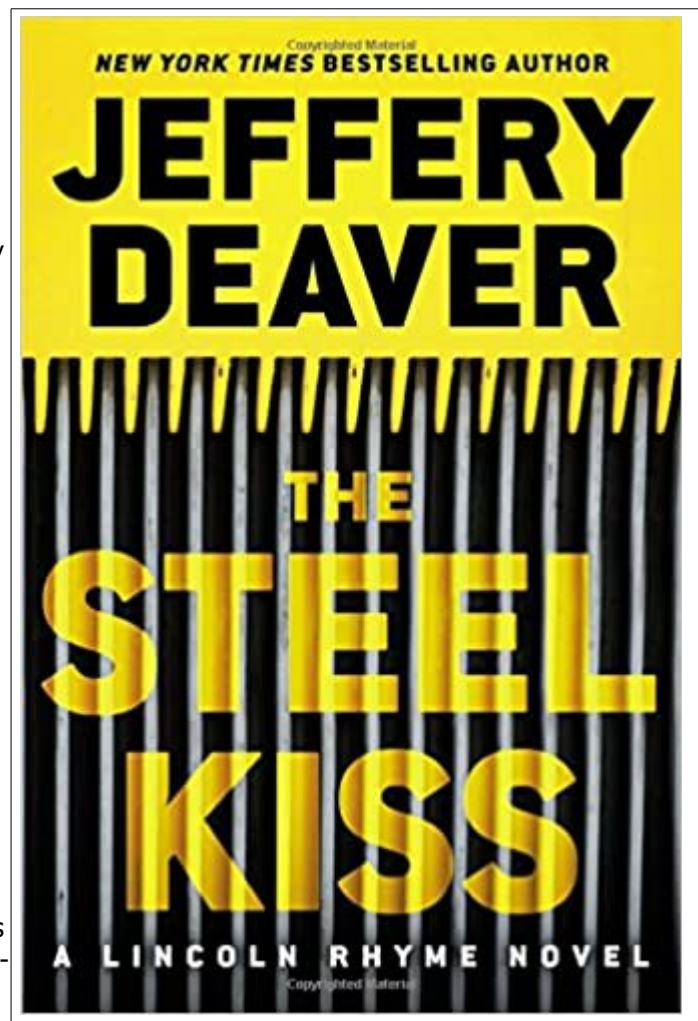
I like Deaver's Lincoln Rhyme books (this is 12 in a series of 14). Some of the puzzles that he has to unravel are among the most intricate - and perverted - of all the mysteries that I have read. His villains are among the most cunning, savage and brutal. I usually can't put the book down.

I put this one down. Frequently.

A little background for those not familiar with Lincoln Rhyme. He is a quadriplegic, a former captain in the NYPD whose spinal cord was damaged beyond repair while working a crime scene. Since that time he has worked as a consultant to the NYPD, solving some of their knottiest cases. He is ably assisted by Amelia Sachs, an active NYPD detective and lover who is engaged to Rhyme. There are several other active NYPD detectives who assist. It is a formidable crew, dedicated to solving the crime(s) through thorough analysis of meager trace evidence.

The Rhyme books are not classic whodunnits - we know who the culprit is (mostly). He even gets his own first person narrative in parts of this book. The mystery is the motive and how he will be caught.

This book is complex in that no fewer than 4 - or is it 5 - separate stories are intertwined. The unsub - he is actually called "Unsub 40" through much of the book - is a tall, rail-thin man who is suspected of several



heinous crimes. Sachs is hot on his trail at the inception, only to be thwarted as she closes in on her prey as he is eating lunch in a shopping mall by the intervention of a horrible accident - a man falls into the workings of an escalator and is chewed to death as Sachs tries to save him. But we soon learn that it wasn't an accident - someone hacked the wireless controller embedded in the escalator, causing the cover plate on the gearbox to open while operating. I don't think it will spoil much if I tell you that the hacker is Unsub 40 and he popped the cover while having lunch.

Lincoln, who in this book has terminated his work with the NYPD, takes on a task for the lawyer representing the wife of the chewed-up shopper. Eventually Sachs and Rhyme figure out they are dealing with the same perp and join forces. But there are still other subplots: the appearance of Sach's old flame, an ex-cop who was sent upriver for a truck hijacking that he now claims he didn't do, a drug dealer that another detective is trying to nail because he thinks it will get Lincoln working for NYPD again, and the actions of the unsub's mysterious and somewhat pathetic girlfriend. It is all pretty confusing. It all comes together at the end, but you have to embark on a torturous ride to get there.

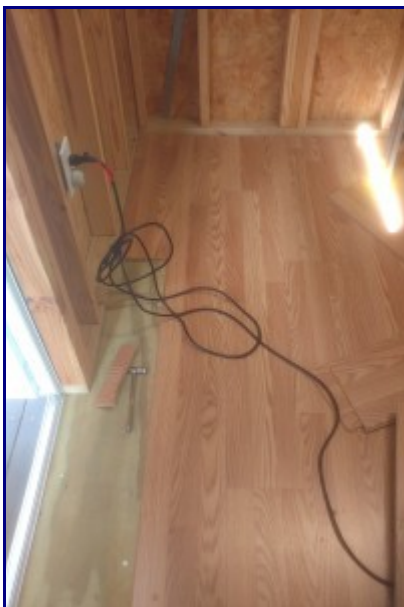
There are plot twists. Lots of plot twists. But, more than any other Lincoln Rhyme book, this one seemed to rely less on evidence and more on dumb luck and conclusions based on very thin evidence. The reader is asked to buy into some fairly far-fetched wrinkles in the plot. I didn't buy into them and so had a hard time getting through to the end. It felt like a slog in some very thick quicksand.

5 out of 10.

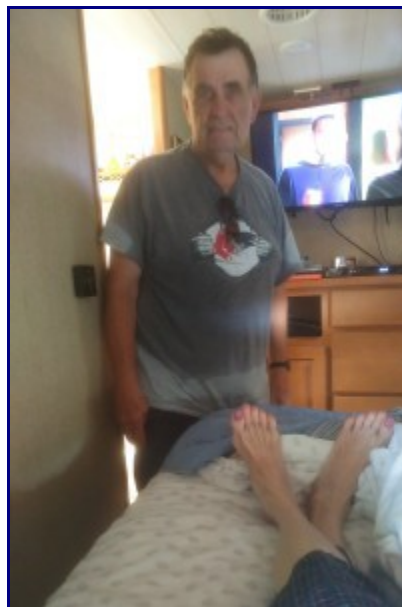
## Flooring!

**20 Mar 2020**

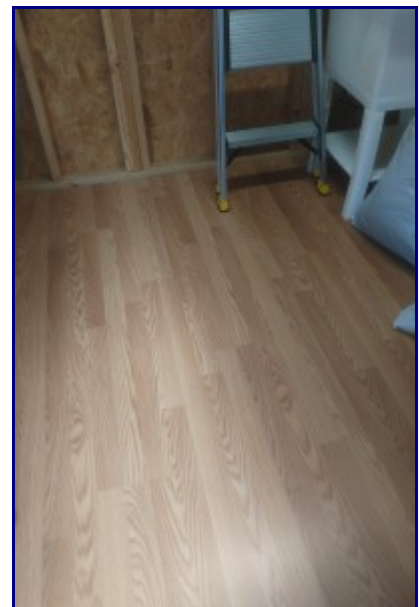
After many months of inaction, there is now some movement toward getting a washer/dryer installed in the shed. The main goal right now is plumbing - can't wash clothes without water - but I also have to get the air conditioner installed and get the walls insulated. I spoke to a contractor last week and a plumber before that and came to an agreement on price. The contractor applied for a building permit on Monday (yes, the county office was still open for business, unlike almost everything else).



Nearing completion



Sweat



Completed

And I confirmed that I could install the flooring without affecting any of the upcoming work.

So I worked this past weekend - in sweltering 90-degree heat and oppressive humidity - installing the laminate flooring that I had bought a year ago. The installation was not difficult - I just had to make sure the tongue-in-groove boards mated tightly so there were no unsightly spaces - but I had no power tools and had to saw everything by hand. And the biggest job was moving everything out of the shed then, when done, moving it all back in again.

I think the job took about 6 hours spread over two days. And about a gallon of sweat. I haven't worked that hard in years. Jett got a photo of me when I came in for a break - my shirt was SOAKED.

But I got 'er done. And it looks great.

## Gearing up for a blog upgrade

**22 Mar 2020**

I am - or was - a professional software developer. I spent over 45 years developing commercial software, mostly of high quality. The term "development cycle" is one that I have heard so many times that it may be tattooed on my forehead. So why, in the 9 years since I started this blog, have I not upgraded the underlying blogging software?

Laziness, mostly. And a firm belief that if it ain't broken, don't fix it.

But now it is broken. Well, it has been broken for several years, really. Those few of you who followed the blog in the early years might recall that the blog's original theme included a graphic banner. That disappeared about 5 years ago. The feature that allowed a reader to filter by date or tag was lost two or three years ago. It is no longer possible now to scroll back in time further than the list of posts that are provided on the page. All of these features just disappeared, without warning, over time, as, I presume, parts of the underlying technologies became incompatible with each other. I am now getting warning messages that the WordPress blogging software that is the keystone to the whole operation is about to become obsolete.

I can no longer ignore all of these failures. Time to bite the bullet and try to bring the blog up to date. This is going to require some work on my part. That is okay - I am retired and with the coronavirus raging, what better time to stay indoors and work on a project like this? But there is a risk that I could screw it up and completely break the whole thing. I am hoping that the technologies that need to be upgraded are forgiving and "idiot proof." But I think it is possible that the blog could go dark for a while.

My hope, however, is that the upgrade will go smoothly and the the blog will emerge with all of the original capabilities restored. And maybe some new ones added. The look-and-feel will certainly change.

If you have any thoughts about features to be added, let me know.

Otherwise, please just pray that I don't mess this up.

## Air conditioning!

**22 Mar 2020**

I bought an air conditioner for the shed on March 3, 2019 - just over a year ago. The intent, at the time, was to

get it installed to keep the shed cool through the summer of 2019. Didn't happen. And attempts to get it installed this year hadn't gotten anywhere. But, finally, it got installed this week.

The major icebreaker was reaching agreement with the contractor on the cost of plumbing, insulation and carpentry - including installation of the air conditioner. A construction permit was pulled last week and a few days later two workmen showed up at my door (but stood 6 feet away) offering to begin work. The first step was to install "ribbing" in the ceiling, to make room for the required R-19 insulation. I dutifully cleared out some of the stuff to make room (most was on the shelving in the middle of the room which they said I could leave). I asked if they would be installing the air conditioner and they said they would. But not that day.



Ribbing

But they surprised me. I guess the ribbing work went faster than expected and by the end of the day the air conditioner was installed and operational.

But not remotely controlled.

After I bought the air conditioner I tested it to make sure it worked and configured it for remote control in the (vain) hope that I could get someone to install it while we were north last summer and could then monitor and control it from there. But when I took a look for the remote control app on my phone it was nowhere to be found. Don't know why it disappeared, but it was gone. I would have to download and configure it again. Frustrating, but no big deal. It didn't take much effort the first time and the second time should be even easier. Right?

So I downloaded the app and almost immediately hit a roadblock: I needed the password from the label on the right side of the air conditioner. But, now installed in the wall, the label could no longer be seen. So I had to call for technical support. That took three phone calls before I found a person who could help. Then I had to download a second app to get the MAC address of the air conditioner. But the tech support guy was able to use that to look up the password and I was then able to finish the configuration. I can now monitor and control the air conditioner from anywhere in the world where I have cell phone or WiFi access.

Yes, I wrote down the password in case I need it again.



Air conditioner installed

All of this was done during mounting concern over the COVID-19 pandemic. I made it a point to keep as distant as possible from the workmen, to never touch them and, just once, when I was inspecting the air conditioner installation, getting within 3 feet of either of them. Later that day, when walking Rusty, I stopped by the newly-closed pool. If there is a photo that captures the impact of the pandemic in the RV resort, this is it. An empty pool on a beautiful "in season" afternoon. Sad.



Shuttered pool

## George and Melissa (Freeman) Richardson

**30 Mar 2020**

I haven't done much genealogical research lately, though I have been getting a lot of exercise walking cemeteries. This morning I decided to catch up on some accumulated Ancestry.com "hints." In doing so I think I solved - at least partially - one of the great mysteries in my ancestry: how George Watson Freeman, a 2nd great-grandfather who was born in Ohio, met and married Melissa Jane Freeman, born in Missouri. They married, probably in Kansas but possibly in Colorado, in 1865 and settled in Wisconsin in 1873. They are buried together in the East Pine River Cemetery in Yuba, Wisconsin. I found and photographed their headstone in 2017.

See the mystery? Ohio, Missouri, Colorado, Kansas, Wisconsin. How the heck did that all come about? That is a lot of travel at a time when railroads were just being established in the middle of America.

Today I dug into some records - both old and newly-discovered - and can now provide some details of these movements.

First, George's father and mother, Zacheus and Sarah Ann "Sally" (Francisco) Richardson, 3rd great-grandparents, were pioneers in their own right. Both were born in the Northeast - he in Springfield VT (in the Connecticut River valley) and she in German NY, near Binghamton. Sometime before 1827 they both moved west, to Ohio, which was the "wild west" at that time. They married in 1827 in Mayfield OH, a town which he helped found. George was born there in 1840.

Apparently Ohio in 1845 wasn't wild enough because Zacheus and Sally picked up their family then and moved even further west, to Illinois when George was just 5. They purchased 80.2 acres in McHenry County IL, just west of Chicago, on June 1, 1845. The farm grew to over 120 acres before Zacheus' death in 1865.

George inherited his parents' pioneering spirit and as a young man of 19 became a miner, first in Utah and then in Colorado. In 1862 he enlisted in the US Army, serving during the Civil War in Company G, Second Regiment of the Colorado Volunteer Infantry. He served there 3 years, after which he reenlisted in Company E, Second Colorado Cavalry. It was between those enlistments that he married Melissa Freeman. She must have been with him, based at a frontier fort in the west, until he mustered out, probably after 2 or 3 years. They lived for a while in Lawrence, Kansas, before moving to LaFarge, Wisconsin, in 1873.

I found a note that described the Second Regiment as "being raised by ['Buckskin Joe.'](#)" This apparently refers to Joe Higgenbottom, a miner who discovered gold in Colorado in 1860, leading to a gold rush. It is pretty likely that this gold discovery is what brought George to Colorado from Utah and why he later joined Buckskin Joe's regiment.



Headstone

I found the following account of his time in the infantry:

He served principally in the west and southwest, having first proceeded with his command to New Mexico, and later having been at St. Louis, Fort Scott, Kansas and Fort Smith, Arkansas, hunting for bushwhackers. He finally returned with his command to Colorado and at Fort Riley he received his honorable discharge May 12, 1865.

[Fort Riley](#) is actually in Kansas. He married Melissa Freeman in April 1865, just prior to his discharge, probably at Fort Riley. She was probably living in or near Fort Riley at that time.

I don't have any description of his time in the cavalry, but I can imagine that he was involved in protecting the pioneer settlements in the west from Indian attacks. If he spent any time at Fort Riley then he probably met Major General George Custer who was in command of Fort Riley for a time starting in 1866.

So this answers the basic question of how a woman born in Missouri got into my family tree - she met a gold miner and soldier in the wild west. This is one of the more colorful leaves on my tree and Melissa Freeman is a critical link to our Virginia ancestors; all other branches came through New England or New York.



# “Personal” by Lee Child

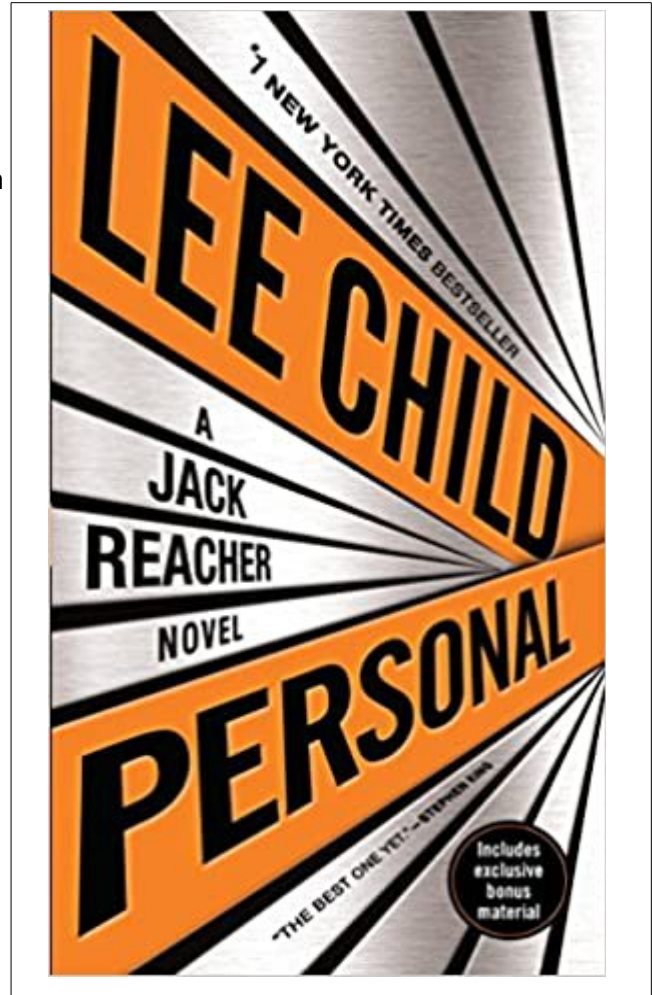
6 Apr 2020

[Copyright 2014 by Lee Child. Published by Penguin Random House LLC, New York.](#)

There is no such thing as a bad Jack Reacher book, but some are better than others. This one, #19 in the series, is about average. It features an interesting primary plot in which Reacher is tasked - unofficially as he is a private citizen - to track down a sniper (or maybe 2 snipers) who might be gunning for one or more leaders of the western world who will be meeting in a couple of weeks at the G8 summit in London. The alarm is raised when the French President is nearly assassinated, from a distance of 1400 yards, while giving a speech in Paris but is saved by a super-strong pane of security glass on the lectern at which he was speaking. That incident turns out to be not only a close call but a key clue in figuring out whodunit.

Reacher is fingered for the task because the primary suspect - John Kott - has a grudge against Reacher who captured and provided testimony that sent him away to a military prison for 16 years. This animosity is confirmed when Reacher finds his lair in the North Carolina woods where Kott was using photos of Reacher for target practice.

But Kott, if he is indeed one of the snipers (and it wouldn't be much of a book if he wasn't) is being bankrolled by someone with some resources. A guy just out of prison is in no position to buy a new sniper rifle, a thousand rounds of 40-caliber bullets at \$4 per and get a ticket to fly to France.



Most of the action takes place in or near London where Kott has teamed up with not one, but two criminal gangs. Reacher goes to London and tracks him down with the help of Casey Nice, an attractive sub-30 CIA agent assigned temporarily to the State Department. A relationship between Reacher and Nice blossoms, but unlike most Reacher books, this one never reaches the bed. It is more father/daughter. Is Reacher growing up? Inquiring minds want to know.

Reacher does get opportunities to bust heads, nuts, knees and spleens. The body count creeps up. It is a lot of violence for Merry Old England, but Reacher escapes any accountability. As expected. It is feel-good mayhem.

It finishes with a twist which is pretty common for Reacher books. So, all-in-all, a pretty average Reacher adventure.

7 out of 10.

# Lee Memorial Park

9 Apr 2020

I have several times alluded to the time I spend in cemeteries, usually looking for the graves of ancestors - either Jett's or mine. But this season, I have taken to walking cemeteries as (1) a way of getting some regular mild exercise and (2) collecting some feel-good endorphins. No ancestors involved as neither of us have any ancestors buried in the area.

I have, in the past, tried to satisfy some "photo requests" posted in [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com). These are requests for headstone photos posted by geographically-distant relatives. But there are relatively few of these and many are impossible to



Lee Memorial Park

resolve as the headstone may be missing or the grave location is incorrect. That means a lot of walking with little satisfaction. I get plenty of exercise but no endorphins. This season I decided to go after easier prey - unphotographed graves. In many cemeteries there are relatively few of these as well. But I noticed that one large nearby cemetery - [Lee Memorial Park](#) in Lehigh Acres, just a few miles away - had over 15% unphotographed graves. Since the cemetery has over 11,500 graves, that meant over 1,800 opportunities to feel good. Finding and photographing graves on this list became a season-long goal.

I am not finished yet, but my current count of photographed graves is north of 1,200. I believe it will be over 1,400 when I finish. I think it will probably take another 6 or 7 hours in the cemetery. Should be easy to do before we head north. Because, with everything closed in the pandemic, I have plenty of spare time.

I couldn't have predicted this, of course, when I embarked on this task, but it turns out to be a *really* good way to get exercise during a pandemic. It is very easy to adhere to "social distancing" rules when I am surrounded by dead people. There are, occasionally, other visitors to the cemetery, but it is a huge cemetery and it is very easy to avoid other living humans.

# Irrigation shock

11 Apr 2020

Our RV site is irrigated, meaning that our lovely bushes and shrubs are supposed to get a daily dose of water. But I have seen the system work exactly once in the two years we have been in residence - I heard the sprinklers activate once at about 2am. Somewhere way down on my To Do list is "call the irrigation company." But it never rises very high because the flora does fine without any assistance. Everything is always green and lush.

Until this month. March was pretty much rain-free in Fort Myers. The grass is turning brown and I have been hand-watering our two new bushes. But before I called the irrigation company I thought I should take a look in the control box - buried behind our huge palm shrubs.

Surprise! A snake was curled up in there. It didn't move when I lifted the lid and for a second I thought it was dead. My second thought was "it might be poisonous" so I carefully replaced the lid. It started to move as I did so.

It wasn't huge - maybe 18" and the thickness of my pinkie. But small venomous snakes can be deadly. So I wanted to identify it. After 10 minutes on the laptop I got the answer: eastern corn snake. Non-venomous.

But I think I will let the irrigation company take it from here.



Snake in the irrigation control box

## Pandemic selfie

13 Apr 2020

With COVID-19 still raging, I now wear a mask and gloves whenever I go out to a store. This is how I dressed for a simple trip to the post office. Life is no longer simple. Every shopping trip is fraught with danger. Everyone hopes that this will go away soon.

Rusty, meanwhile, is taking his quarantine in stride. He gets his usual 18 hours of sleep each day.



Ready for a trip to the post office



Resting for his next meal

## Plumbing (mostly)!

18 Apr 2020

After 2 years of trying and failing, I finally got a plumber to appear to install the plumbing in the shed. It wasn't

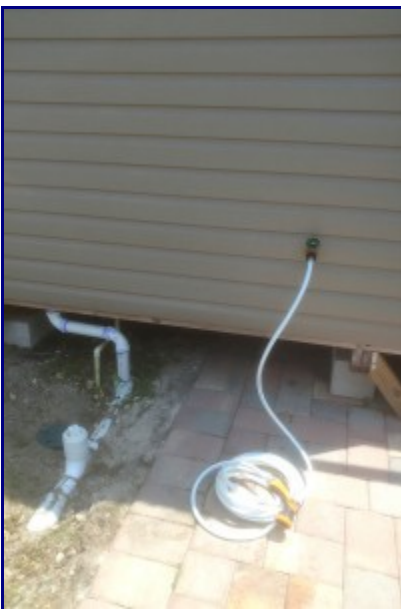
much - a washer hookup, with hot water, a sink and an outside faucet. It was all done by one guy in less than 2 days. It isn't fully operational yet because the sink can't be hooked up until after the inspection and the hot water heater can't be installed until the walls are finished. But the outside faucet works and I expect the carpenter to arrive next week to finish the interior work after which the plumber will return to install the hot water heater. Then, at long last, we will be able to install a washer and dryer. I am not sure that we will get that done before we head north for the summer, but it is possible.

And that is pretty damn exciting.

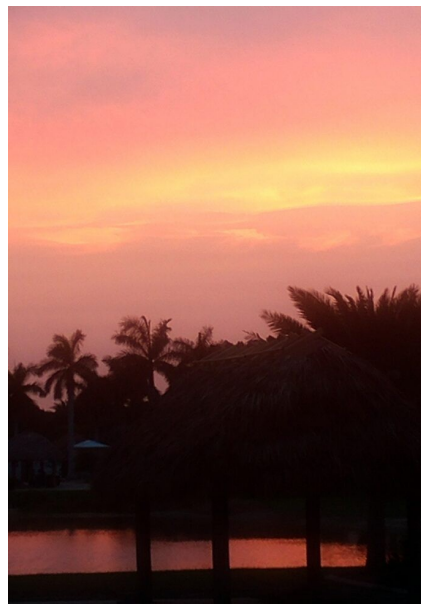
Apparently Mother Nature is in agreement as she gave us a nice colorful sunset last night.



Roughed-in plumbing



Exterior faucet



Sunset

## WordPress upgraded, but...

**22 Apr 2020**

I performed the dreaded WordPress upgrade today. It turned out to be a piece of cake. The blog backup took only a few minutes and the upgrade consisted of (1) deactivating plugins, (2) upgrading WordPress, (3) upgrading plugins, (4) upgrading themes and (5) re-activating the plugins. Each step took just a few minutes. Total time: about half an hour.

And nothing broke.

But...

I somehow expected some of the things that had disappeared over time - the graphic banner and the navigation to earlier posts being 2 key features - to magically reappear. They didn't. So I think I have a theme change and graphic redesign task in my future.

The thing that did change, unexpectedly, is the post editor. This is my first post using this new editor. If you are reading this post then I successfully used it. It appears to have a bunch of new layout options which I haven't investigated yet, but look forward to learning. Maybe I can make the layout a little more dynamic.

Anyway, it seems to have gone well.

So far.

## Theme update in progress

**23 Apr 2020**

I have changed the theme to "Twenty Nineteen" which is last year's default WordPress theme. I mostly like it - clean and crisp. It also has two of the widgets that I most wanted - an "Archives" widget so that you can go as far back as you want and a "Search" widget so you can search for a post with a particular topic. Try them - then are located at the bottom so you have to scroll down.

Things that are still missing or need to be fixed: (1) the "Recent Posts" list is actually a list of pages, not posts and (2) there is no way to filter by category. I will figure these out, I am sure. In the meantime I will leave this new theme active and look forward to any feedback.

**UPDATE:** Got the list of pages to be properly labeled as "Pages" and eliminated all but the Search and Archives widgets. Still can't filter by Category, though.

**UPDATE:** I am considering the "Adventure Journal" theme. It restores the graphic banners that were lost years ago. I like having the banner. I also have the list of Pages in a right-side column and an Archives drop-down. All good. But I haven't gotten Search, Categories or Tags filters to work yet.

**UPDATE:** I got Search back. No Categories or Tags, but I am happy for now. And I have started to upload some more recent banner photos. All of the existing ones were from 2012.

**UPDATE**[28 Apr 2020]: I found a widget for Categories. That filter now appears as a dropdown in the sidebar. It is single-selection which is not as good as a multi-select dropdown and it seems that the only way to undo a selection is to backtrack, but I am happy that it is now possible to filter by Category. Never had that functionality before.

## Insulation!

**24 Apr 2020**

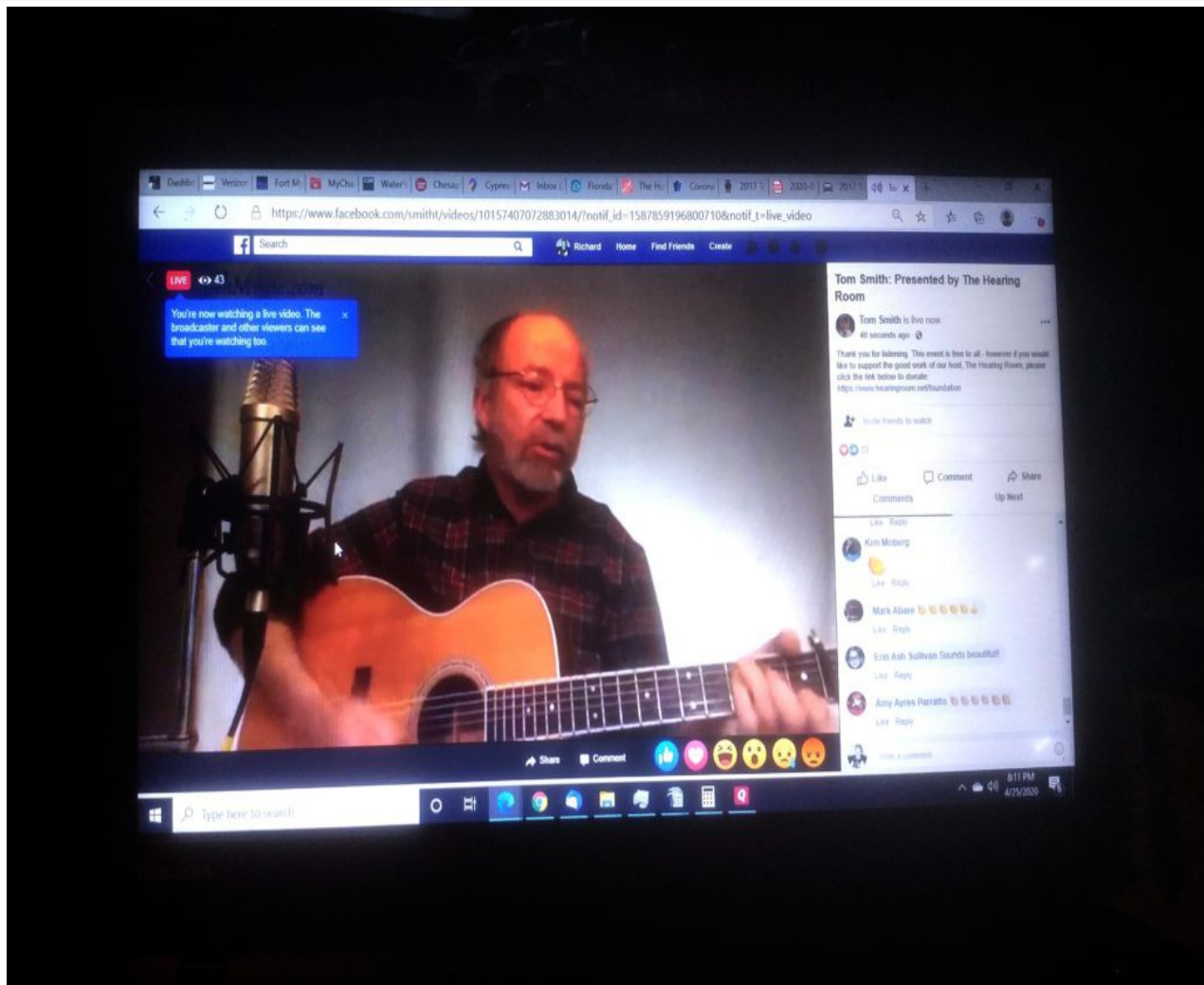
The shed now has a layer of insulation, which should make the air conditioner very happy.

I also got the plumbing inspection which means that the way is now open for installing the walls. That is the last major piece of work needed before we can install the washer and dryer. Which, after all, is what this is all about.

## Live performances in the pandemic

**26 Apr 2020**

This COVID-19 pandemic has upended life as we knew it. Bars, night clubs and theaters are closed. Where does one go for live entertainment?



Tom Smith, streaming live on Facebook

To your laptop, of course.

Last night, for the first time ever, I tuned in to a live performance on Facebook. The performer was [Tom Smith](#), a college friend who spent a lot of time in college honing his guitar-playing and folk-song-singing skills. Now, retired after a long career teaching yung'uns, he has taken up folk singing as a retirement career. And he is pretty darn good.

Anyway, I watched him in a live performance last night. Very entertaining. Kudos, Tom.

## Flowers to cheer us

28 Apr 2020

In the middle of this very depressing COVID-19 pandemic, I find that my spirits are buoyed by the presence of colorful flowers on and around our site. Foremost among these flowering plants are our two new plantings - the red hibiscus (which, the gardener said when he put it in the ground, would be yellow) and the small tree (not sure of the type) that seemed on the verge of dying a week ago but has recovered rather spectacularly.

It is somehow comforting to know that no matter how many human beings are dying from this novel coronavirus, the plants will go on, reliably producing cheerful flowers.

The hibiscus is especially dramatic. The flowers are huge - about 6 inches across. And the production is nonstop. Any particular bloom may last just one day, but tomorrow there will be another to take its place. Not a day has gone by since the first bloom appeared that we have not had a vivid display from this bush.

The neighbors also have some very nice flowers. I like the orange/yellow mix just down the street.



Cheerful flowers

## Skirt!

29 Apr 2020

More than a year after I started on the shed skirt, I finished it. I had to wait for the plumbing to be installed and that was done last week. So the two previously unskirted sides now proudly skirted.



Framing the side



Framing the front

This was more work than I expected, due mostly to the large number of cutouts that I had to make in the 2x4 frame. Both the hurricane anchors and the plumbing connections were positioned so close to the edge that I had to carve out big chunks of wood to fit the frame around them. And because the frame was weakened by the cutouts I felt compelled to add more braces. Anyway, it turned out to be a big, sweaty job that was done mostly on my knees. My knees objected to the abuse and I felt it last night. They seem to have forgiven me overnight, though.



Completed skirt

## Interior walls!

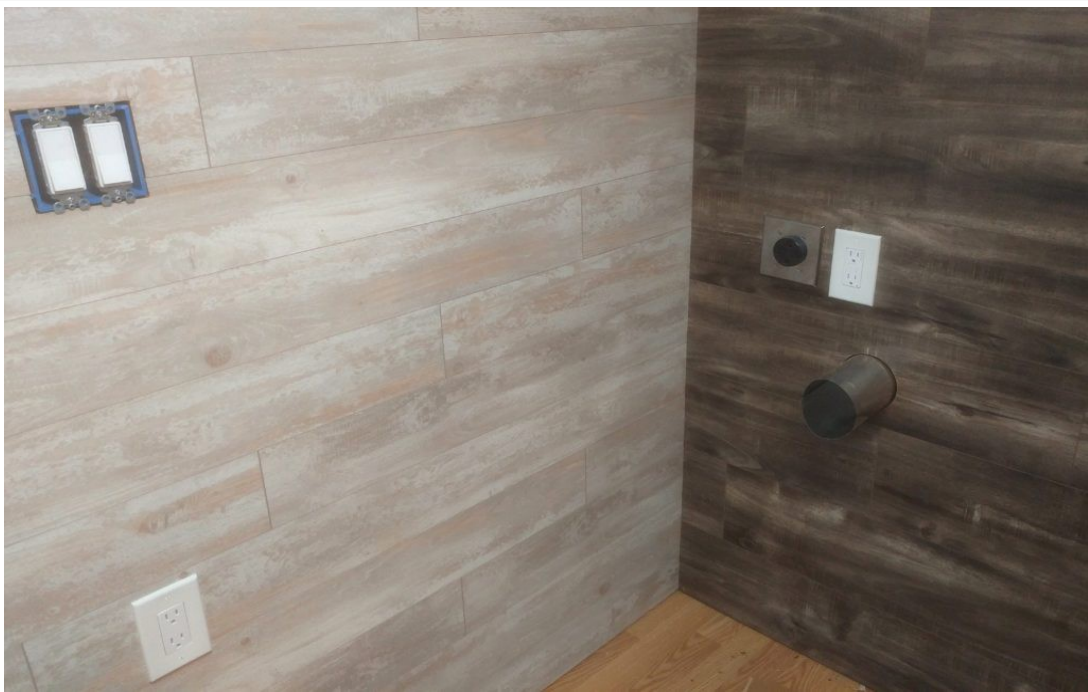
**2 May 2020**

The carpenter completed the installation of the interior walls and the ceiling today, so all that remains is the final plumbing and the trim. The final plumbing will be done next week - installation of the tankless hot water heater and the sink. But the trim will wait until fall. There is no compelling need to do the trim until the washer/dryer are ready to be installed and we have decided to wait until fall to do that. It seemed unwise to leave a brand-new washer/dryer pair in a shed which could be leveled by a hurricane.

The walls are actually flooring. We have one dark gray "accent" wall where the washer and dryer will reside and 3 cream-white walls. The white walls are Pergo. Can't remember the manufacturer of the dark gray flooring. The ceiling is white vinyl soffit.

I was pretty pleased, once I got everything back into the shed, to see how empty it was. There will be plenty of room for the stuff we will bring south from our storage unit in MA.





Finished walls where the dryer will go



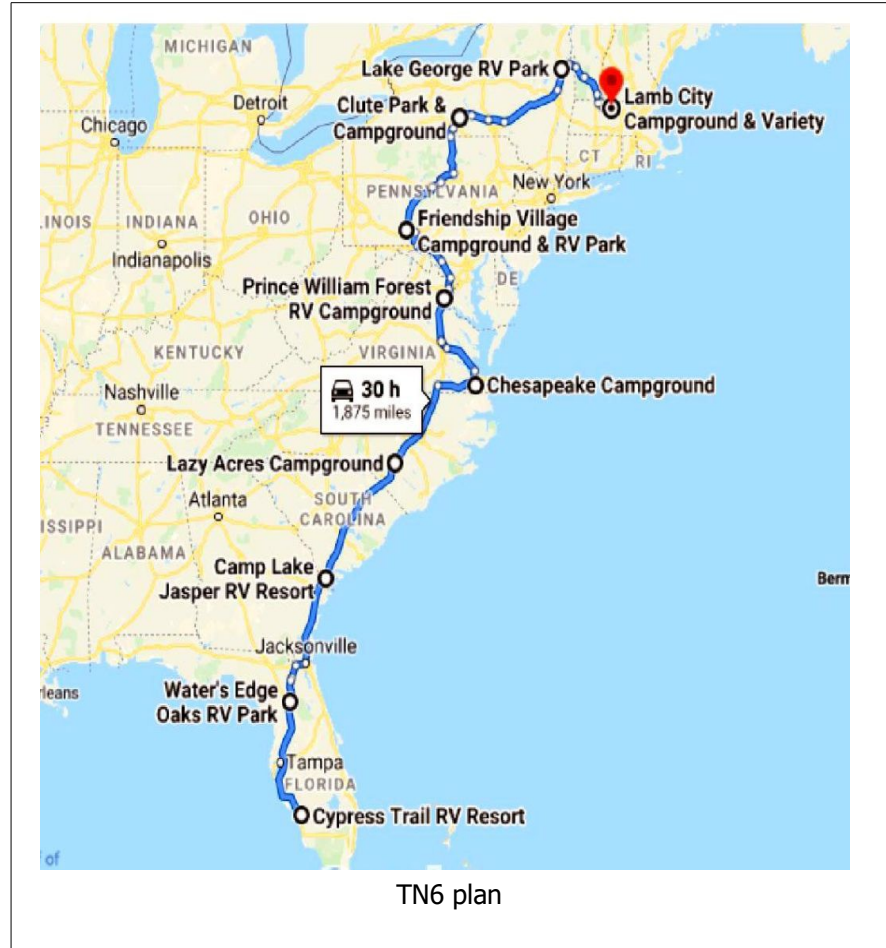
Storage area

## 6<sup>th</sup> trip north (TN6) plan

4 May 2020\

RV travel has not been kind to us lately. Last year the TN5 was aborted due to Jett's cancer diagnosis. The trip south in the fall of 2018 (TS4) was delayed by the near-disaster in upstate New York and the pause for repairs in Virginia. The trip north in the spring of 2018 (TN4) was interrupted by the truck breakdown in Newburgh NY. The trip back from the west coast in 2017 (STE) featured(?) the truck breakdown in Utah. You have to go back to the STW in the summer/fall of 2017 to find a trip that didn't have a major breakdown.

But hope springs eternal. Jett has been medically cleared to travel to MA and we plan on spending the summer at [Lamb City Campground](#), as we did in 2018. In the very same site. We are looking forward to returning. It might be weird with the COVID-19 pandemic still raging - our get-togethers with family may involve masks and talking from a distance. But we will make do, somehow.



So I have to figure out a way to get there. This is my plan for the trip (1873 miles, 9 hops, 19 nights), starting from our home in Fort Myers:

- **Hop 1 to Citra FL.** 236 miles, 1 night. This is just an overnight stop. If I have time I might check out the campus of the [University of Florida](#) in Gainesville.
- **Hop 2 to Hardeeville SC.** 238 miles, 2 nights. The attraction here is Hilton Head Island. I have been curious about Hilton Head for years and this is a chance to see the place.
- **Hop 3 to Fayetteville NC.** 238 miles, 1 night. Another overnight stop. Nothing to see here.
- **Hop 4 to Chesapeake VA.** 227 miles, 3 nights. This is one of the featured stops on this trip. It is both a genealogical destination - I hope to see some of the places where my Virginia immigrant ancestors lived - and a historical destination ([Yorktown](#) and [Colonial Williamsburg](#)). It is likely that some of the places I want to see will be closed, but I will still get a flavor of the area.
- **Hop 5 to Dumfries VA.** 177 miles, 5 nights. This is the requisite stop to see Jett's children and grandchild in Virginia. It will be a challenge to see them all without hugging.

- **Hop 6 to Bedford PA.** 166 miles, 3 nights. The two attractions for this stop are the [Flight 93 Memorial](#) and the site of the [Johnstown Flood](#). I haven't booked this stop yet because it is likely that one or both attractions will be closed. I may choose another destination if that is the case.
- **Hop 7 to Watkins Glen NY.** 237 miles, 2 nights. This was the destination when we had the near-disaster in the fall of 2018. This is to show Fate that we cannot be stopped. The main attraction is the [Finger Lakes](#).
- **Hop 8 to Lake George NY.** 220 miles and 2 nights. I hope to see [Fort Ticonderoga](#), but, again, it may or may not be open. If closed I will explore the Lake George area.
- **Hop 9 to Phillipston MA.** 136 miles. This gets us to our summer home. The trip itself will be interesting as it is almost all on local roads through fairly mountainous terrain.

If you look carefully you will notice than the longest hop is 238 miles, which means that we should not need to make any refueling stops while hauling the RV. That is always a good thing.

The 19-day duration is no accident. Because Jett is on immunotherapy infusions every 3 weeks, we have to make the journey within a 20-day window. She will have an infusion the morning of our departure and another at UMASS immediately after we arrive. We cannot be delayed on this trip. If there is a major problem we will have to figure out a way to get Jett north quickly.

I have done everything I can to make sure the truck is ready for the job. I replaced the right front wheel bearing (it was making some noise which indicated wear) and had the dealer inspect the brakes, fluids and hoses. I will wash it to make it nice and shiny and improve its confidence. I think it can, I think it can.

But I will be nervous until we get at least two hops into the trip. Wish us luck.

## “Night Prey” by John Sandford

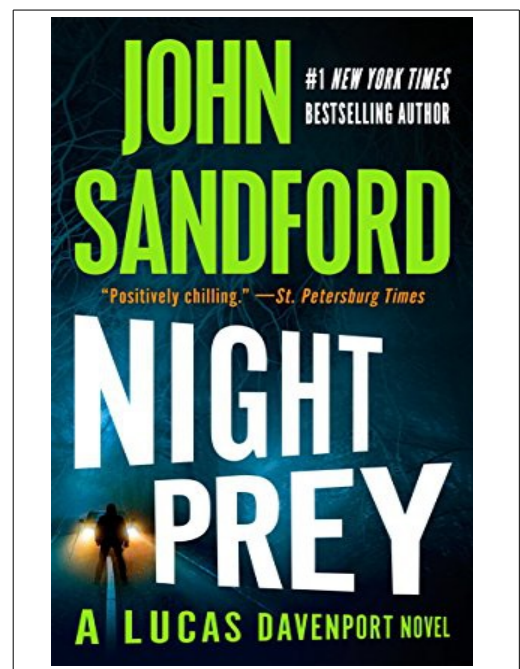
7 May 2020

[Copyright 1994 by John Sandford. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.](#)

I love whodunnits. The thrill of the chase, the mystery of figuring out the identity of the culprit. But this is not a whodunnit; this is a howto catchim. We learn almost immediately who is gutting the women, slicing them from guggle to zatch (thank you, James Thurber). Roughly half the book follows the killer's movement and thoughts. So the question is only: how is he to be caught?

The protagonist in the Prey series (this is #6) is Lucas Davenport, a homicide detective in Minneapolis. He is assisted in this case by a Minnesota state trooper, Meagan Connell, who is laser-focused on capturing the bad guy quickly because she has end-stage cancer and will be dead in a few months. Obviously the girl-gutter will be caught and almost as obviously Connell will be key to bringing him down. That pretty literally turns out to be true.

So how do they bring him to bay? Lots of slogging detective work, plus a few moments of inspiration, most notably one where Davenport, while looking at his girlfriend's ass, suddenly realizes the



import of the "ASS" partial license plate clue reported by an eyewitness. A beautiful ass is often a source of inspiration, though it is unusual for one to inspire a solution to a crime.

The big break, though, comes when the serial killer just suddenly, inexplicably, does some really stupid stuff. Additionally, the final takedown, though carefully planned, goes all wrong, resulting in injury to Davenport and death to Connell.

I found this all to be pretty depressing. Not a whodunnit. A sadistic killer with no obvious motive and no scruples about killing both humans and pets. Dumb criminal behavior. Police screwups. A terminally ill sidekick. A big bummer, really. I had a hard time slogging through. Reading is supposed to be fun.

3 out of 10.

## Hot water!

**8 May 2020**

The very last piece of the shed construction for this season was completed this morning when the tankless hot water heater was activated. We now have hot water in the shed, on demand. It takes about 10 seconds for the water to reach the sink. Or the washer, once it is installed.

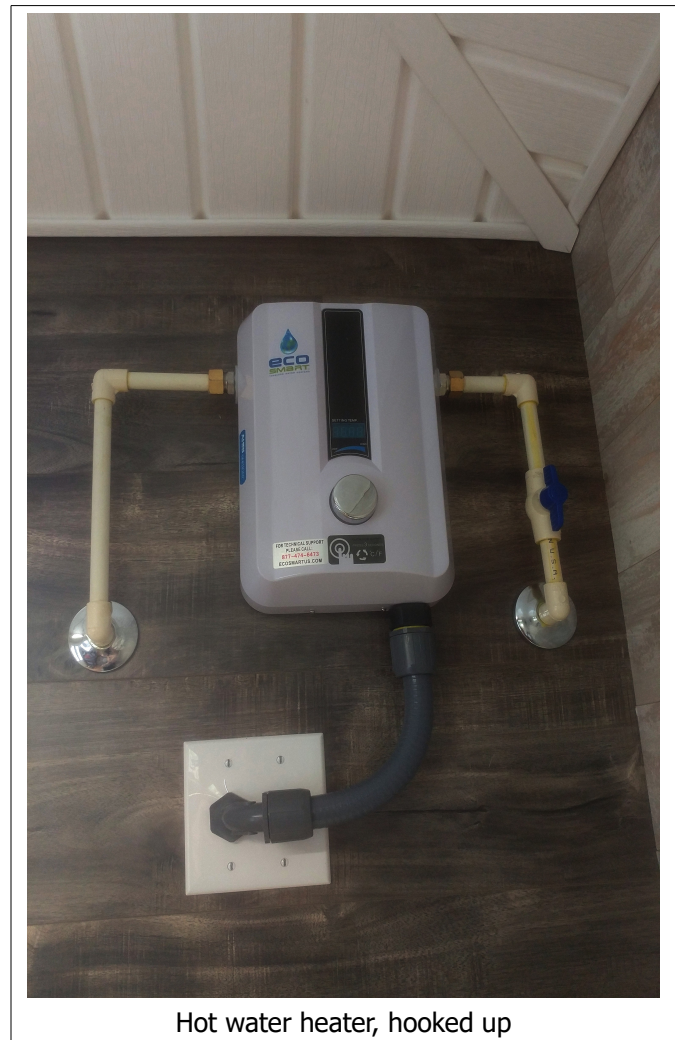
Now I can shut it off until next season.

This final piece means that the final inspection can occur and the building permit can be closed out. That is the last building permit that I expect will be needed.

Until Jett decides she would like to add a toilet.

Anyway, we are done for now so no more exclamation point post titles.

!!!



# Almost ready for TN6

13 May 2020

Whenever preparing for an RV journey, there are always a surprisingly large number of small tasks that need to be completed before we are ready to go. This year because we were trying to complete work on the shed, there were a number of shed tasks:

- Assemble the portable closet for the shed and fill with clothes to leave behind.
- Clear the shed A/C filter (filthy with construction dust) and set A/C for remote control.
- Get pavers for back of shed (to prevent a nasty, muddy splash problem in a heavy rain).
- Decide which stuff that was in the shed should be moved to the RV and vice versa,
- Store yard stuff (solar lights, hose, rain buckets) in the shed.
- Build a shelf for the WiFi router in the shed.
- Complete the final electrical, plumbing and construction inspections.

There was a lot of the usual vehicle preparation work too. This year it was complicated by our initial decision to sell the Toyota, later reversed when the offers were appallingly low:

- Clean out the car and get it washed.
- Print new insurance cards for both the car and the truck.
- Clean out the back seat of the truck and prepare it for Rusty.
- Pack the bed of the truck (but no golf clubs this time).
- Test and adjust tire pressures on the truck and the RV.
- Test the truck/RV umbilical connection.
- Test the slides.
- Update the GPS map,
- Update the "low clearances" map.

Finally the general "get up and go" tasks:

- Update the Escapees mail forwarding instructions.
- Leave mail forwarding instructions with the resort office, for those few pieces of mail that arrive directly.
- Tether the fiberglass steps to the shed (required by the resort).
- Gas up both the car and the truck.
- Leave car keys with the resort office (in case the car needs to be started or moved while we are away).

I spent some time finding and reserving a storage space for the car after we decided that (1) we wouldn't sell it and (2) we wouldn't transport it north. That was before I realized that the resort rules would let me keep it on our site. That was great news as it saves about \$100/month and eliminates the job of getting it to a storage location.

All tasks except for the "get up and go" tasks have been completed.

## A problem at the starting line

**17 May 2020**

I feel like a guy who lines up for the 100-yard dash and, as the starter's pistol is raised, notices that his shoelace is untied.

The truck has sprung a leak in the fuel line. I noticed a dark spot on the pavers on Friday when I took the truck out for an errand, but it had rained earlier and I dismissed it as runoff. But when the spot was still there when I returned I could no longer dismiss it as water. I got down on my knees and looked under the truck. Yup, something dripping. A slow drip. Put my finger on it, smelled it. Diesel fuel. Crawled under the truck and looked. There is a funny radiator-type thing under there and the drip is emanating either from that or from one of the fuel lines attached to it.

A little Google research revealed the radiator thing to be a "fuel cooler". Never knew I had one. Don't know why the fuel needs to be cooled. But whatever. It is not an expensive part and is probably easy to replace. But we have no time. If I can't get the problem fixed on Monday (unlikely) then I need to know whether it can wait a week until we get to Virginia. It may be a minor leak (I think maybe a cup has spilled onto the pavers), but any problem in a vehicle that will be hauling a 15,000-pound trailer 1500 miles is potentially a big problem. I have arranged an appointment at the GMC dealer for Tuesday, but that is the day we are supposed to leave. So I plan to take it into a local garage tomorrow (Monday) and see if I can at least get a professional assessment of how worried I should be.

Keep your fingers crossed.

## Not so fast there, buddy

**19 May 2020**

It is now 2:27pm, about 3 hours after I intended to leave Ft Myers on the first leg of the TN6. But the truck is still in the shop. The good news is that the dealer says it will be fixed tomorrow, probably in time to make that first hop. I certainly hope so as I have told the first RV park that we will be a day late and am about to tell the second one that our stay will be just one night instead of two. If we get the truck back in time to make that first hop tomorrow, those will be the only schedule adjustments that I will need to make.

The bad news? Estimated cost: \$2300. That is about 5x more than I expected. My assessment that it would be cheap and easy to fix was wildly off the mark. Besides replacing the fuel cooler (dealer cost: about \$350 which is just double the Amazon price, which is not unreasonable), I also need to replace three fuel lines, each about \$300. That price shocks me, but I have no way to gauge if it is out of line. Too late now as they are busy at work ripping out the old lines.

Piece by piece I am building a new truck.

## TN6 makeover

**20 May 2020**

After being delayed a day, the schedule for the TN6 was reduced to 18 days. The first hop was going to be a late arrival even if we got going by 4pm, which we almost did - the repaired truck was back in my hands (hands

which were \$2300 poorer) by 3pm and we actually pulled out of our site at 4:30. I was hoping to get to our destination in Citra FL by 8:30 so that we would still have some light to set up by.

I needn't have worried - we aborted the trip before we got 5 miles. The turbocharger hose that had blown in the fall of 2018 near Sevierville and had become detached - twice - on the trip from Flagler Beach to Fort Myers in May 2019 - became detached again - twice - in the first 5 miles of TN6. Deeply disappointed and totally discouraged, we turned around and went home.

Tomorrow will be devoted to getting that troublesome turbocharger hose replaced. When it becomes detached it is easy to reattach, but I can't be stopping every few miles on the interstate; I need that connection to hold for thousands of miles.

I also have to repair our WiFi cable line tomorrow. Apparently I broke it when I detached the cable TV line when departing. I guess that is one small silver lining - if I had left with the line in that shape I would not have had remote control over the shed's air conditioner. I do like being able to check the status of the shed wherever I can.

So... another trip another disaster. But I can truthfully say that I anticipated this one and prepared for it. I did not trust that turbocharger hose, despite the dealer's assurance that it was okay. So I started the trip on I-75 one exit further south than normal, to give me two exits before the long 17-mile stretch out of Fort Myers. I did not want to get stuck 17 miles from the next exit. After blowing the hose connection twice - once at each exit (where there is an emergency stop area where I could work on reconnecting the hose) - I was able to turn around before the 17-mile stretch.

If you have enough disasters you get good at handling them.

I think the hose is just too short. Hopefully I can get a replacement that will fit better and be reliable.

Hope springs eternal.

The problem, really, is that I can't test the turbocharger without hitching up the RV as the turbocharger is only stressed when I am hauling it. Taking the RV for a test drive is difficult But I am desperate enough now to consider doing that.

I now need to rethink the TN6. There are several possibilities but the existence of Memorial Day weekend complicates matters. I had to book all 3 days in Chesapeake and will lose all 3 days if I skip that stop, but that is probably the option that makes the most sense. Get the turbocharger hose replaced tomorrow, Friday to Citra, the weekend near Hilton head, one night in Fayetteville and a long day trip to Dumfries. That is a god option (or the best of the bad options), but it depends entirely on being able to book a site for Memorial Day weekend. If I can't do that then the whole trip may have to be delayed until after Jett's next infusion.

Stay tuned.

## The revised 6<sup>th</sup> trip north (TN6) plan

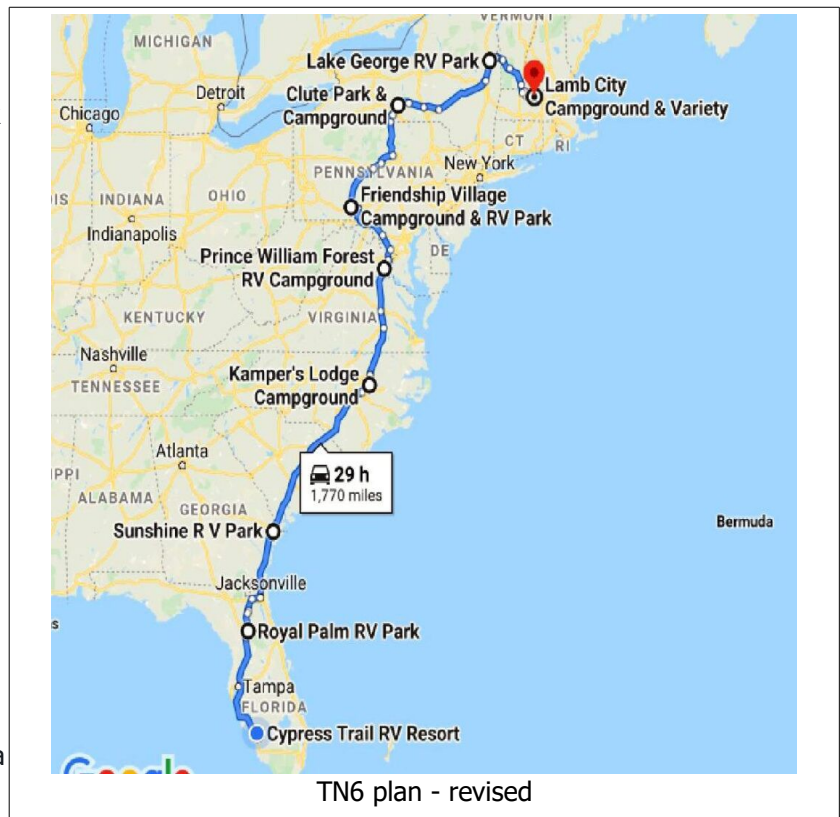
### 1 May 2020

If you have been paying attention, you know that our (bleeping) truck has completely destroyed our original TN6 plans. I currently have a part on order and expect to have a new turbocharger connector hose installed by competent professionals by, at the latest, tomorrow (Friday) morning.

So I need to revise the TN6 plan to start on Friday. A complicating factor is that this is Memorial Day weekend. That means that some RV parks are full and others are requiring a 3-day prepaid stay. I didn't want either a 3-day stay nor did I want to prepay, given our deplorable history of making our actual travel match our plans. But

I was able to find a place which required neither, so I booked that for Saturday and Sunday night. So here is the revised plan:

- **Hop 1 to Citra FL.** 236 miles, 1 night. This is just an overnight stop. If I have time I might check out the campus of the [University of Florida](#) in Gainesville. This is the same hop as originally planned, but 3 days later.
- **Hop 2 to Savannah GA.** 217 miles, 2 nights. The attraction here is Savannah and, possibly, Hilton Head Island. This is our new Memorial Day weekend stop and I feel fortunate to be allowed to stay just 2 nights. I hope to still get a peek at Hilton Head, but it is now about 30 miles further away.
- **Hop 3 to Wilson NC.** 341 miles, 1 night. This is a long (over 5 hours) hop that will require a refueling stop. Just rest up after a long day on the road



- **Hop 4 to Dumfries VA.** 217 miles, 5 nights. This is the requisite stop to see Jett's children and grandchild in Virginia. It will be a challenge to see them all without hugging.
- **Hop 5 to Bedford PA.** 166 miles, 3 nights. The two attractions for this stop are the [Flight 93 Memorial](#) and the site of the [Johnstown Flood](#). I haven't booked this stop yet because it is likely that one or both attractions will be closed. I may choose another destination if that is the case.
- **Hop 6 to Watkins Glen NY.** 237 miles, 2 nights. This was the destination when we had the near-disaster in the fall of 2018. This is to show Fate that we cannot be stopped. The main attraction is the [Finger Lakes](#).
- **Hop 7 to Lake George NY.** 220 miles and 2 nights. I hope to see [Fort Ticonderoga](#), but, again, it may or may not be open. If closed I will explore the Lake George area.
- **Hop 8 to Phillipston MA.** 136 miles. This gets us to our summer home. The trip itself will be interesting as it is almost all on local roads through fairly mountainous terrain.

This revised TN6 itinerary has us traveling 1,770 miles in 8 hops and 16 nights. We will have to eat over \$155 in deposits that we will forfeit due to cancellations.

Again, keep your fingers crossed.

Here is a little tip that I learned this morning: if you ever have a turbocharger hose pop off, the home remedy is to (1) clean the metal pipe thoroughly and (2) coat it with **hair spray** before reattaching the hose. The mechanic said that this is foolproof - the hairspray acts like glue.



# The upside of breaking down

22 May 2020

I suppose this comes under the heading "making lemonade out of lemons" but it occurs to me that being delayed 3 days at the start of the TN6 due to truck problems was not all bad. Good things:

- I got a chance to fix the broken line to the WiFi router.
- I got my CARES Act stimulus check. I don't know if that would have been forwarded, so getting it was fortunate.
- My confidence that we have a truck that will be able to complete the trip is now much higher (though not 100%).
- We missed the VERY crappy Tropical Storm Arthur weather in SC and NC. Parts of NC are flooded. I am happy to avoid that. Heavy rain is never fun when traveling.
- Jett is feeling a bit better today. She was quite ill on Tuesday.

So, not a totally bad thing to be delayed.

## TN6 Hop 1: Ft Myers FL to Citra FL

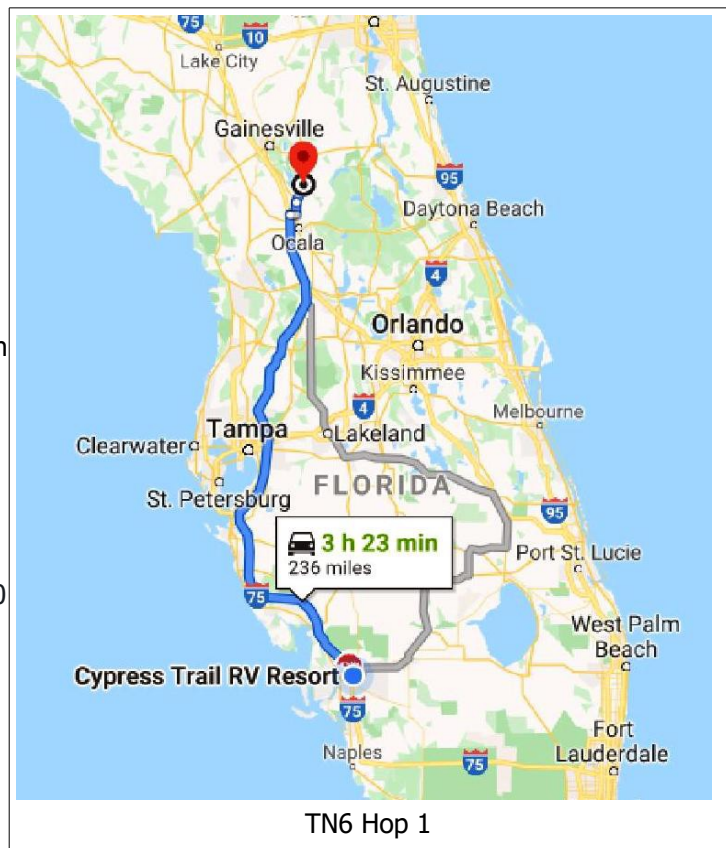
22 May 2020

235 miles via I-75 and US 301. Truck miles: 309.  
Cumulative tow miles: 235. Cumulative truck miles: 309.

Hallelujah! We actually got out of Fort Myers without the truck failing. In fact it performed flawlessly, thanks to its spanking-new turbocharger connector hose. The guys at [Bayshore Truck](#) came through again. That is the third time I have had them do some work on one of my vehicles but, oddly, this is the first time I have had them work on the pickup. Anyway, they were able to obtain the part and install it (with a new clamp, even) quickly so the I could get on the road today by 2:15pm. We got to the destination at 6:00pm exactly, so 3:45 on the road.

The extra "truck miles" - 64 of them - were due mostly to the aborted Hop 1 on Tuesday and the 10 miles of test driving I did today after the work was done.

I will say it again: the truck ran flawlessly. It feels really good to say that. It has been a long time since I could. I guess Hop 1 (actually the only hop) of TN5 a year ago would be the last time the truck



ran well. When we got to our destination - the [Royal Palm RV Park](#) in Citra FL - our reputation preceded us. Our neighbors said that they had heard (from the owner, obviously) that we had had some truck problems. I said "yes, but nothing \$3000 couldn't solve." They were appalled. But they were camping in a pop-up tent - a rig that probably cost less than \$3000 new. Some innocent price-shaming.

Jett made the trip on her back, in the back seat with lots of pillows. It wasn't an easy trip for her, but was easier lying down in the back seat than sitting up in the front seat. Rusty was happy to ride shotgun.

We will probably do the same tomorrow, getting up to Savannah. We will stay there 2 nights. I hope Jett feels well enough to go out to dinner. We have fond memories of Savannah as the place where we first sampled fried green tomatoes.

Oh - I almost forgot to report a HUGE success: the refrigerator stayed on the entire trip! This is proof that the work I did months ago to replace the inverter and the inverter switch were successful in solving that thorn-in-the-side problem. No more melted ice cream due to a long hop. I am SO thrilled. Of course Camping World should have fixed this for free years ago, but I no longer expect anything of them. They are useless.

## TN6 Hop 2: Citra FL to Savannah GA

**23 May 2020**

217 tow miles via US 301, I-10, I-295 (around Jacksonville), I-95 and I-16. 219 truck miles. Cumulative tow miles: 452. Cumulative truck miles: 528.

Two hops with no truck problems! That has to be some kind of freaking record. At least it seems that way.

I was actually more concerned about the state of the truck on this hop than the first one. That is because my truck emailed me a problem report last night. That's right - no sign of a problem while operating the vehicle but a problem report shows up in my inbox:

Your **2005 GMC Sierra 3500** has triggered a Diagnostic Trouble Code (DTC) with the following details:

Code	P0727
Description	The Engine Speed Sensor tells the Transmission Control Module (TCM) how fast the engine is spinning so the correct gear can be engaged. When the TCM receives an inaccurate signal from this sensor, it can't properly shift the vehicle from gear to gear as the vehicle needs to change speed and rates of acceleration. Most vehicles use the crankshaft position sensor for this information. The engine control module (PCM) or TCM will set code P0727.

This alert was detected at 05:54 PM on 05/22/2020. We arrived at the campground at 5:58pm, so this happened just as we were approaching the driveway.

I researched the problem a bit and what I learned was (1) it would cost somewhere between \$200 and \$1000 to fix and (2) if it was a real problem then the truck was probably undrivable.

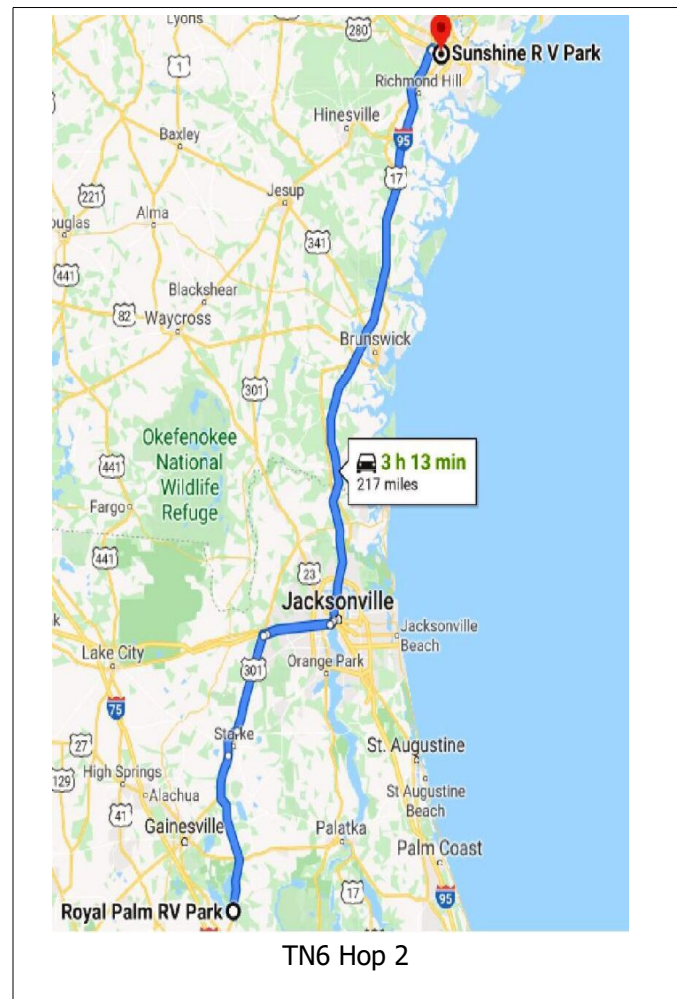
But was it a real problem? The arguments against that were (1) nothing was reported to me in the cab as I was driving (serious problems are reported on the dashboard and the "check engine" light usually appears) and (2) I drove the truck to get dinner and a full tank of fuel before I read the email and had absolutely no problem.

So... maybe nothing. But as it is Memorial Day weekend and there is ZERO chance that I could get a problem fixed before Monday, it caused some loss of sleep. Getting out this morning was white knuckle time.

But the truck ran like a champ. Very smooth. I started to relax after about 100 miles.

Our home for the evening was the Royal Palms RV Park. It is a small (maybe 30 sites) RV park with a mix of long-term residents and transients. It was pretty low-class, but perfectly fine for one night. The worst thing about it was that it was on the wrong side of US 301 - we had to do a U-turn on a fairly busy highway to get there (maybe that caused the PCM to skip a heartbeat? It caused my heart to skip a few) and another this morning to get out. Our "pull-thru" was large enough but the turnaround to get out was so tight that I decided it was easier to back up into a wooded lawn. Pain in the neck. I probably will avoid this park in the future.

So we are in Savannah for 2 nights. I hope I can get Jett out to dinner or, failing that, get some good take-out for her. Fried green tomatoes!



## TN6 Hop 3: Savannah GA to Wilson NC

**26 May 2020**

342 tow miles via I-16, I-95 and US 301. 459 truck miles. Cumulative tow miles: 794. Cumulative truck miles: 987.

And the people. This was Memorial Day weekend, in a pandemic. But there were swarms of people everywhere, with nary a facemask in sight. Expect a spike in COVID-19 cases in SC in about 3 weeks. I didn't get out of my truck.

Instead I visited two nearby cemeteries - the Pinckney Colony Family Cemetery and St Luke's Cemetery. Both very scenic. I am curious about the "Pinckney Colony" name, but not curious enough to research it.

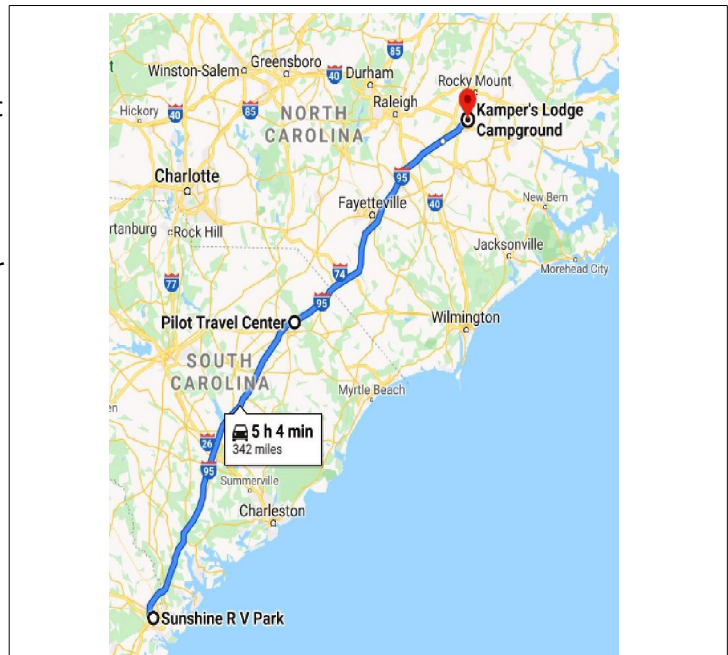
So the island may have been a disappointment but the cemeteries were wonderful. I even got about 50 headstone photos that I posted in findagrave.com.

Our home in Savannah for 2 nights was the [Sunshine RV Park](#). This is a family-owned campground (I met the grandfather who founded it and the grandson who is running it) of about 100 sites with a mix of long-term residents and transients. There are no park models but some of the RVs clearly had not moved in years. Some of them had "interesting" modifications, like the trailer with the pitched aluminum roof. They also had fences that seem to have been made from old billboards. This campground did not put a premium on aesthetics.

The trip to Wilson NC was the longest hop in our itinerary and the only one that required a refueling stop. We ran into a couple of heavy thunderstorms in the first hour and had an annoying refueling/lunch stop. I opted to refuel at the RV pumps which were a tight fit and we had to wait quite a long time for one of the two pumps to free up. I thought one of the guys was just being

rude, leaving his truck at the pump to go into the store. But when I finally got to the pump I realized that it was misbehaving. I didn't have to go into the store but it did take about 5 minutes to get to the point where the pump would dispense fuel.

Then we parked in the truck area to "dine" at Wendy's. That was interesting in that Wendy's had no hamburgers. But we got fueled - both the truck and our bodies - and were on our way in about 40 minutes.



TN6 Hop 3



Pinckney Colony Family Cemetery



Pitched-roof trailer



Billboard fence

The good news: the truck, once again, performed flawlessly and the refrigerator stayed on. The last point is significant because it DIDN'T stay on during Hop 2. I diagnosed that problem as a popped GFI breaker. I don't know why the GFI popped but I suspect it was due to a surge in the switchover from the land power to the truck power. I made sure that the inverter was off when I did the switchover this time.

More good news: I went to a WalMart Neighborhood Grocery to get some milk, OJ and a few other items. Milk was 75 cents for a half-gallon. And they had a gas station where I filled up at **\$1.64 per gallon of diesel**. In the 8 years that I have owned this truck I don't believe I have ever paid less than \$2 per gallon. Amazing times.

## TN6 Hop 4: Wilson NC to Dumfries VA

26 May 2020

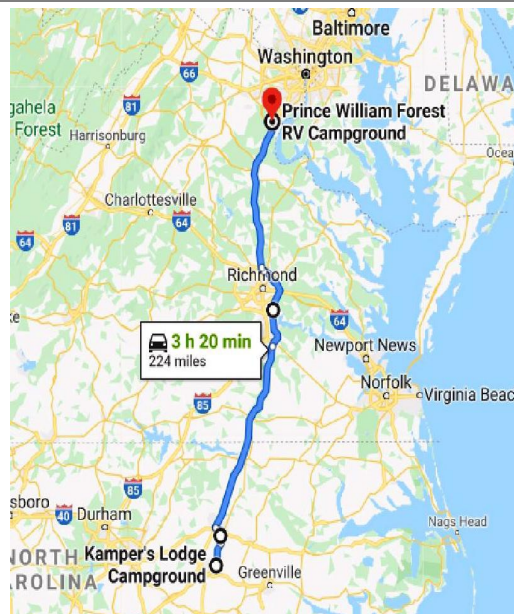
224 tow miles via US 301, US 64, I-95, I-295 (around Petersburg and Richmond) and VA 234. 234 truck miles. Cumulative tow miles: 1,018. Cumulative truck miles: 1,221.

This was a fairly painless hop, except to the rough roads (why can't anybody create a bridge joint that doesn't scramble the eggs?). The truck again performed well. Got to the destination - the [Prince William Forest Campground](#) - just as the "low fuel" light came on. Perfect planning.

Our 1-night at [Kamper's Lodge](#) in Wilson NC was uneventful except for the threat of being blocked from leaving by the paving work being done today. That got Jett off her keister and we got out of the park before 11am.

We will stay in Dumfries 5 days, mostly visiting family, but I may find time to do one of those things that have eluded me. Like visiting Mount Vernon.

4 hops down, 4 to go.



TN6 Hop 4

# The end of the road for the Sierra?

28 May 2020

The truck has been performing beautifully on the first 4 hops of the TN6. But I still don't trust it. As evidence of that mistrust, I took it into a GMC dealer in Alexandria VA yesterday in the hopes of diagnosing the troubling email that the truck sent to me at the end of [Hop 1](#). My hope was that it was an aging crankshaft position sensor, which could be replaced fairly easily and cheaply.

But, as is so often the case with this truck, the fix was neither easy nor cheap. The root problem, it seems, were cracks in both the intake pipe to the turbocharger and in its outflow pipe. The hot gases escaping one of these cracks melted the plastic connector on the crankshaft position sensor, making the electrical connection tenuous. Estimated cost to fix those cracks: over \$3000. The transmission would have to be removed to gain access to the pipes.

Worse, the parts might not even be available for a week. We need to be on our way north in 3 days. Fixing the pipes in VA is not an option. Fixing the problem at all may be throwing good money after bad.

If there was any "good" news in this it was the observation that the cracks appear to be old. The mechanic said that these pipes had probably been leaking for years. Which immediately raised the question in my mind: why, in all of the times I have had GMC dealers inspect the truck to make sure it was ready to tow, did they not discover these pretty obvious cracks in the turbocharger pipes?

Anyway, the plan is to replace the sensor and do anything else that can be done to "band aid" the problem, then try to get to MA as quickly as possible. I will look for a replacement truck when I get there.

The truck has been running beautifully. I hope it can continue to do so for another 500 miles. I will modify the TN6 itinerary to shorten the remaining trip.

I vaguely recall when traveling was fun.

## TN6 Plan – Rev 2

31 May 2020

The continuing unreliability of the truck (though performing flawlessly so far) has convinced us that we need to cut out any further sightseeing and head straight (or as straight as possible, given our intense desire to give NYC a wide berth) to our destination. I have cut a hop out of the itinerary and shortened the remaining 3. The remaining miles are now about 550, a reduction of about 200 miles. There will be a 1-night stop in Hershey PA (where, due to the pandemic, we were given a choice of a 1-night stay or a 14-night stay) and 2 nights in Florida NY, near West Point (which is closed to tourists, but maybe I can drive by).

Between the pandemic and the truck issues, all of the fun has been squeezed out of the TN6. Except for seeing family this weekend. That was very nice. Hard



on the waistline because there was a lot of eating going on, but nice nonetheless.

## TN6 Hop 5: Dumfries VA to Jonestown PA

31 May 2020

171 tow miles via VA 234, I-95, I-495 (around Washington DC), I-270, US 15, I-83 and I-81. 339 truck miles. Cumulative tow miles: 1,189. Cumulative truck miles: 1,560.

The additional truck miles resulted from 2 trips to the GMC dealer for repairs, some errands and a trip into Alexandria to have dinner (a very pleasant dinner) with family.

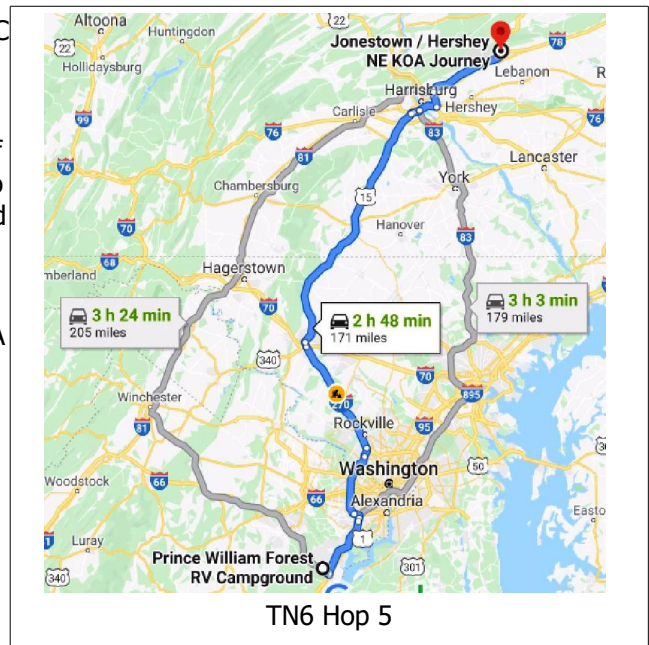
Once again, the trip was uneventful, except for the loss of our "Home is Where We Park It" sign that was Velcroed to the front of the RV. The Velcro held, but the block of wood glued to the RV let loose. I think I dropped it on an interstate. Hope it didn't cause any problem.

It was a beautiful day. High in the low 70s, puffy clouds. A nice travel day. But a lot of traffic (it was Sunday) and, as always, the roads in PA were pretty rough.

Our home for 5 night in Dumfries was the [Prince William Forest Campground](#). This is a very nice, very quiet park. The large back-in sites (there are no pull-thru sites large enough for us) are hard to get into due to the narrow roads, but are lovely, wooded sites. It even smells like forest.

We have stayed here, I believe, twice before. But I never realized that this campground has a swimming pool. It is closed due to the pandemic, but I will keep that in mind for a future visit.

2 more hops to go.



## TN6 Hop 6: Jonestown PA to Florida NY

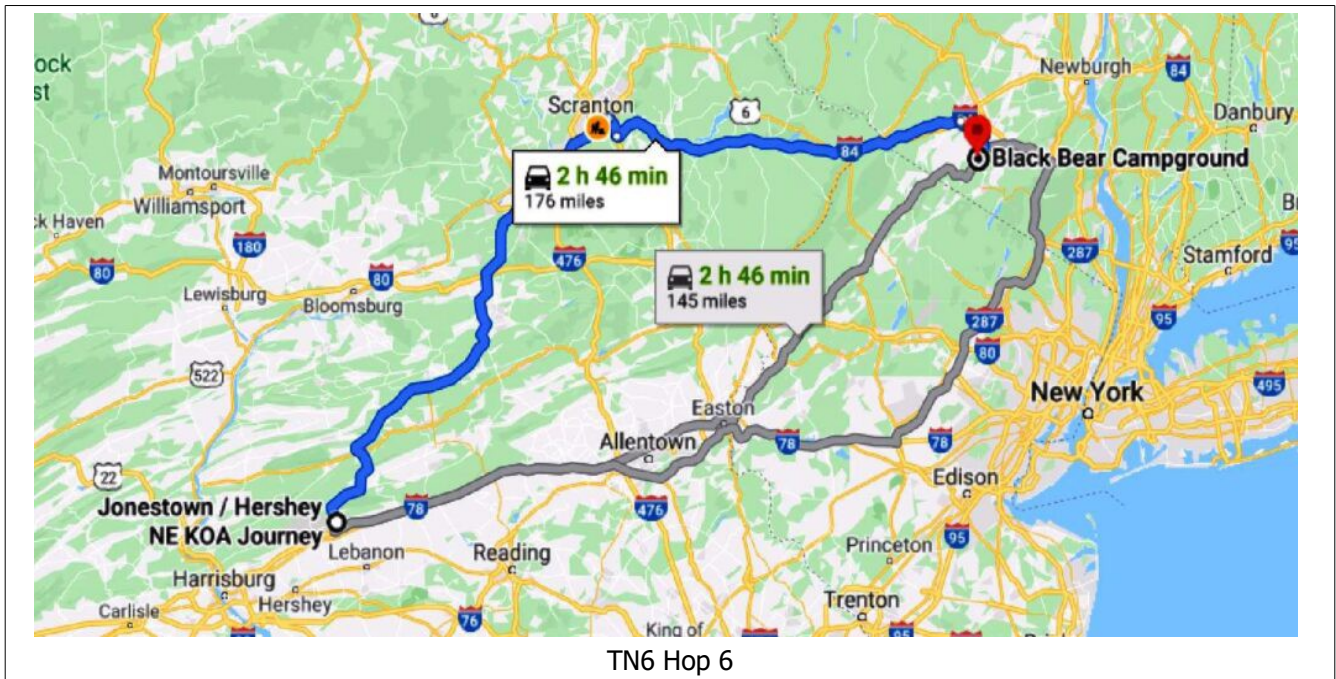
1 Jun 2020

178 tow miles via I-81, I-84, US 6 and local roads. 179 truck miles. Cumulative tow miles: 1,368. Cumulative truck miles: 1,739.

One extra truck mile to fill up.

Yes, it's true: Over 1,300 tow miles and we are back in Florida again. But this Florida is much cooler (68 degrees right now).

If there was a hop to test the health of the truck on this trip, this was it. Both I-81 and I-84 are very hilly. The engine was put to the test. And passed. No problems whatsoever.



I was tempted to use the alternate route that was 31 miles shorter (see the map above). But it saved no time and a close look at it revealed that it was 145 miles on narrow roads, some of them without shoulders or center lines. Too much stress.

Our one night in Jonestown was spent at the [Jonestown / Hershey KOA](#). If not for the pandemic we would have stayed longer. It has been many years since I have been to Hershey and I am not sure Jett has ever been there. We also had a chocolate request from daughter-in-law Cristina. Sorry, Cristina - we didn't get there.

The campground is very nice, though we didn't take advantage of the mini golf, the pool, the restaurant or any of the other amenities.

I am seeing a pattern on how the campgrounds are dealing with the pandemic. They are closing the office and transacting nearly everything online or over the phone. When an escort to the site is offered, it is a masked person who stays far away and motions us to follow. Being careful.

One hop of just over 200 miles remaining.

## TN6 Hop 7: Florida NY to Phillipston MA

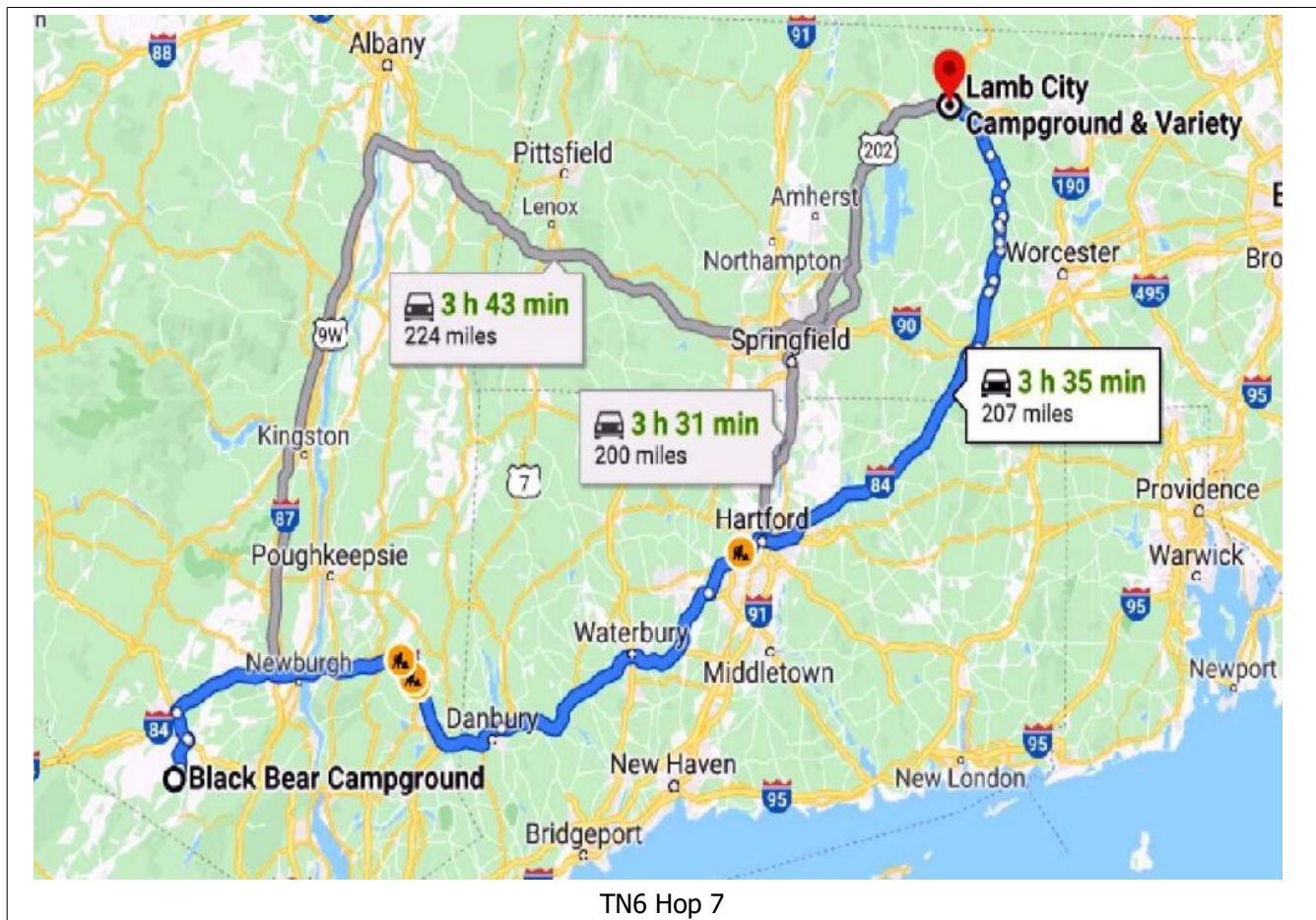
3 Jun 2020

209 tow miles via NY 17A, NY 17, I-84, US 20, MA 49, MA 31, MA 122A MA 68 and US 202. 281 truck miles. Cumulative tow miles: 1,577. Cumulative truck miles: 2,020.

We made it!

Again, no truck problems (except as noted below). There was a light rain and most of the trip was on I-84 which is far down our list of Favorite Roads. There was a minor detour about 10 miles from our destination, but no big deal. Backing into the site was difficult, but that was expected - I have done it twice before.





The extra truck miles were mostly due to a 60-mile trip I made yesterday to ride by West Point. I didn't go in as there is some security there, but I wanted to see the area. The elevation was impressive - I can see why a few cannon on the point could block shipping from flowing up the Hudson River. But it was a cloudy day so I took no photos and overall the trip was underwhelming. But it got me out of the RV for 90 minutes.

Our home for 2 nights was the [Black Bear Campground](#). This is an expensive RV park - \$90 per night. For that price you get a weedy gravel patch, water, sewer, decent WiFi and crappy cable TV. At first I thought it was a small park as only 46 sites were visible (and no obvious amenities such as a swimming pool). But yesterday morning I took Rusty on a long walk to the "upper area" and found that the park is actually quite large - 154 sites, all full hookup. The upper area also has a small meeting room, a basketball court, horseshoe pits and a mini-golf course. On my way down the hill I found the swimming pool (closed due to the



The large and empty "upper area"

pandemic). But the park was maybe 10% occupied. I don't know if that is more a reflection of the pandemic or the price, but I don't know how they stay in business.

After we got settled I checked my email. There in my inbox was another problem report from the truck: a second P0727 problem alert. This was the problem that I spent \$1000 in Virginia hoping to fix. Obviously I didn't

fix it. But the problem report was issued at 1:30pm when I was still nearly 2 hours from my destination. The truck ran fine for those 2 hours.

Anyway I won't stress about it tonight. Or even this week. I will have to address the ongoing truck reliability issues soon, but it got us to Massachusetts and tonight I will celebrate that.

## TN6 wrapup

4 Jun 2020

Now that the Sixth Trip North (TN6) is in the books, it is time to look back. First, the statistics:

- 7 hops in 12 nights
- 2,020 truck miles
- 1,577 tow miles
- \$862.89 in campground fees (including \$165.20 in lost deposits)
- 226.9 gallons of diesel fuel consumed (8.9 miles per gallon)

Highlights:

- No breakdowns. No disasters. Not even any near-disasters. The worst thing that happened was dinging the truck in Dumfries VA - the result of looking the wrong way when backing the truck into the site trying to make room for a visiting car. The damage to the truck is minor and cosmetic (and do we really care about cosmetic damage to a 16-year-old vehicle?). The RV damage? A scratch so small that I would have to point it out to you.
- Seeing Jett's kids and grandchild. The pandemic has isolated both of us, but Jett more so than me. It was a relief to see family again.



The ding

Lowlights:

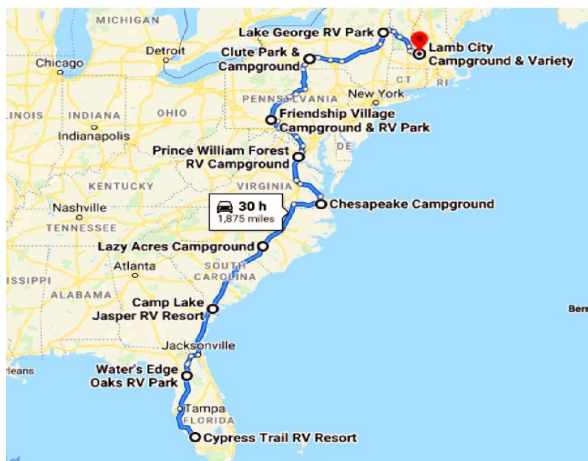
- While there were no truck breakdowns, worry over the state of the truck dominated the trip. The "fun stuff" of the last 4 hops was eliminated, as was one of the hops, in an effort to get to MA before anything bad happened. The start of the trip was delayed for 3 days by truck issues - fuel line problems and replacement of the turbocharger hose. Traveling will not be fun until we once again have a tow vehicle that we can trust.
- The only RV issue was the discovery, on a cold morning, that our electric furnace was not functioning. I will have to look into that.

I guess the summary would be "smooth trip, but not much fun."

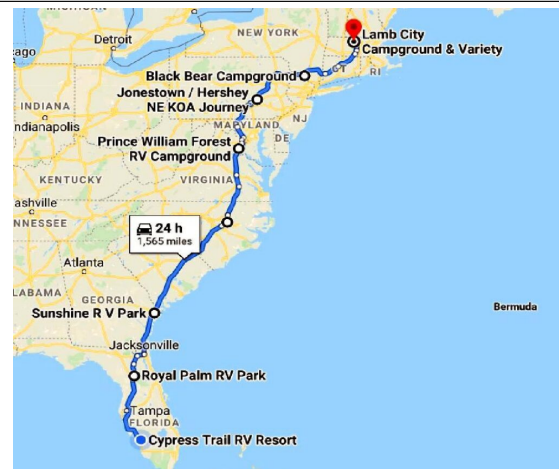
Because of the delay at the start and the concern over the health of the truck at the finish, the actual itinerary diverted greatly from the plan.



Jett, me and the family



TN6 plan



TN6 actual

## “Are we there yet?”

4 Jun 2020

Jett asked me yesterday how far we have traveled, towing the 5th wheel, in our nearly 8 years of living on the road. I thought maybe 20,000 miles. She thought that was too low. Fortunately I keep records.

The answer: 37,163 miles. If you add in the tow miles that weren't part of an officially-designated trip (e.g., getting the RV in for repairs or the trip to Maine to attend a rally) then the number approaches 38,000 miles.

Wow. One and a half times around the world at the equator.

Do I get some kind of "frequent driver" award?

# “White Fire” by Preston & Child

7 Jun 2020

[Copyright 2013 by Splendide Mendax, Inc and Preston Child. Published by Vision, New York.](#)

I really liked the first 80% of this book. Then it got ridiculous.

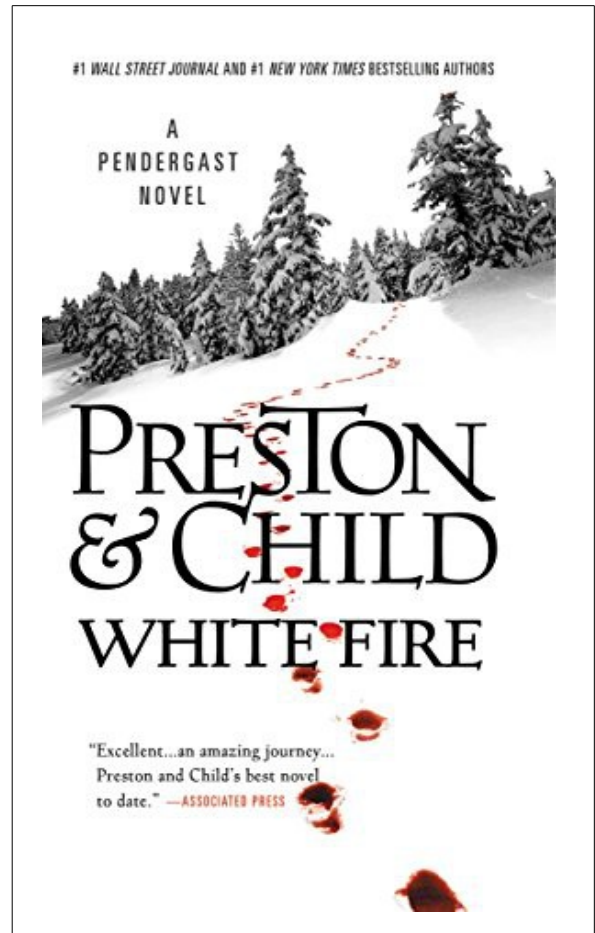
This is the 13th book in the Preston & Child series featuring Aloysius Pendergast, a rather effete FBI agent. My wife loves these books and I can see why. They are easy to read, the story was compelling and Pendergast is one interesting guy. But I like my stories to be somewhat realistic. This one has, as a key plot element, a very detailed reverie by Pendergast where he transports himself back more than 100 years to overhear a conversation between Oscar Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Yeah.

Up until that point the plot was interesting. Corrie Swanson, a student at John Jay and an aspiring FBI agent and acolyte of Pendergast's, chooses a thesis topic that takes her to Roaring Fork CO, a ski playground of the rich and famous. The topic of her thesis was a forensic analysis of the bones of 12 miners who were killed, ostensibly by a grizzly bear, in the summer of 1876. She soon discovers that they were likely victims of a serial murderer. But things spiral out of control for both her and the town while she is there. A series of murder/arsons and a guy shooting at her car, plus a second crazy who stalks her. Not a typical ski vacation.

Besides the self-seance, I have a few other objections to the plot. Both Pendergast and Swanson commit B&Es and Swanson also steals a snowmobile and some items from a museum. A few bones, too. Not exactly exemplary behavior from law enforcement professionals.

Then, as the end of the book, Swanson goes out in a snowstorm, against Pendergast's advice and is attacked by not one but two criminals and is saved by another woman who is tailing one of the culprits. Pendergast shows up, too. That is 5 people out in a raging snowstorm. On Christmas Eve. And, while being pursued by two men bent on murdering her, Swanson discovers the remains of the 1876 murderer and collects bone samples. I suppose I should be impressed at her desire to put a bow on her thesis while being shot at, but it was a bit much for me.

5 out of 10. But there is enough here that I will try another in the series. Maybe one of the early ones - Jett says they are better.



## (lack of) Progress report

19 Jun 2020

I haven't blogged in a while for the good and sufficient reason that I didn't want to bore you. I figured if I was bored then you would certainly be bored too.

In our first two weeks in Massachusetts our main activities were (1) avoiding contact with people, (2) quick trips to food stores for provisions, wearing mask and gloves, (3) quick trips to the laundromat, wearing mask and gloves, (4) getting an estimate for necessary repairs to the Sierra (no actual estimate received yet, but I expect that the total of the turbocharger work and brakes will be roughly \$3000) and (4) searching for a replacement truck. This last item consisted of a trip to a local dealer to look at a very promising Ram which I soon learned had been sold just hours before and a trip to Naugatuck CT to view a 2008 Ford F-350 which was very nice but overpriced and they wouldn't budge. Worse, they initially offered me only \$2000 for my truck. I laughed. They called back with a \$5500 offer but the whole deal was still too expensive. I was hoping to get at least \$8000 on the trade-in (KBB lists the trade-in value between \$10,000 and \$13,000). My target for a replacement vehicle is 2008 or newer, 100K miles or less and a net cost of no more than \$22K after trade-in.

I am considering a private seller of a low-miles 2008 Ford F-450, but the complexity of transferring my Florida plates to a vehicle privately purchased in Connecticut is daunting. I am currently thinking of first investing the \$3000 in fixing the Sierra, then putting it up for sale without having to disclose the turbocharger and brake issues. I will give myself to the end of July to do that. If successful I can then go out and find a replacement truck in September without worrying about trade-in. If I fail I will either take my lumps on trade-in or keep the Sierra for the return trip to Florida.

Dang! I really was trying to not bore you but you have fallen asleep.

## A social-distanced reunion

21 Jun 2020

Jett was able to see her 3 siblings yesterday in a CDC-approved fashion. We traveled to her brother Ray's house, settled in their back yard and sisters Sybil and Christine joined us, sitting in widely-spaced chairs. We chatted, loudly, across the distance.

Jett and I sprung for lunch - chicken and eggplant parm, with breaded chicken cutlets and oodles of ziti and angel hair pasta. It is never good to run short and Jett made sure we didn't, ordering enough for a platoon.

It was a beautiful day. We chatted for several hours and didn't go hungry.

A little hoarse maybe, but not hungry.



Social distancing with family

# "London Bridges" by James Patterson

2 Jul 2020

[Copyright 2004 by James Patterson. Published by Little, Brown and Company, New York.](#)

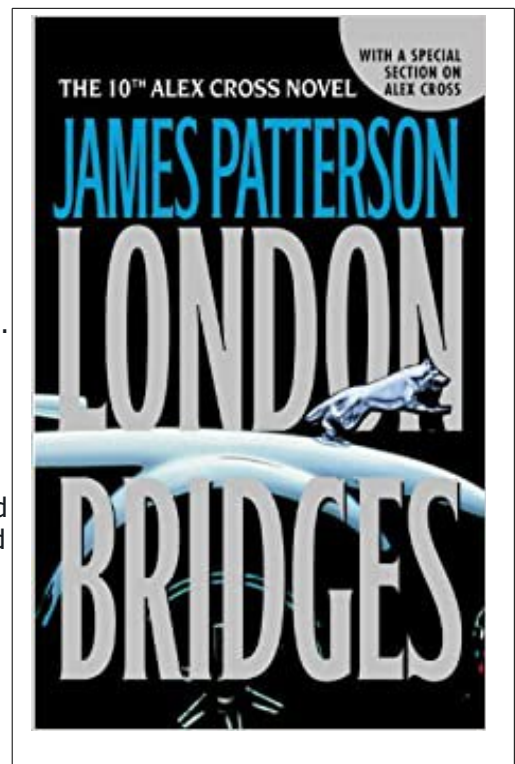
This is one of Patterson's wildly popular books featuring Alex Cross, FBI agent and psychologist. It appears to be the 9th of his Cross books and the second where Cross is up against the Russian supervillain known as "The Wolf."

This book scores high on several counts. First, chapters are short - 2 to 4 pages. I like that. I can pick the book up and read a few chapters in 15 minutes. Second, it visits many interesting places. Washington, Seattle, New York, London, Paris. A few others too. I like a book that takes me to places I would like to go. And it has an archvillian with a big agenda - destroying four major western cities in this case. Cross has a worthy adversary.

But there are negatives, too. Lots of gratuitous violence. The Wolf seems to want to kill everyone he works with,

along with a few thousand innocents. You would think his reputation would get around and others would be hesitant to do business with him as all of his allies end up dead. Second, the deadline to destroy the four cities if the ransom - some \$2B - is not paid is extended 3 or 4 times, apparently because the book wasn't long enough. And the four cities change. Frankfurt is dropped and Tel Aviv is added. For a guy who supposedly plans his evil to the last detail, changing the list of cities in the middle of the blackmail made no sense. Maybe Patterson decided he would rather research Tel Aviv than Frankfurt? Didn't matter because neither city figured into the plot at all. Puzzling.

My biggest problem with the book, though, was its lack of consistent pace. After reading 80% of the book it was apparent that Cross and his colleagues were not one bit closer to catching The Wolf than at the outset; it was just one long, frustrating chase around the world. I also had a hard time swallowing that The Wolf, a supervillain who had been on the "most wanted" lists of law enforcement around the world for 30 years, was so mysterious that no one had an inkling as to his identity. Or her identity, as it was suggested many times that The Wolf might be female. This, despite the chapters of the book that were written from the viewpoint of The Wolf used male pronouns. This conceit was maintained up to the very end where there was a brief, final attempt to pin the identity on a woman.



Then there was the threat to the cities. The Wolf, to prove his power to wreak damage unless he gets his money, destroys bridges in New York, London and Paris. Why bridges? No good reason, but the havoc is sufficient to extract the ransom from the blackmailed governments. True, The Wolf demonstrates that he had access to some "suitcase nukes" so the payment would be small change compared to the cost of rebuilding major cities. But after the ransom is paid the nukes are not found and no one seems to care. Uh, wouldn't the existence of the devices continue to be a bit of a concern?

Cross finally tracks down The Wolf and the villain dies. But the takedown is more a matter of luck for Cross and stupidity on the part of The Wolf, which seemed out of character for a supervillain. And (spoiler alert) he commits suicide before he can be interrogated. And before the money can be retrieved. So the book ends with \$2B and some suitcase nukes still missing. Not a very satisfying conclusion.

So was the dead guy The Wolf? We will never know. Until Patterson finds a reason to resurrect him in a future

novel, like a popular character on a soap opera.

It was a fun read, for the most part, but left me feeling manipulated.

6 out of 10.

## My silly walk

**9 Jul 2020**

No, not a *Monty Python* silly walk. Wish it had been.

Background: I put the truck in for new brakes July 1. I am trying (not too hard) to sell it and upgrade to a newer, less-used truck, but I figured that regardless of whether I sold it or kept it I had to do the repairs that would be necessary to keep it useful as a tow vehicle. The first step was brakes. The turbocharger repairs will come later.

The garage is about 6 miles from our summer home. When I dropped the truck off, at 8am on Wednesday morning, I got a ride home from brother-in-law Ray (thanks, Ray!). But I didn't know when the truck would be done and couldn't arrange a ride in advance. Phillipston may have taxi service - not sure about that - but it does, surprisingly, have bus service. I determined that it was very feasible to take a \$1.25 bus ride to fetch the truck with only relatively short - less than half a mile - walks at either end.

The "truck is ready" call came at 3pm Thursday. A quick check of the bus schedule revealed that the next bus would arrive at 4:25pm which would get me to the garage before its 5pm closing time, but just barely. I had been sedentary for two days and was itching for some exercise. A quick mental calculation convinced me that I could walk the 6 miles and arrive, with greater certainty, at about the same time as the bus option. How hard could it be to walk 6 miles? I needed the exercise!

So on with the sneakers, grab a bottle of water and a baseball cap (hot day - upper 80s) and off I went. Briskly. The target pace was 4 mph.

Which I did for the first 4 miles. I even cut a few minutes off my projected arrival time. My right hip ached for a bit, but it went away.

The fifth mile was tougher. But I maintained my target pace.

Then came the 6th mile. My feet were sore. My legs were starting to cramp. I needed to rest. Big mistake. I could barely life my butt off the stone wall. Then it started to rain. Hard. I lumbered on for a bit, but fell well off my pace. When I realized that I would never make the 5pm closing I called the garage and begged a ride. I rode the last half mile.

When I got in the truck to drive home, after paying the bill, both legs cramped up. Hard. Excruciating pain. I sat in the garage parking lot, trying very hard to not scream. The cramps finally subsided enough for me to drive home.

I barely made it inside before I vomited.

Now, a full week later, my thighs are still sore and some of my toes are still bruised.

Dumbest thing I have done in years.

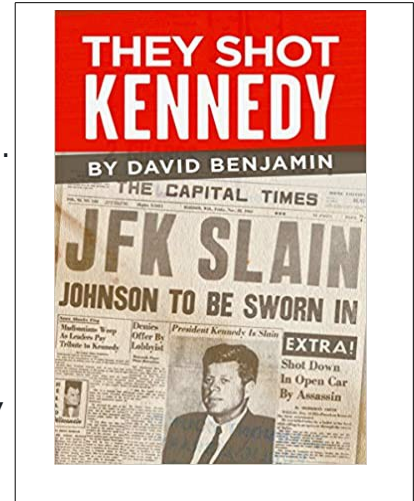
# "They Shot Kennedy" by David Benjamin

9 Jul 2020

[Copyright 2020 by David Benjamin. Published by Last Kid Books, Madison WI.](#)

Full disclosure: the author is a friend. A very good, lifelong friend. We met in high school, in Madison WI in 1963. That is particularly relevant because this book is set in a high school in Madison WI in 1963. It is semi-autobiographical. The protagonist, Cribbsy, a 16-year-old wiseass aspiring author is Benjamin, for sure. Some of the other characters - but not all - are identifiable as people I know and grew up with. I see myself in one of the characters and many of the places are both real and very familiar. That familiarity makes this book exceptionally interesting to me.

But I believe anyone would find this book interesting. It is a fascinating look back at the turbulent month of November 1963, when Kennedy was shot. But, despite the title, this is not about Kennedy, nor the assassination, except as a backdrop to the adolescent drama and angst of a fascinating group of teens.



The characters are complex and fully developed. Their problems are real - sometimes shockingly real - and the narrative is amusing and chock full of literary references. I laughed, I cried. I even, occasionally, had to put the book down and reflect on that period in my life. And interspersed with the witty prose are real headlines and snippets of news articles from November 1963. For those old enough to have lived through that month, it is a collage of news that I had forgotten which made me realize both how much things have changed (e.g., all the references to "Negroes") and how much they are still the same (e.g., the overwrought reactions to social change). There are also quotes from JFK, presented in a different font, which in counterpoint to the other nonsense, make him seem like an absolute oracle of the times.

How much did I like this book? It is 568 pages and I finished it in a week. That is over 80 pages per day. I haven't read a book that fast in... well, forever.

9.5 out of 10. Maybe I would have given it a 10 if Cribbsy had gotten the girl. But that wouldn't have been Cribbsy. And, in a way, he did get the girl. You will see what I mean.

# "Deep Storm" by Lincoln Child

17 Jul 2020

[Copyright 2007 by Lincoln Child. Published by Anchor Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.](#)

This book is strongly reminiscent of the *Andromeda Strain* by Michael Crichton. That is not a bad thing. But where Crichton wrote realistic medical mysteries, this one tiptoes into the sci-fi genre. That surprised me as Child is one of Jett's favorite authors (I stole this book from her mini-library) and I have never seen her read a sci-fi book before.

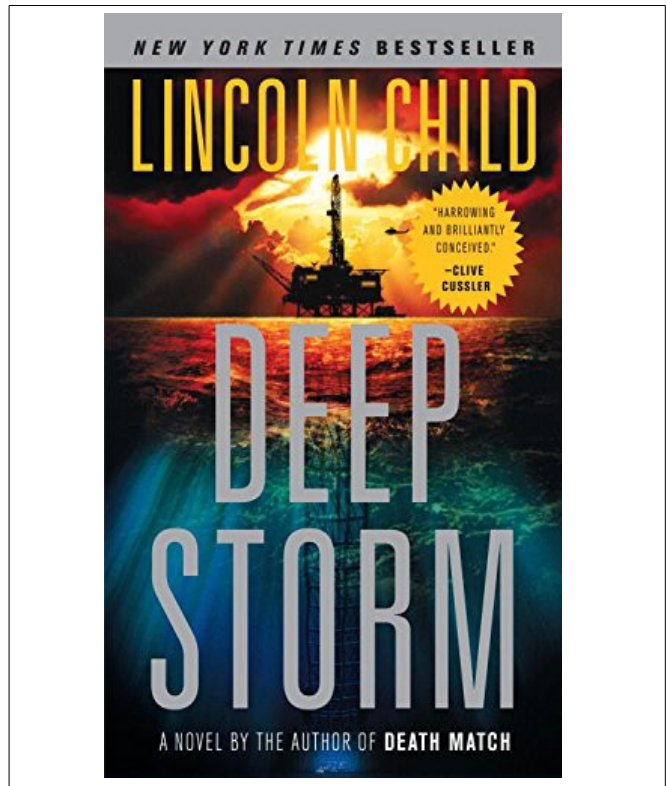
You have to be willing to believe in aliens to appreciate this book. I don't believe in aliens - at least not the type that are central to this book - and I have a hard time swallowing some highly improbable engineering feats that are also crucial to this plot - like having a 12-story research facility operating 10,000 feet underwater in the Atlantic. An unpressurized facility. I need to find the engineers that were able to built this structure. They can probably figure out a way to make my toilet stop leaking.



The plot? Without giving away more than I already have, I will tell you that the protagonist, Dr Peter Crane, is summoned to this super-secret underwater facility to diagnose a multitude of mysterious illnesses in the hundreds of people working there. As usual, there is tension at the top between the three people running the operation: an admiral who ostensibly is running the whole operation, a general who is focused on the national security aspects and a scientist who is overseeing the scientific research. And, just to stir the pot, add in a saboteur who is intent on destroying the whole operation.

If you can swallow the aliens and the improbable engineering, you might very well enjoy this book. Child is a skilled author. The prose is lively and entertaining and the plot, though ridiculous, is engrossing. On balance, the entertainment value wins out.

8 out of 10.



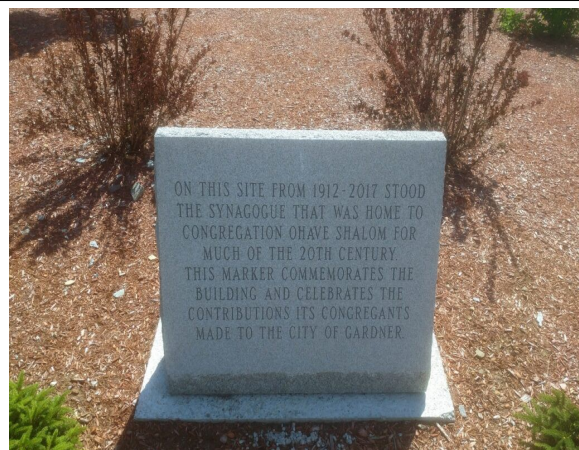
## Historical markers

19 Jul 2020

If you have been paying attention, you know that I spent a good many hours this past winter photographing headstones in Florida. It was a feel-good activity that combined the need for some exercise with an ability to keep myself socially distant from living people. I have done some of the same this summer in Massachusetts, but also have found a new activity: finding and photographing historical markers.

I recently discovered a national database of historical markers: [hmdb.org](http://hmdb.org). I was thrilled to see that this site, like [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com), had a list of "photo requests." These consisted both of requests of photos for markers that had no photos at all (like the headstone requests in findagrave) and requests for additional photos (e.g., a request for a wide-angle photograph for a marker that had only a close-up photo).

Well, I was like a dog on a bone when I saw this. I immediately printed a list of photo requests for markers in the county in which I am residing this summer (Worcester County MA). The photo here is my very first photo of a marker that had none. My first contribution to the historical marker database!



Ohave Shalom Synagogue marker – Gardner MA

# "Ricochet" by Sandra Brown

27 Jul 2020

[Copyright 2006 by Sandra Brown Management Ltd. Published by Simon and Schuster, New York.](#)

Let me begin by apologizing for the preponderance of book reviews in this blog which is intended to be a diary of our full-time RV lifestyle. But in this pandemic there is darn little left to do but read. So, sorry, but this is our RV life right now.

I liked this book a lot. That makes 3 straight books that I liked a lot, which is some kind of record. Hopefully my view is not being tainted by my boredom.

First, let me mention something that I liked about this book that has nothing to do with the plot or the prose: it was a large-print edition. I think this is my first large-print novel and I have to admit that it was a pleasure being able to read it without reading glasses.

Second, let me mention something I liked about the book that had a bit to do with the plot, but not much: it was set in Savannah GA, one of my favorite cities. Many of the settings in the book were familiar to me from the times I have visited there. This familiarity made it easy to picture the scene and made it more realistic to me.

The plot. It begins in the courtroom of Judge Laird where a career criminal, Robert Savich, is on trial for murder. The lead detective, Duncan Hatcher, and his partner, DeeDee Brown, are confident that this time they had built an iron-clad case against Savich, a long-time nemesis who had skated free numerous times. This time the trial ends in a mistrial when Judge Laird rules that a juror had lied on his questionnaire. Hatcher is incensed that the juror had not simply been replaced by an alternate and voices his displeasure so forcefully that the judge slaps him with 3 days in jail for contempt.

Fast forward to an awards ceremony where DeeDee is receiving a commendation for exemplary police work. Duncan goes, reluctantly, as DeeDee's escort, and encounters Judge Laird there. He manages to be civil. Until he meets Laird's trophy wife, Elise, who figuratively knocks his socks off. Hatcher, more than a little tipsy, gets Elise alone for a few seconds and says something wildly inappropriate. She really should have slapped him or at least walked away, insulted. But she doesn't. And she lies to her husband about what Hatcher said to her.

Not surprisingly, much of the rest of the book is about Duncan and Elise's incipient relationship and Duncan and DeeDee's quest to nail Savich. These two plot lines are, of course, intertwined. There are twists and turns galore and the plot left me guessing right up to the very end. This is one of the best plots I have encountered in a long time and the ending is reminiscent of *The Sting*.

My complaints? Well, the book is written in the third person which give Brown the freedom to jump from scene to scene. Sometimes the jumps are jarring, with a large block left out, purely to keep the reader guessing. It works, but seemed a bit unfair.

Also, I have some problems with Hatcher's behavior. He is a veteran detective with an exemplary record and a reputation for integrity. One thing you absolutely don't do as a detective is form an emotional attachment with a suspect, which is what Elise Laird becomes. You also don't break the law in an attempt to bring a criminal to justice, which is what he does with Savich. He was very out of control - and out of character - for much of the book. The ending absolves him, mostly. But not completely.

But these complaints don't do a lot to diminish the entertainment value of this book.

8.5 out of 10.

# Isaias

6 Aug 2020

Due to the pandemic I haven't been doing much. Jett also hasn't been doing much, either, but in her case it is more due to a real disease than a potential disease. The result is that I haven't had much to report that wouldn't fall squarely into the "really, truly boring" category.

We did, however, survive tropical storm Isaias Tuesday night. It ran up the NY/MA border pretty far to our west, so I wasn't expecting much. But we got hit harder than I expected. Rather than 35 or 40 mph winds, we had some gusts over 50. Maybe even a few over 60. The RV was rocking pretty good. Or bad, if you don't like your RV rocking (I don't). Wednesday morning I took a tour of the campground, with Rusty. I counted 6 fallen trees. Fortunately, none fell on an RV. One RV may have received some fairly minor damage.

Lucky, I guess. But scarier than I expected.

# "Fever Dream" by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child

8 Aug 2020

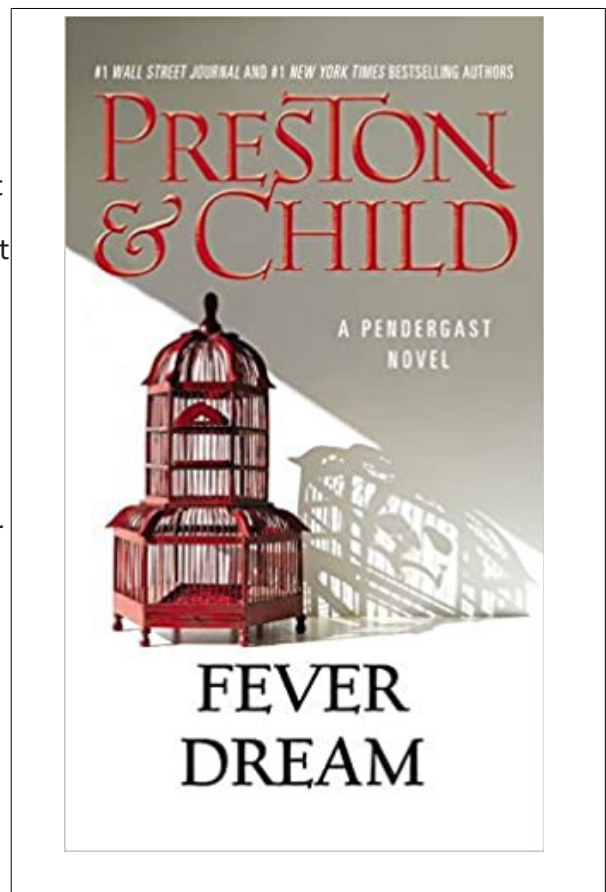
[Copyright 2010 by Splendide Mendax Inc and Preston Child.](#)  
[Published by Grand Central Publishing.](#)

This is #10 in the series of mysteries featuring Aloysius Pendergast, effete FBI special agent extraordinaire. It is only the second Pendergast mystery that I have read and that first one for me was #14 in the series, so some of the references that made little sense to me in that book came into focus a bit more while reading this one. In a series like this, with some continuity between books, it is probably best to start at the beginning. I may go back and do that.

Pendergast is an interesting if somewhat unbelievable character. Preston and Child want us to believe that an active FBI agent could investigate cases while driving a Rolls Royce. And that he is perfectly free to investigate cases on his own, as in this volume, without an extended leave from the FBI. Or that he can use "unconventional" methods, like destroying a bar by exploding a propane tank, without encountering some serious official blowback.

I try to be tolerant of all of this nonsense because I do, after all, enjoy the writings of Clive Cussler, a guy who pens the most ridiculous plots this side of sci-fi. Cussler's main guy, Dirk Pitt, is similar to Pendergast in that he is capable of superhuman feats. You can't enjoy a Cussler story without checking your disbelief at the door.

So, beyond my problem with the believability of the character, what do we have here? An intricate plot spanning



over 12 years, starting with the death of Pendergast's wife in the mouth of a lion. Yes, she was attacked by a lion while they were on safari. Pendergast found only her disembodied hand, with its distinctive ring still intact.

Twelve years later he happens to look at the gun she was using when she was killed and finds evidence that she had been shooting blanks. He realizes that rather than a tragic accident, her death was murder by lion. The rest of the book is a non-stop chase to find the murderer. It is fun, if unbelievable.

The endgame takes place in a swamp where he and a colleague are first attacked by a group of murderous local yahoos, bitten by an alligator, shot and nearly set on fire. But despite being outnumbered and outgunned, they prevail and find the murderer. Or one of two murderers. The other, at the end of the book, remains alive and undiscovered.

I can guess the plot for the Pendergast #11 book.

Another plot complaint: throughout the book there is a major subplot involving a young woman - Pendergast's ward - who is arrested for infanticide. I was curious, as the plot unfolded, how this plot line was going to tie in to the death by lion and the battle in the swamp. Answer: it doesn't. Apparently this was all one big "coming attractions" subplot for #11.

So despite being entertained by the main plot and the superhuman exploits of Pendergast, I found myself annoyed at being manipulated by Preston and Child.

6.5 out of 10.

## Turbo work

**18 Aug 2020**

So that turbocharger problem... remember? The leaks in the uppipes to/from the turbocharger that were spewing hot gases and causing those weird email messages to me during the trip north? We got to MA successfully, but not without some angst. As soon as we arrived I started plotting the fix. The plan was to replace those parts ASAP, sell the truck in July and devote August and September to finding a replacement. Well, I found a candidate used truck - a very fine 2008 Ford F-450 dually - but failed to get the turbocharger fixed promptly. In fact, it didn't get fixed until today.

It turns out that getting parts for a 16-year-old truck can be difficult. Who knew?

This work, for which the GMC dealer in VA gave me an estimate of \$3500, was completed by a local mechanic (thanks, Josh!) for just over \$1700. And that included replacing yet another fuel line and an oil change. So I am pretty pleased with the price. And maybe it is my wishful thinking, but now the truck seems to run more smoothly and with more pep.

I am keeping my fingers crossed that the truck is now ready to take us back to Florida.

I think that F-450 is going to have to find another home. Sorry, F-450.



The discarded uppipes

## "Caught" by Harlan Coben

21 Aug 2020

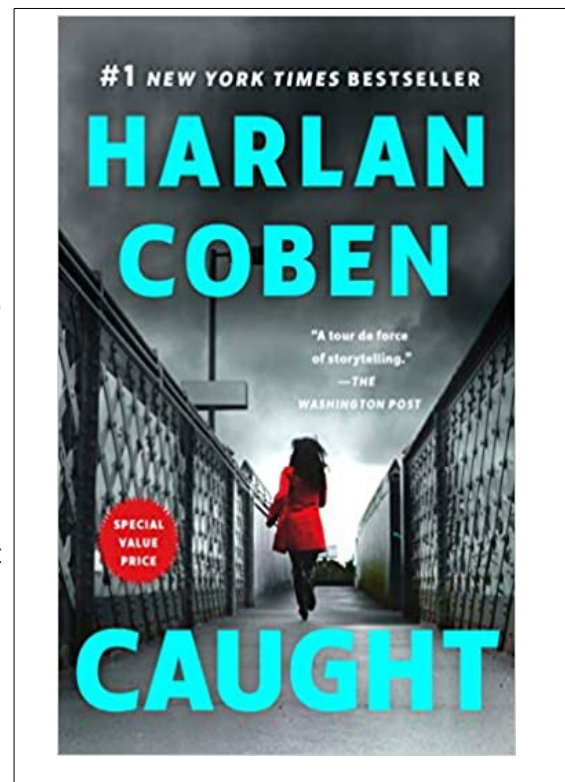
[Copyright 2010 by Harlan Coben. Published by Penguin Group \(USA\) Inc., New York.](#)

A (very) few of you may recall that I raved about Coben's [The Woods](#) last August, rating it as one of the best mysteries that I have ever read. Well, move over, *The Woods* - you are going to have to share the top shelf with *Caught*.

The books are similar in one important way: the central mystery in both is a long-ago incident - a murder at a teen summer camp in *The Woods* and an incident at Princeton in *Caught*. Both traumatic incidents were life-altering to central characters in the books. Both resulted, after many years, in additional deaths. I think the depth of the trauma caused by the ancient incidents provides a great foundation for engrossing stories.

The story in this case starts with a divorced do-gooder, Dan Mercer, getting caught in a pedophile sting. He claims he was set up, but his protestations fall on deaf ears. His life is ruined. Even when his case is thrown out.

The TV reporter who organized and filmed the sting, Wendy Tynes, is fired when the case is thrown out as the judge ruled that she tainted the evidence. Partly because she had some free time and partly because something about the whole thing didn't



feel right to her, she continued to investigate. She eventually unravels the rather intricate story, which includes not only Dan Mercer but also 4 of his classmates at Princeton. Her digging leads to more death and more trauma, including trauma to her. But she perseveres.

The story is complex. It moves in directions that surprised me (e.g., I really thought that divorced Mercer and widowed Tynes were headed for a romance, but I couldn't have been more wrong). Some characters are not who they seem to be. And every character has a part to play in the deeply satisfying conclusion.

I really need to read more Coben.

9.5 out of 10.

## Don't say that!

**22 Aug 2020**

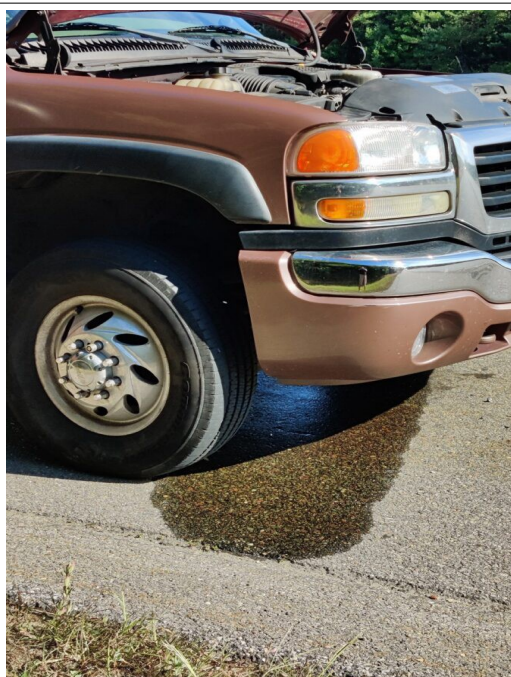
Before we started our trip north - and after completing the expensive repairs to the fuel lines - I made the statement that the truck was ready for the trip. As you know, that was absolutely not the case. Two days ago I made this statement: "I am keeping my fingers crossed that the truck is now ready to take us back to Florida." Once again I was mistaken. I need to stop saying things like that. Because the truck is listening.

I traveled to Leominster MA yesterday to do a number of things, the most significant being upgrading our cell phones and switching carriers. That is a trip of just over 20 miles. On the trip home, just 2 miles shy of my destination, a car pulled up alongside and honked furiously. He was obviously trying to alert me to something, though I had no idea what as the truck was running just fine. But he pulled over and I stopped behind him. He came back to me and said "Something is burning!" There was, indeed, some smoke, but it wasn't coming from my rear tires, as he thought - it was my engine smoking. It was pretty obvious, once I looked under the truck, that a fuel line had broken as diesel fuel was spewing onto the asphalt at a high rate - maybe a cup a minute. I shut off the engine and the spill stopped.

It would seem that the fuel line repair performed on Tuesday had lasted a grand total of 40 miles. I called the garage and spoke to Josh, my mechanic. He was nearly as distressed as I was and sent a tow truck out to get me. The driver loaded the truck onto the bed and dropped me off at the RV park, then took the truck to the garage where Josh assessed the situation. He called me later (8 pm!) and said that a "clip had let loose." He had ordered a part which should arrive this morning. He promised to have the truck repaired as soon as the part arrives.

I am going to avoid any further statements of optimism about the repairs.

Because the truck is listening.



Disabled truck, spewing fuel

# A weekend without the truck

26 Aug 2020

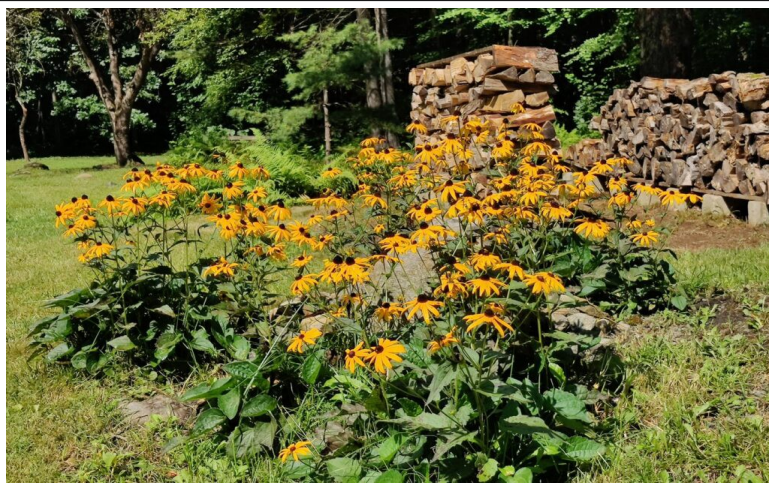
I got the truck back on Monday. Lots of apologies from the garage and no charge. But we had to spend the entire weekend *sans* transportation. This is not a huge problem for us as we typically have enough food on hand to feed the entire campground and we had no major commitments.

Well, we did have one invitation: to spend time with Jett's siblings at brother-in-law Ray's cabin in New Salem. Rather than cancel we simply asked for a ride from sister-in-law Christine. She had to go through Phillipston anyway, so it was a minor detour for her. And she found a yard sale, too, so there was even some upside for her.

As always, it was a lovely couple of hours with family. And I was able to try out the outstanding camera on my new cell phone. I have attached a couple of samples. These are reduced quality - the full-size originals are just stunning - but the eye really can't see much difference.

I am posting this now because I just figured out how to transfer photos from the phone to the laptop. It turned out to be simple, as I expected, but had to find the right switch to flip.

Anyway, I am very pleased with the camera. I have to wonder now why I even bothered to buy the Canon. The phone camera is every bit as good - probably better - than the Canon. And I haven't even learned how to use all the options yet.



Black-eyed susans



Hummingbird feeders

# Getting her tested so she can be tested

2 Sep 2020

Jett was due this week for her regular MRI and CT scan tests, needed to monitor her cancer. But on Monday she was feeling poorly and cancelled the CT scan. On Tuesday we made the 50-minute trek to Worcester to get the MRI, only to be turned away because two of her current symptoms - extreme fatigue and shortness of breath

(which are pretty much expected in someone who has stage 4 lung cancer) - were also on the COVID-19 symptom list. So, to get the tests needed to monitor her cancer she first had to get a COVID-19 test.

Today was devoted to finding a place to get that test. I found one, but it took Jett so long to get ready that I was stressing that we wouldn't get it done. Like you, I have seen those nightmare videos of long lines of cars at drive-thru testing sites. So it was with some trepidation that I went into the local testing facility, Tully Walk-In Care in Athol, to seek a test. Much to my surprise, the waiting room was empty. Registration was a breeze, after which I drove around to the back of the building where there was a drive-thru testing tent. A quick nasal swab and we were on our way. Less than 30 minutes total time. A very pleasant surprise.

I had considered getting myself tested, too, but passed. My reasoning: whatever the result of her test will be the result of my test, too.

Now we wait 2 or 3 days.

Then, if negative, we can reschedule the CT scan and MRI.

## T-Mobile vs Verizon

**4 Sep 2020**

I switched our cell phone service from Verizon to T-Mobile a couple of weeks ago. This was a big move because we have been loyal Verizon customers from the day we first got our cell phones many years ago. Verizon was the obvious choice for a wireless carrier when we first went "on the road" in 2012 as it offered, without question, the best coast-to-coast coverage. That was a very important factor when we were traveling a lot.

Our coast-to-coast traveling days may be over. Now we are more concerned about cost than coverage. Verizon was expensive: for our 2 cell phones with unlimited minutes and data, a hotspot router for the laptop and a "Hum" device to plug into the truck to monitor for engine problems the monthly bill was over \$240.

Coupled with the high cost was poor cellular service in central Massachusetts. Making a call from our site in Phillipston MA was always an adventure, often resulting in a dropped call or an interrupted voice stream. Cell phone service at Jett brother's cabin in New Salem MA was non-existent. Cell service north and west of Phillipston was very spotty.

High cost and poor signal. Seemed like a good time to investigate options. We also needed new phones, so we either had to jump to another carrier now or commit to Verizon for 2 more years.

Ray and Kim, Jett's brother and sister-in-law, have very good T-Mobile service in New Salem, so I decided to consider T-Mobile. A little investigation revealed a "Try our Signal" offer from T-Mobile: they would send a hotspot, with a 30-day 20GB limit, to try, free of charge. I took them up on the offer. What I found was that the T-Mobile signal in Phillipston was perhaps slightly better than Verizon's. There were a handful of times during the 2 weeks that I used the hotspot when the internet connection was dropped. That concerned me a bit, but it wasn't a deal-breaker. It seemed that the T-Mobile signal would likely be no worse than Verizon's and perhaps a bit better.

The quote I got from T-Mobile was \$170 - a savings of about \$70 per month. However, this is a bit of an apples-and-oranges comparison because the pricing is structured a bit differently. Most of the savings results from Jett and I both being over 55 (well over). The new phones, at \$600 each, were amortized over 3 years, not 2.

Still, a savings of \$70 per month, coupled with the promise of a better signal, sold me. I jumped.

So after a couple of weeks in the T-Mobile world, what do I think?



- The signal improvement is less than I hoped. The voice signal in Phillipston is worse than Verizon's. I find that, most times, I can't make a phone call unless I link to the hotspot. This means that I am chewing up data just to talk.
- The internet connection continues to drop at random times. This is going to be very annoying for the few weeks we have left in Massachusetts.
- The voicemail system is a dinosaur. I now have to do a "speed dial 1" to access voicemail, then use 7 to delete and 9 to keep. This is the same system I had over 10 years ago when I had my first flip phone. I am very disappointed in this. I had gotten very used to Verizon's very simple and intuitive management of voicemail.
- Uploading photos to the laptop is also more difficult now. I had gotten used to simply attaching the phone to the laptop via USB and transferring photo files. With the new phone I had to install drivers and use a pretty clunky photo viewer app to upload photos to a month file (e.g., "2020-09"), then cut-and-paste the photos to where I want them to be. Very painful. And I haven't yet figured out how to bulk delete photos from the phone.

That all sounds pretty negative and I guess it is, except for the \$70 per month savings. But there are some things about the new OnePlus phones that I like very much:

- The camera is outstanding. It is actually 3 cameras designed for various distances from the target. I am able to take very clear close-up photos and am able to zoom in on very distant targets. I took a photo of a hovering hummingbird and the camera captured the beating wings very nicely. I have barely scratched the surface on all of the features. I think I will love this camera. I am already wondering why I bothered to buy the Canon.
- The battery life is a big improvement over our old phones. We were used to waking up and finding that our phones were dead in the morning. With these new phones they can go all night and still be over 90% when we wake. I haven't tested the full battery life yet, but I am guessing it will be over 4 hours.



Hummingbird feeders



Disorienting pond view

So... a mixed bag. I definitely like the phone but am somewhat disappointed in the T-Mobile service. Hopefully I will be happier with the service when we get to Florida.

## Negative

6 Sep 2020

I wasn't really worried but maybe you were, so I will announce the result of Jett's COVID-19 test: negative.

## "Betrayed" by Lisa Scottoline

7 Sep 2020

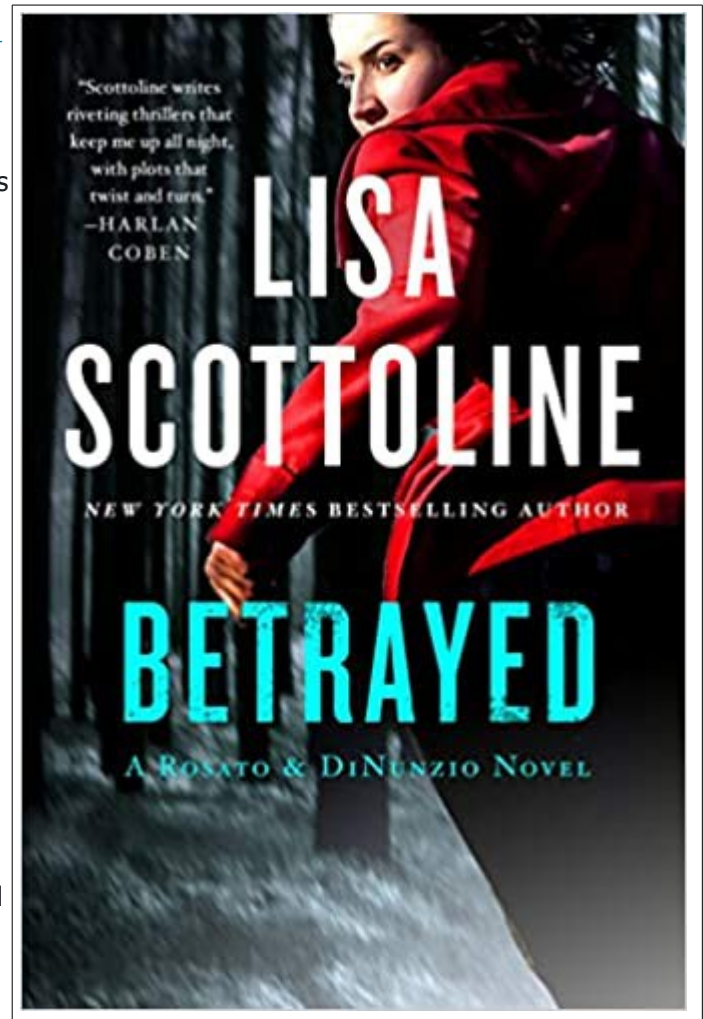
[Copyright 2014 by Smart Blonde LLC. Published by St. Martin's Press, New York.](#)

You all know about "chick flicks." This is a "chick mystery." Yes, it is a whodunit but it is also about feelings and relationships. You know - chick stuff. This is a book with very little testosterone.

This is one of Scottoline's many books about the Rosato & DeNunzio law firm (though in the earlier books it was just Rosato). The main character in this book, however, is neither Rosato nor DeNunzio but rather Judy Carrier, the senior associate in this all-female Philadelphia law firm. It begins with the firm taking on a huge 75-case workload defending an asbestos manufacturer. This is a big deal for the law firm and a ready-made path to partner for Judy, but she hates the work. It seemed, early on, that the book would be all about these cases.

Not so. Personal problems intervened. She got a call informing her that her beloved Aunt Beth had breast cancer and was to undergo a radical mastectomy on Monday, just a weekend away. Judy heads to her aunt's home, just over an hour away, to comfort her, joining her mother who has flown in from the west coast.

The three women are joined, briefly, by Iris, an illegal Mexican immigrant who is a gardening partner of Beth's. Beth speaks very highly of Iris and it is clear she has grown very fond of this young 40ish woman.



So it is quite a shock when Iris turns up dead that very afternoon, the victim of a heart attack. Or so the medical examiner rules. But things don't seem quite right to Beth and Judy agrees. She quietly starts to investigate Iris' life.

Things quickly spiral out of control. Over the course of the weekend and the following Monday, Judy experiences an amazing variety of traumas, both physical and emotional. She is assaulted, chased by gunmen intent on murdering her, hides in a pile of manure, watches her VW and an informant being blown up, finds a large sum of money secreted in Beth's home, dumps her boyfriend, loses control in a deposition and is slapped with what amounts to a malpractice complaint and learns that her Aunt Beth is not her aunt. That is what I call a busy few days. And none of it has anything to do with asbestos.

That probably sounds more exciting than it was. And more exciting than it should have been. The assaults and the car bombing really lacked motive. Why was it necessary for the bad guys to take this drastic action? She really knew very little and the whole nefarious scheme probably would have survived and continued to thrive if they had just ignored her. They brought the law down on themselves by attacking her. So I have a problem with the motive.

I also have a problem with the murder/assaults/car bombing being about 40% of the book - the rest is a recitation of Judy's personal issues. Cancer, boyfriend, an aunt who is not an aunt. All interesting, but not a mystery. Chick stuff.

4 out of 10.

## 6<sup>th</sup> trip south (TS6) plan

**8 Sep 2020**

I am not sure why I bother to announce a trip "plan" because if recent history is a guide the actual trip will bear little resemblance. But I am either a creature of habit or an optimistic fool - or some combination thereof.

This will be our 6th trip from New England to Florida, hence the "Sixth Trip South" designation. I won't be dawdling much because (1) Jett's health is rather delicate and I think a longer-than-necessary trip will be considered torture by some, including her, and (2) I want to arrive in Ft Myers a month before the election so that I can participate. I have already signed up to be a poll worker in Lee County, Florida.

That said, this won't be a straight shot down I-95. For one, we have to avoid New York City and Philadelphia, as always. I also want to get to the Virginia Beach area to do a little genealogical research. So, yeah, a little diversion. But otherwise pretty straight.

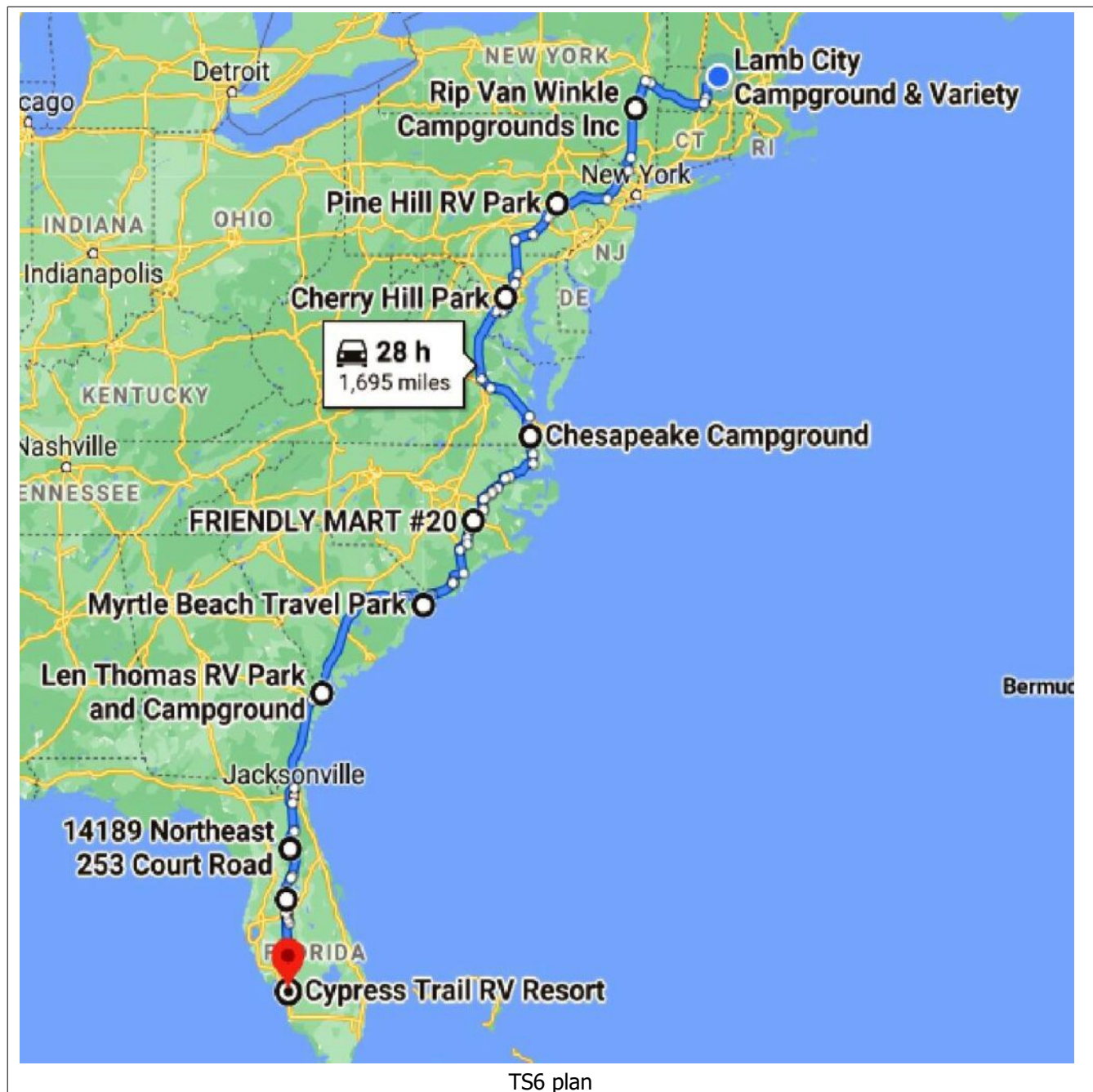
My plan has us traveling 1,685 miles in 8 hops over 17 days. The itinerary:

- 2 nights in Saugerties NY. I hope to spend a few hours exploring this area of the Hudson River Valley.
- 1 night in Kutztown PA. This is just an overnight but is close enough to Pennsylvania Dutch country that maybe we can get a good country meal.
- 4 nights in College Park MD. This is the "visit the kids" stop, but in Maryland rather than Virginia. We have stayed at [Cherry Hill Park](#) before and love it, though I doubt we will love it as much in the pandemic.
- 3 nights near Virginia Beach. I hope to find a few graves of my colonial ancestors and maybe get a glimpse of the Yorktown battlefield too.
- 3 nights in Myrtle Beach SC. This should be an R&R stop, weather permitting. The hop from Virginia Beach to Myrtle Beach is the longest of the trip and will require a refueling stop.
- 2 nights near Savannah GA. I don't have any specific plans for the day here, but there are some interesting cemeteries nearby and maybe I can get some fried green tomatoes for Jett.
- 1 night at Salt Springs FL. This is just an overnight but is part of my attempt to avoid I-4 on this trip.

The plan has us departing on Wed Sep 16 and arriving Fri Oct 2. This is cutting it close for Jett's medical appointments. As you know, she did not get the CT scan and MRI that were originally scheduled for last week. Her infusion is scheduled for Sep 15 and the MRI has been rescheduled for Sep 14. The results of the MRI should be available when we meet with the doctor on the 15th. The CT scan, however, has been rescheduled for Sep 16 at noon. So the plan is to button up the RV before we head to the CT scan, then immediately hitch up and depart when we get back. The results of the CT scan will have to be transmitted to Florida to be evaluated there.

All of this depends, of course, on the health of both Jett and the truck.

Keeping my fingers crossed on both.



# Yup. Again.

17 Sep 2020

We were supposed to be in Saugerties NY today, on our way to Florida. Instead we are still in Phillipston MA, our planned trip delayed. Yup. Again.

Why? More truck problems. Yup. Again.

What kind of problem? A broken fuel line. Yup. Again.

This time the problem appeared Monday as we were on our way to UMASS Memorial Hospital in Worcester to get an MRI of Jett's head. We were stopped at a light just two blocks from the hospital when we were hit with a very strong diesel fuel odor. There were a couple of trucks nearby and I couldn't see anything leaking or smoking from my driver's seat so we continued on, into the parking garage, hoping against hope that it was those trucks. When I shut the engine off and got out... fuel spewing from the engine. I dropped to my knees, cursing a blue streak. Any observer probably thought I was Job. I certainly felt like Job.

But no time to wail - had to get Jett to the MRI. So I got her to her appointment and then called a GMC dealer some 23 miles away to see if (1) they could undertake repairs quickly and (2) had a rental or loaner that I could have while they had my truck. They said "yes" to both. Then I called AAA. They told me that they could not transport the truck until the fire department said it was safe to do so. So, realizing the both the fire department and the tow truck would have great difficulty dealing with a truck parked on the top level of a parking garage, I decided I had to move it. I walked along the backside of the hospital, near the exit from the garage, and spotted a legal parking spot that would be perfect. Back to the hospital to pay the parking charge, then to the truck. Started it up and, as fast as possible, got out of the garage to the on-street parking space. The fuel continued to spew.

Then back into the hospital to collect Jett. Moved her to the sidewalk outside the hospital, to sit in the sun (a sunny day in the mid-70s). Then I called the fire department. A fire truck with 5 firemen arrived, lights flashing (but no siren, thankfully), about 10 minutes later. They opined that it was a minor leak and the truck could safely be transported. I called AAA and put the fireman in charge on the phone, to assure AAA that they could send a truck.

Back to Jett to check on her. She was doing fine. A call to the GMC dealer to tell them the truck was en route, than a call to sister-in-law Kim to see if she could give us a ride to the GMC dealer (the AAA driver was not allowed to take us due to the pandemic). She agreed to do so and was even pleased that the dealer was right on the way to the cabin in New Salem which is where she was headed after work.

Back to the truck, getting there just as the tow truck arrived. My truck was expeditiously winched onto the flatbed and was off to the GMC dealer after I paid \$80 for the portion of the tow not covered by my AAA membership.

Back to Jett, just as Kim arrived. She drove us to the dealer where the tow driver was just unloading the truck. Signed the papers for the repairs and the loaner (a 2008 Cadillac with 132K miles - my first and last Cadillac ever). With a stop at KFC to pick up some comfort food, we were back at the RV by 5:30.

4.5 hours of pure misery.

You might ask why I didn't take the truck back to Greg's Garage as it is a reasonable assumption that their fuel line repair had failed for a second time. Two reasons: (1) they had already had 2 bites of this particularly bitter apple and I was not about to offer a third and (2) I needed alternate transportation and I didn't think they could provide it. In addition to the MRI on Monday, Jett had an immunotherapy infusion on Tuesday and a CT scan on Wednesday. I needed a car. Going carless was not an option.

I got the truck back Wednesday after the CT scan. The description of the problem - both orally and in writing -

was interesting. I asked the mechanic whether the fuel line that had failed was new (trying to see if it could be pinned on either Greg's Garage or the GMC deal in Ft Myers who did the original extensive fuel line work in April). He said he wasn't sure but didn't think so because the line was "brittle." I wasn't sure what he meant, but it became clearer on the written summary of the work: "Found fuel leaking from broken fuel injector return hose at L/H injectors. Was able to extract broken pieces from injectors. Replaced fuel return hose."

Broken pieces? Doesn't sound like the "clip let loose" problem that Greg's Garage found. Could there be two separate catastrophic fuel line failures two weeks apart? Seems unlikely, but anything is possible with this truck.

Maybe all fuel line components are programmed to fail at 16 years or 180,000 miles, whichever comes first.

Anyway, I am now \$700 poorer but again ready(?) to go. We could have gotten underway with just one day lost, but decided to postpone the trip for 5 days to give us a full weekend with the kids in VA.

FYI, the MRI revealed that Jett's brain lesions had shrunk even further. Very good news, especially as counterpoint to the truck problems. We don't have CT scan results yet but the doctor says it would be rare for treatment to be successful in one area of the body and not in another.

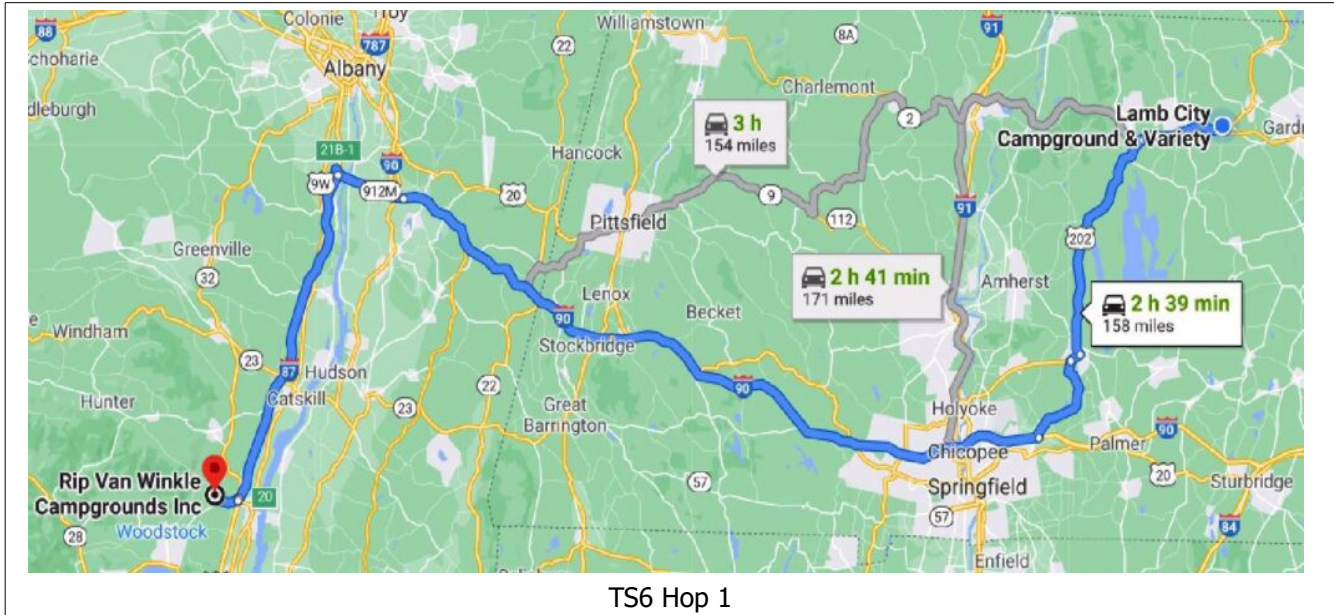
I wish I had gotten a photo of the fire truck. But I only got the tow truck.



Disabled again

# TS6 Hop 1: Phillipston MA to Saugerties NY

22 Sep 2020



158 miles via US 202, MA 21, I-90, I-87 and NY 212. Truck miles: 169. Cumulative tow miles: 158. Cumulative truck miles: 169.

After all the truck problems this spring and summer, there is no such thing as an angst-free hop anymore. That said, about the only problem encountered on this hop was a strange oil pressure reading: very high. For 8 years and over 100,000 miles I have never seen the oil pressure venture out of the 40 to 80 psi range. For this hop the range was 60 to 110 psi. I don't know what to make of that. The truck seemed to not care and performed well. All I can think is that the oil used in the last oil change - which is different than what I have used in the past, at the recommendation of the "expert" at Greg's Garage - might account for the difference. But it is a big difference. And any gauge running at close to the limit (120 psi for oil pressure) alarms me.

In all of the previous trips to/from Massachusetts I have avoided using US 202 because it has some steep hills. This time I decided to take it, to challenge the truck in the first 20 miles of the hop. No problem.

Anyway, we made it to Saugerties. I have a non-travel today and may try to get some photos of the Hudson River valley.

1 hop down and 8 to go (I changed the refueling stop in NC into an overnight, which added one hop to the itinerary).

I should say a few words about [Lamb City Campground](#), our home for the summer of 2020. But I described it pretty thoroughly after our [2018 stay](#). And with the pandemic, most of the activities were either canceled or subdued. It continues to be a family weekend campground which is virtually empty during the week - maybe 10% of the sites are occupied then. Largely due to this it is not a great campground for us. On the other hand, it meant that neither of our immediate neighbors were there much, which gave us a lot of privacy and solitude.

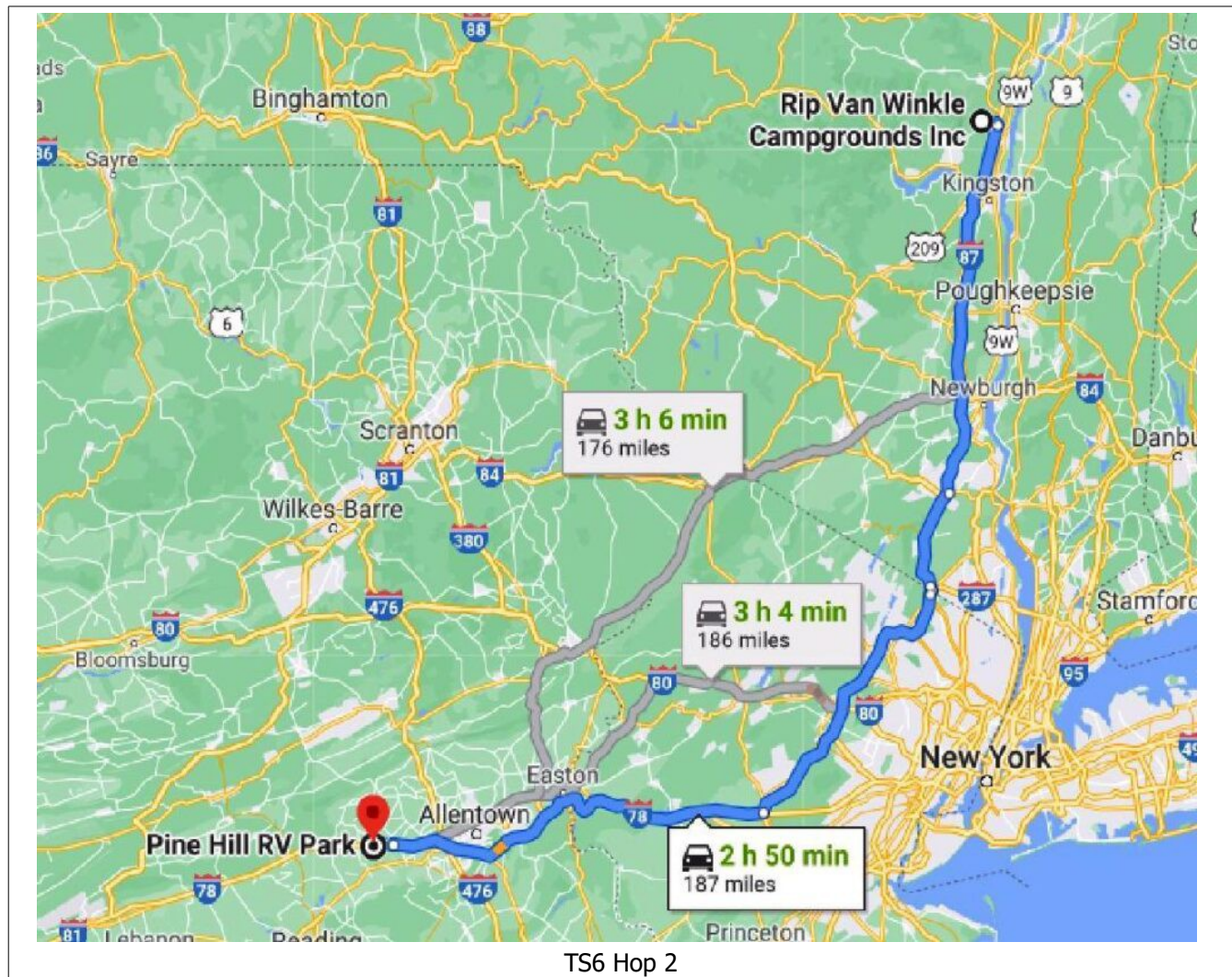
The biggest negative of the campground - and not something they can control - is the very poor cell phone reception. We typically had "one bar" for Verizon, which was one of the major reasons why I decided to switch to T-Mobile this year. Well, the T-Mobile service there is just as bad. Arguably a bit worse. But it is a very localized problem: about 50 feet to our south, where the road reaches the pond, the service is three bars.

Halfway up the hill the service is twice as good. In the bulk of the campground the service is more than acceptable. It is just our one street, along the pond.

If we return we will ask for a site up the hill. We have no need to be close to the pond. But we do need to be able to make phone calls.

## TS6 Hop 2: Saugerties NY to Kutztown PA

23 Sep 2020



187 miles via NY 212, I-87, I-287 (west of New York), I-78 and old US 22. 192 truck miles. 345 cumulative tow miles. 385 cumulative truck miles.

This was an easy hop to navigate as it was almost entirely on interstate highways. But it was a challenge for the truck as NY and PA both have a lot of up-and-down. And traffic was heavy, which surprised me.

The truck performed well, though the oil pressure remained high. I also had some worries about the fuel lines when, early on, it appeared that the gas gauge was dropping too fast. But it was just my paranoia as there was



no fuel leak.

Because the I-87 portion was a toll road (and a toll bridge on I-78), I decided to do the right thing and ask the attendant how to deal with me towing a trailer. The attendant (where I entered I-87) told me to use the Cash lane when I got off, but when I did that the attendant just waved me through. Thank you!

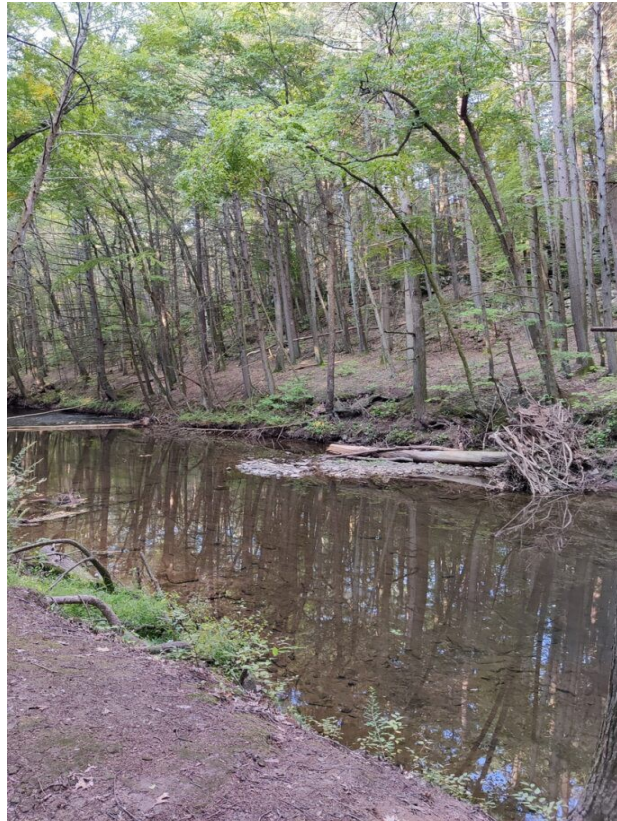
The bridge attendant was not so generous. I got charged the full \$16 rate there.

All-in-all, not a bad hop.

Our home in Saugerties was the [Rip Van Winkle Campground](#), about 5 miles west of the village. I would rate the campground as "pretty nice." We had a wooded pull-through near the Plattekill Creek, a little stream that looked close to dry. As the walls of the creek were about 10 feet high, I can imagine that there are times when this becomes a torrent. But not in the dry summer/fall of 2020.

The biggest problem I had with the campground is the roads. Most are very narrow with some tight bends that are tough to navigate with a 42-foot trailer. There are some roads that I am sure would trap me if I tried them. Not a great place for big rigs.

The campground has very good, free WiFi. And a good thing, too, because T-Mobile regards the entire area as "roaming" territory. On the evening of the first day I received a message from T-Mobile saying I had used my entire roaming data allotment. The message said that they would continue to provide minimal 2G service at no extra charge. 2G is useless for internet browsing, so thanks for nothing, T-Mobile. Another ding in my opinion of T-Mobile.



Platekill Creek



Our wooded site

The park has quite a few long-term sites, but few were occupied. Some looked like they were prepared for winter even though the park is not open year-round. I wonder if this is the kind of place that lets long-term renters access their sites via snowmobile when they are "closed." Doesn't matter - I sure wouldn't want to be here in the winter. Brrrrr.

Saugerties itself was a disappointment. I was hoping to get some photos of the Hudson River, but I completely struck out. First I tried going to the Coast Guard lighthouse, which I knew was closed but I didn't expect the entire area to be fenced and locked. Strike one. Then there was a municipal park on the banks of the river. I couldn't even find the entrance. Strike two. Finally I headed for a public beach north of the village. Again, I couldn't even find the entrance. Strike three. Three tries and I didn't get so much as a glimpse of the river.

I also tried to get some headstone photos at the Blue Mountain Cemetery, just a few miles from the campground. It was too large and too windy. I didn't get a single grave photo. But the dead have a lovely view.

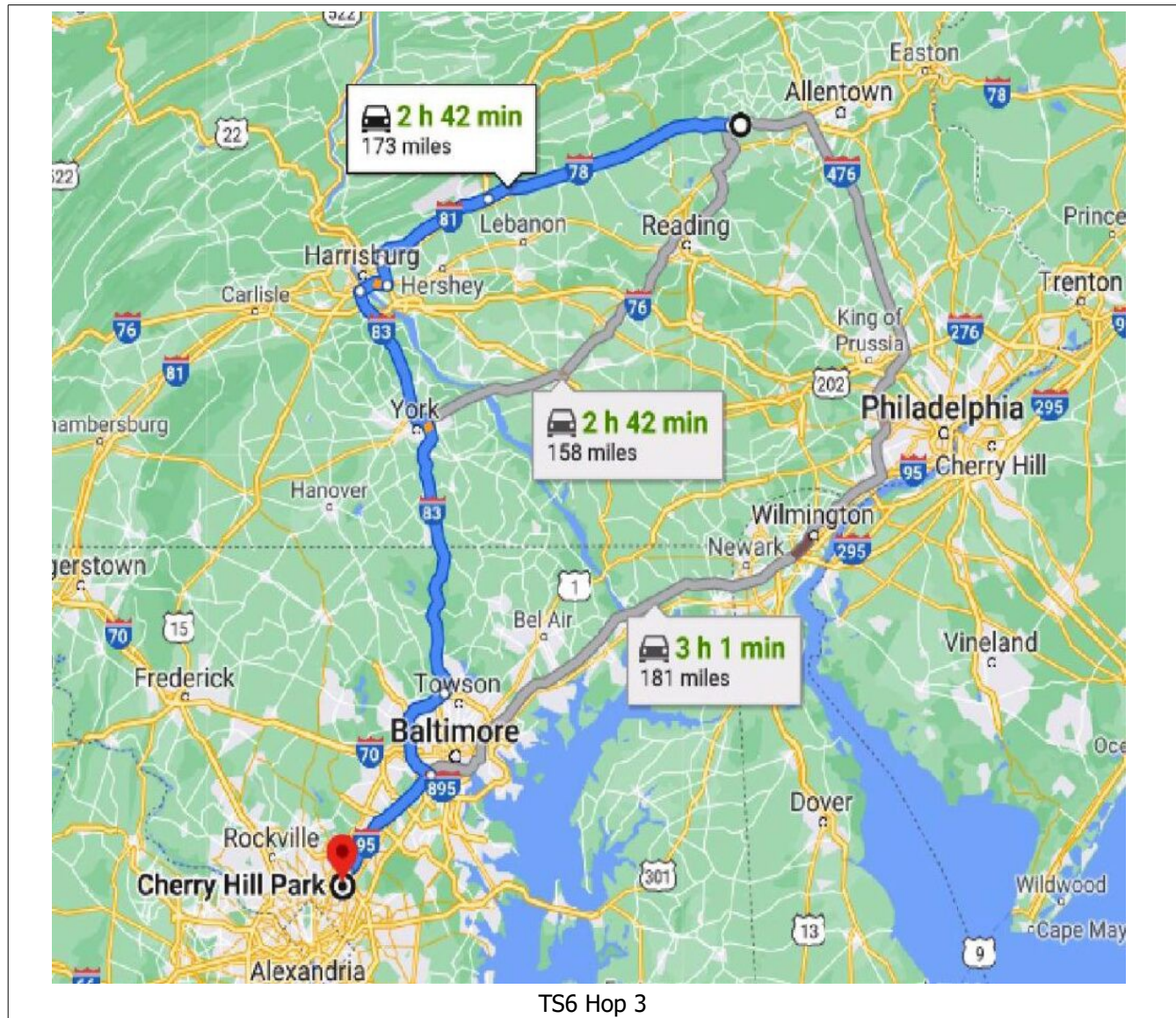


Blue Mountain Cemetery

So I have to say that I am not very enamoured of the Hudson River valley. Between my failed attempt in the spring to get photos near West Point and my Saugerties failures, the whole stretch of the river between Newburgh and Albany has been a bust.

## TS6 Hop 3: Kutztown PA to College Park MD

27 Sep 2020



173 miles via Old US 22, I-78, I-81, I-83, I-695 (west of Baltimore), I-95 and MD 212. 178 truck miles. 518 cumulative tow miles. 567 cumulative truck miles.

This hop was almost entirely on interstate highways. That was a last-minute change as I had originally opted for a shorter route using US 202. But I was unsure, so I let the GPS decide.

There was a lot of construction but, fortunately, no real delays. It was an uneventful trip where the truck once again ran with high oil pressure (though not quite so high as on the first two hops - mostly running around 90 psi).

The roads were also *very* busy which I found a bit surprising for a Wednesday early afternoon in a pandemic.

Our one night in PA was at the [Pine Hill RV Park](#) in Kutztown. This is a good transient park with mostly pull-

through sites. It is close by I-78, so there is a bit of road noise but we barely noticed it with the windows closed (it was a cool night). It is in a rural setting and the only time I left was to refuel, so I don't have any opinion about the surrounding area.

## TS6 Hop 4: College Park MD to Chesapeake VA

29 Sep 2020

226 miles via I-495 (east of Washington DC), I-95, I-295 (east of Richmond), I-64, I-664 (west of Norfolk) and US 17. 412 truck miles. 774 cumulative tow miles. 979 cumulative truck mile. Most of the extra truck miles were due to two trips from College Park to Alexandria, to attend family events.

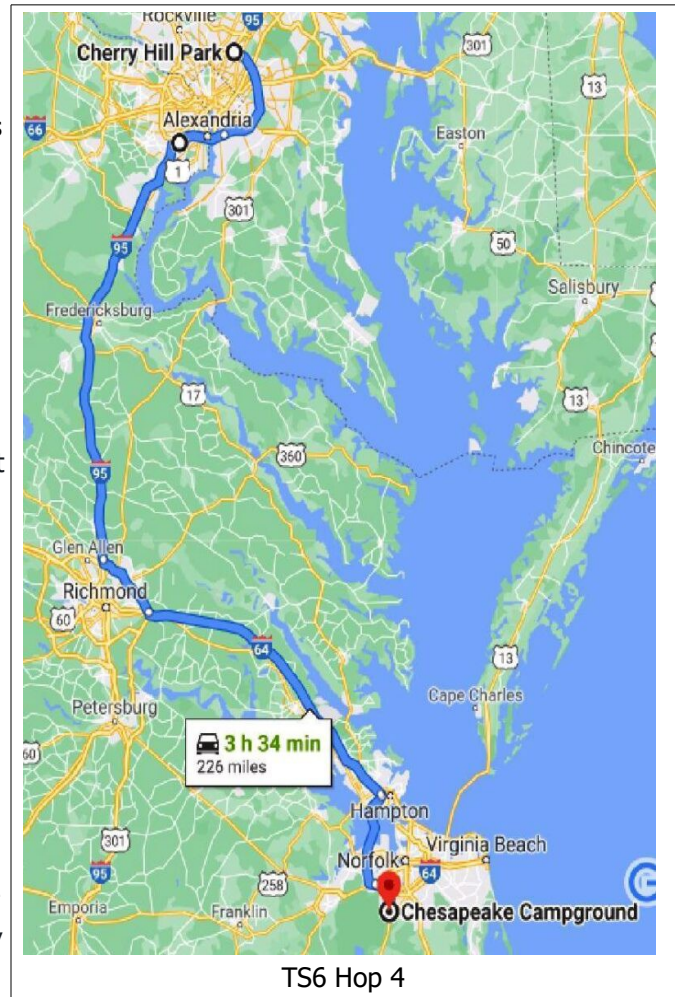
Again (and, again, knock on wood), no truck problem. It was the longest hop so far - just over 4 hours. The last hop will be a similar length.

This route was almost entirely on interstate highway. There were two interruption to what would otherwise have been a non-stop trip: (1) we had to take a brief detour in Alexandria to drop off the swimming gear that the grandson left in our RV on Sunday and (2) a stop before the tunnel on I-664 to confirm that our propane tanks were turned off (a first in our travels).

The weather during our 4 days at [Cherry Hill Park](#) was far from perfect, but it was certainly warm. Jett's sons and grandson came up Thursday night to visit us and we returned the favor on Saturday to attend a family dinner (great Chinese food!). On Sunday I traveled to Woodbridge to watch the grandson play a double-header (one win, one tie) and then the sons and grandson came to MD again, to let the kid take a dip in the pool and to say goodbye. They could have saved the goodbyes as we had to drop the swimming gear off on Monday, which gave them yet another chance to say goodbye.

Friday was a day of rest.

I have reviewed Cherry Hill Park before and it is the same as always (though with facilities limited due to COVID-19): beautiful, efficient and expensive. It certainly still hold a place in our Top 10 Campgrounds list.



TS6 Hop 4

# TS6 Hop 5: Chesapeake VA to Cove City NC

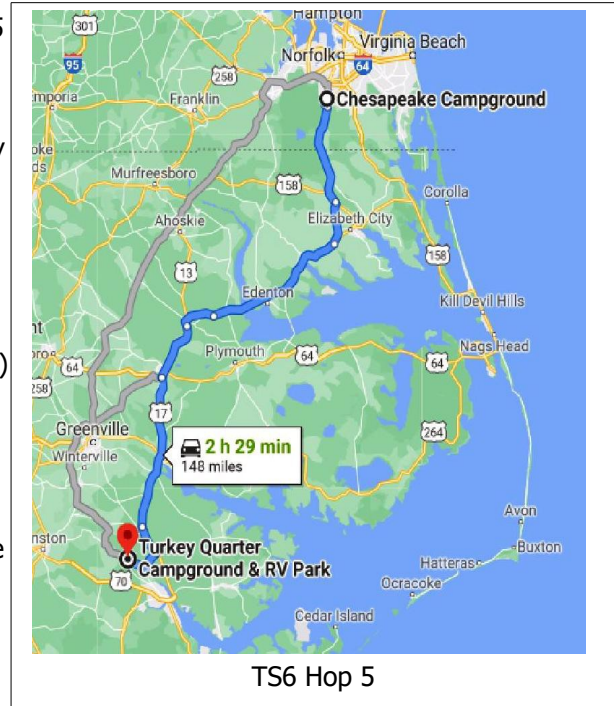
2 Oct 2020

149 miles, almost entirely on US 17, but on NC 43 and NC 55 near the destination. 224 truck miles. 893 cumulative tow miles. 1202 cumulative truck miles.

Again, no truck problems and we are now more than halfway to our destination.

US 17 (or, as we were reminded by signs all along the route, "The Future I-87") is 4-lane divided highway along most of this route and goes through no towns, so it is not much different than an interstate. It even has a rest area, which we used (and which accounts for the extra mile on the route) because Jett said she was hungry. When Jett says she is hungry, I find food. A snack of cheese crackers isn't much, but every little bit helps.

The three nights in Chesapeake were at the [Chesapeake Campground](#). This is a moderate-size campground on a huge plot of land, with lots of open space and a massive RV storage operation (possibly over 1000 stored RVs - I think it is possible that RV storage is their main revenue generator). There is also, oddly, a horse stable on the premises.



The facilities are rather rustic, but sufficient. I used the laundromat (2 washers, 2 dryers - pretty small for a campground where most RVers were long-term residents) and saw the tiny church, the shed of a gym, the pool (8 feet deep at the deep end - unusual for campgrounds now) and the public restrooms, but didn't use any of them. The one facility I did use, besides the laundromat, was the dump station because the sewer at our site was sealed shut. Don't know why as every other site on the row had full hookups. But I think I was warned when I booked the stay and in any case it wasn't a huge problem as I don't dump my tanks until the morning of departure, so it just meant one short extra stop on our way out of the park.



Our muddy, sewerless site



Nightscape

The most memorable feature of the park, though, was the mud. They clearly had had a lot of rain in the days before our arrival and we suffered through a deluge on the first full day there. Because the roads and blacktop pads were very narrow, it was impossible to drive anywhere without getting some of my tires in the muck. And it was impossible to enter or leave the RV without getting mud on my shoes. Not really the campground's fault

(except for the narrow roads and pads) but not pleasant at all.

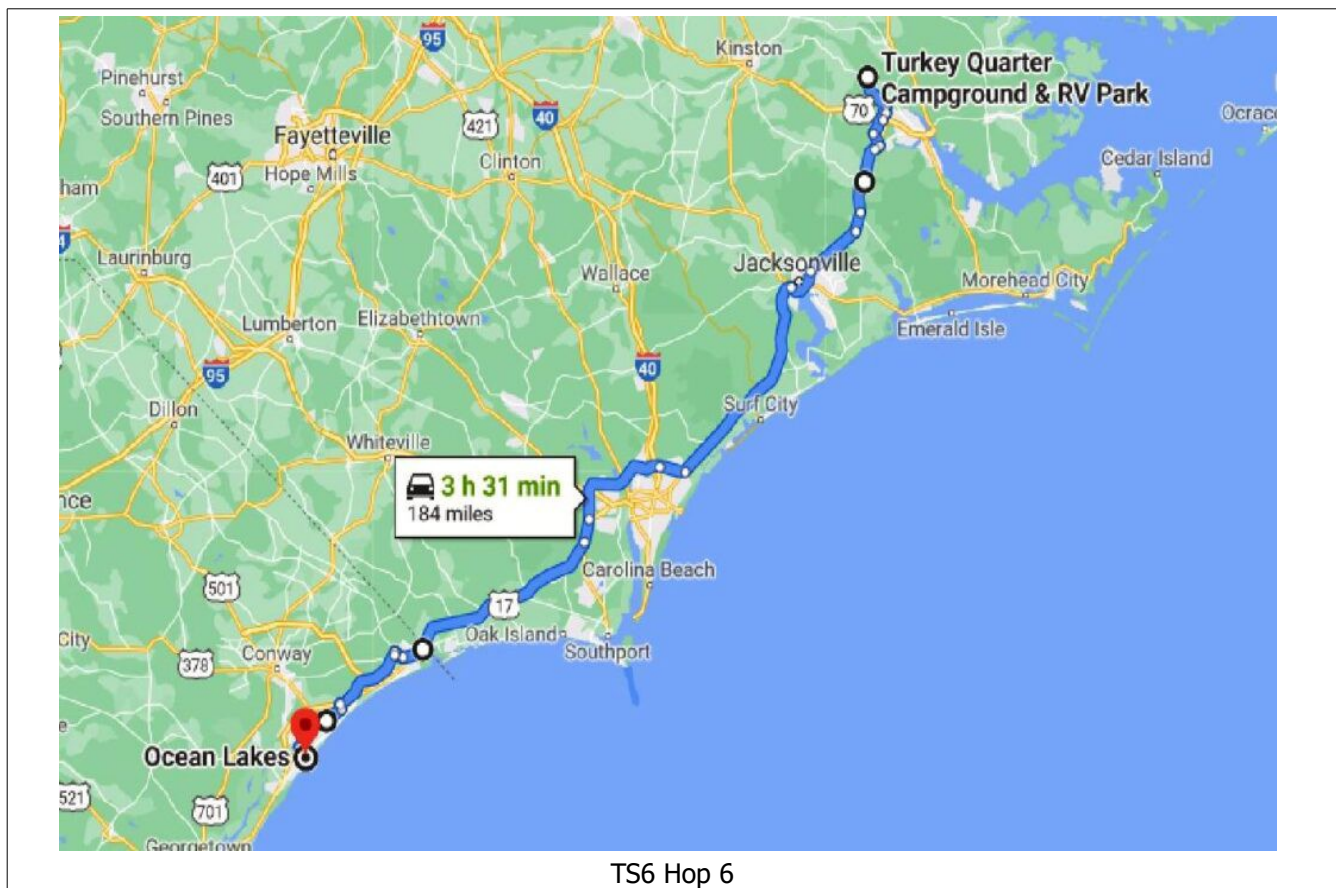
I did some experimentation with my phone camera on a dog walk one night. I wanted to check out the "Nightscape" setting so I took a photo of the RV under the nearly full moon. Pretty impressive, I think. I didn't expect to get this kind of definition of both the sky and the RV at night.

My hope, for the stay in Chesapeake, was to do some genealogical research on my colonial relatives. I didn't really expect to find any headstones, but I did want to visit Jamestown and other nearby areas where they lived. My secondary goal was to visit the battlefield at Yorktown, where Washington put an end to the British resistance to the American revolution. But Yorktown was an hour away, Jamestown was 30 minutes beyond Yorktown, it rained heavily and much of the second day there was spent dealing with some medical issues for Jett - uncomfortable infections. So a visit to an urgent care facility replaced Yorktown in my travel plans.

If we visit again I will try to find a campground closer to Jamestown and Yorktown. I underestimated the size of the region.

## TS6 Hop 6: Cove City NC to Myrtle Beach SC

4 Oct 2020



188 miles via US 17, NC 55, I-140 (north of Carolina Beach) and SC 31 with two brief rest area stops. 214 truck miles. 1081 cumulative tow miles. 1416 cumulative truck miles. The extra truck miles were entirely due to a refueling trip into New Bern NC where I got diesel for \$1.88 per gallon (I love NC fuel prices!) and some groceries.

The first rest area stop was just a few miles into the trip when I took an unplanned detour to avoid a bridge with a 6-ton weight limit (it turns out that it was a 6-ton-*per-axle* limit so the detour was unnecessary), saw the rest area and decided to double-check that the TV antenna was down (it was). The second was at the SC Welcome Center on US 17 where I adjusted Jett's pillows and blankets. She has made this trip in the back seat of the truck, which is more tolerable to her frail body. Rusty doesn't mind riding up front with me.

This stretch of US 17 was not fun. It had a lot of traffic and a lot of stoplights. The "future I-87" is truly a distant dream here. To make matters worse, the GPS seemed to be unaware that some sections of US 17 had been rebuilt and rerouted. It took me several miles down the old route before connecting me with the new route. Worse, it told me to take a left where none was allowed and forced me into a 3-mile loop to get that corrected. The same thing happened when we reached I-140 - it told me to continue on US 17 even though both the signage and my knowledge of the route (from studying the map before we started the hop) suggested that I-140 was the better route. For about 5 miles on I-140 the GPS had no clue where I was. Not a proud day for the GPS.

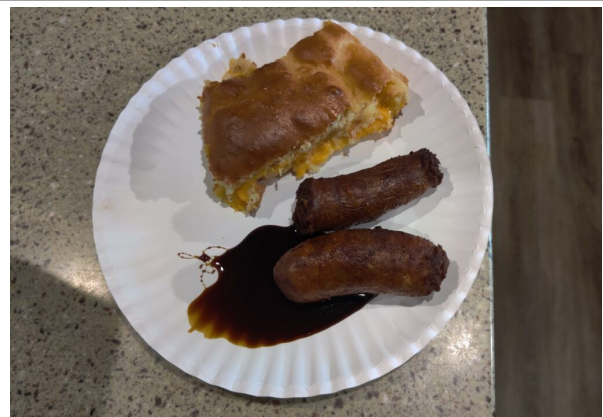


Jett in the back seat

The one night in NC was spent at the [Turkey Quarter Campground and RV Park](#). This campground has only a Facebook page, not a complete website. You should take a look at their page to get a sense of just how unusual this place is. For starters, when I called the number to book a site I talked to a man who simply answered "Hello" - no campground greeting. He informed me that he takes messages for James, the campground owner and gave me James' number. I called James who was at the garage getting his truck fixed. He told me that, yes, he had a space for me - number 3 - full hookup, pull-thru, then launched into a long, incomprehensible series of directions and informed me that it was cash or check only - no credit cards. I got off the phone unconvinced that this was a real business or that we could even get there. But Google knew of the place and an aerial view showed that there was, indeed, a small campground at that location. I could even make out where site 3 was located.

Later, having second thoughts about this weird place, I noticed that there was a KOA not far away. However, the KOA was charging \$80 per night versus Turkey Quarter's \$35 cash. Ever frugal, I couldn't see spending an extra \$45 for a night of sleep in my own RV. So I crossed my fingers and hoped that the place would not be a mess.

It was not a mess. Far from it. The entrance, rather than a scene from "Deliverance" was more like the opening shot of an episode of "Dallas" - sprawling exurbian plots with nice homes along a winding gravel drive. The site we were given was a long, level, shaded pull-thru, very clean with - and this is a first in our 8 years of travel - a firerig with free firewood. We didn't use it but I had to note it because it was truly remarkable.



Cheese biscuit, country sausage and molasses

Also remarkable was James, the owner, a salty backwoods guy with the appropriate North Carolina drawl. He made sure I got into the site and didn't need any other assistance. Then he told me he would be by in the morning with breakfast. I thought he was kidding, but he was very serious. Around 10am he came by with a pan of cheese biscuits, country sausage and molasses. The cheese biscuits were good but the country sausage with molasses was outstanding. Free. Delivered to the site. Another first.

All for \$35. Amazing.

I have to comment on the landscaping too. Someone put some serious money into this place to prep the sites, construct the fishing pond and add all the little designer details, like the artistic display of old farm implements. Imaginative and highly unusual.

I have to say that this campground is nicer than all but a few I have seen. And one of the cheapest. Good and cheap - a great combination.



Artistic farm implements



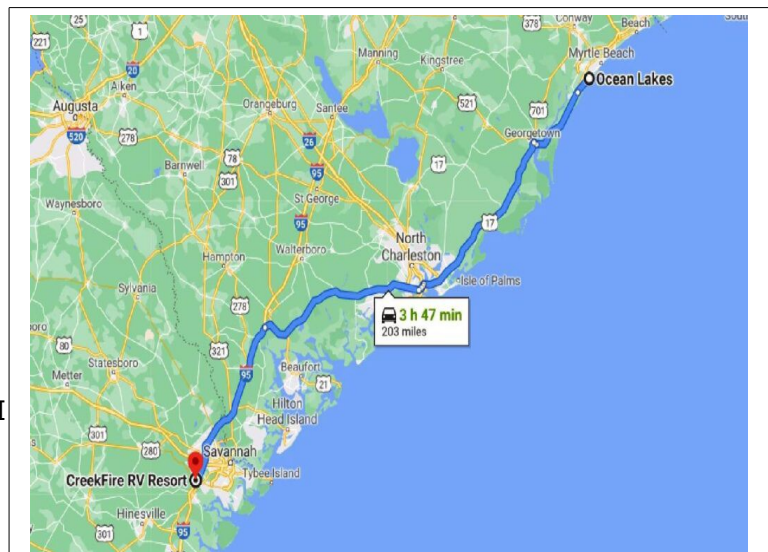
Fishing pond

## TS6 Hop 7: Myrtle Beach SC to Savannah GA

6 Oct 2020

203 miles via US 17 and I-95. 219 truck miles. 1284 cumulative tow miles. 1635 cumulative truck miles. The extra truck miles were mostly due to the trip to the ER the evening of our arrival in Myrtle Beach.

This was an easy trip to navigate: follow US 17 until it meets I-95, then head south. The traffic on US 17, however, was heavy so it was not a carefree jaunt. Plus the original plan, courtesy of Google, was to dodge the section of US 17 that cuts through Charleston and go around, on I-526. The GPS, however, begged to differ and I missed the Google-suggested turn that would have cut off some miles so by the time I reached I-526 I felt it was wiser to just do the Charleston route. I have driven it before and it isn't horrible.



TS6 Hop 7



While the truck's oil pressure continues to run a bit high - though not so high as on Hop 1 - the concern this time was tire pressure on the RV. I try to keep those tires inflated to between 90 and 95 psi cold (max pressure is 105 psi) and in the 5 years we have traveled with it these pressures have held steady. Until yesterday morning when I noticed that the right rear tire was looking underinflated. Sure enough, it was at about 40 psi which was pretty shocking. I hadn't tested the pressure since we left Massachusetts, over 1000 miles back, so I had to wonder how long air had been slowly leaking. I pumped it back up to about 90 and crossed my fingers. It didn't look underinflated when we reached Savannah but I will check it again this morning. And tomorrow morning.

I guess I had better mention the ER. This was done at the recommendation of Jett's oncologist who was a bit alarmed at Jett's description of her bedsore (or "pressure ulcer" as the medical folks refer to it). So after we arrived in Myrtle Beach we went to the local hospital's ER to have it checked out. The visit was blessedly brief - about 90 minutes - and blessedly successful - the doctor said that it not only wasn't infected but looked to be healing. After some instruction from the nurse on how to change the dressing (and waiting while another patient in the ER died) we were on our way.

Our 3 nights in Myrtle Beach were at the Ocean Lakes Family Campground, an RV resort that we first visited in [2015](#). We were very impressed then. The facilities are undeniably first-rate and the beach is spectacular. But we were less enamoured this time, largely because with Jett's illness we could not appreciate the facilities or the beach. And the sites are quite cramped for a rig our size. Add in some very cloudy and cool weather and a trip to the ER and it was basically 3 days of hanging out so that we didn't have to travel on the weekend.

We were also unable to book a site there for 3 consecutive nights, so we had one night in one site and two nights in another. Which meant that I had to maneuver my big rig into two tight sites rather than one. A bitter cherry on a sour sundae?

Rusty and I did walk to the beach on the second day. It was cloudy and cool, but the beach is still lovely.



Site 4012, 1 night



Site 4100, 2 nights



My beach art shot



The beach on a cloudy day

# TS6 Hop 8: Savannah GA to Silver Springs FL

7 Oct 2020

222 miles via GA 204, I-95, I-295 (west of Jacksonville), US 17, FL 19, FL CR 314 and FL 40. 229 truck miles. 1506 cumulative tow miles, 1864 cumulative truck miles.

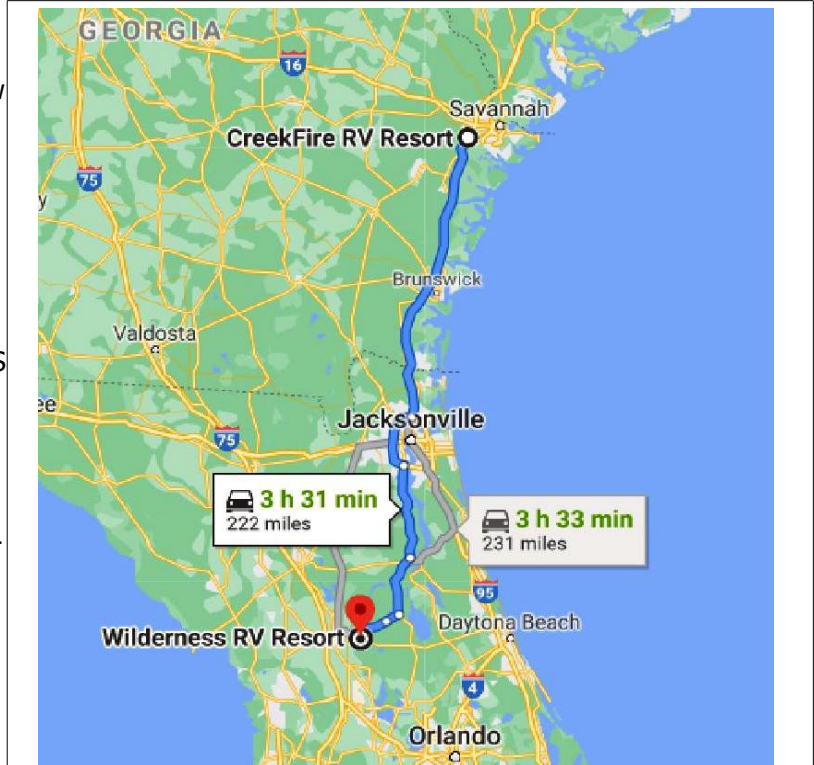
We made a short stop in a rest area in Georgia just to rearrange Jett's pillows. Then on to Florida.

We encountered heavy traffic on US 17 in Jacksonville, a jerk who refused to give me the right of way at a merge a bit later on US 17 and a heavy rainstorm just before we arrived in Silver Springs. No truck problems and no low tire pressure thanks to our spare.

Yeah, I had to change the tire on the RV. Or try to, anyway. When I checked the tire pressure on the problem tire it was 15 psi - nearly flat. I started pumping it up again, thinking I could make it 90 miles to a planned rest area stop, but gave up that plan when I found the nail in the tire and could hear the air escaping.

So I tried to remove the lug nuts but found that anyone not named Superman would be unable to do so. So I called AAA but they wouldn't help as I didn't have trailer coverage. Then I called Good Sam and they sent a guy out who, ironically, arrived in an AAA vehicle. He got the tire changed in about 20 minutes. I will have to either get the tire fixed or replaced in Ft Myers. More likely replaced as all of the RV tires are showing wear after towing it over 20K miles.

We didn't leave the campground until 1pm - about 2 hours after the official check-out time. But the park wasn't anywhere near full and the office had no problem giving us a late check-out.



TS6 Hop 8



Trying (and failing) to change the tire

The campground where this drama played out was the [Creekfire Motor Ranch](#) - a fancy name for a very nice and very new campground in Savannah. This campground is so new that buildings and recreational facilities were still under construction. Most notable of the nascent recreational facilities was a water park(!) with a lazy river. That is something I have never seen before in an RV park.

I did a little more experimentation with the "Nightscape" setting on my phone. I continue to be impressed by both the sharpness of the image and the vividness of the colors in a photo taken in the dark.



Our site, with free-range Rusty



Water park in progress



Creekfire at night

## TS6 Hop 9: Silver Springs FL to Ft Myers FL

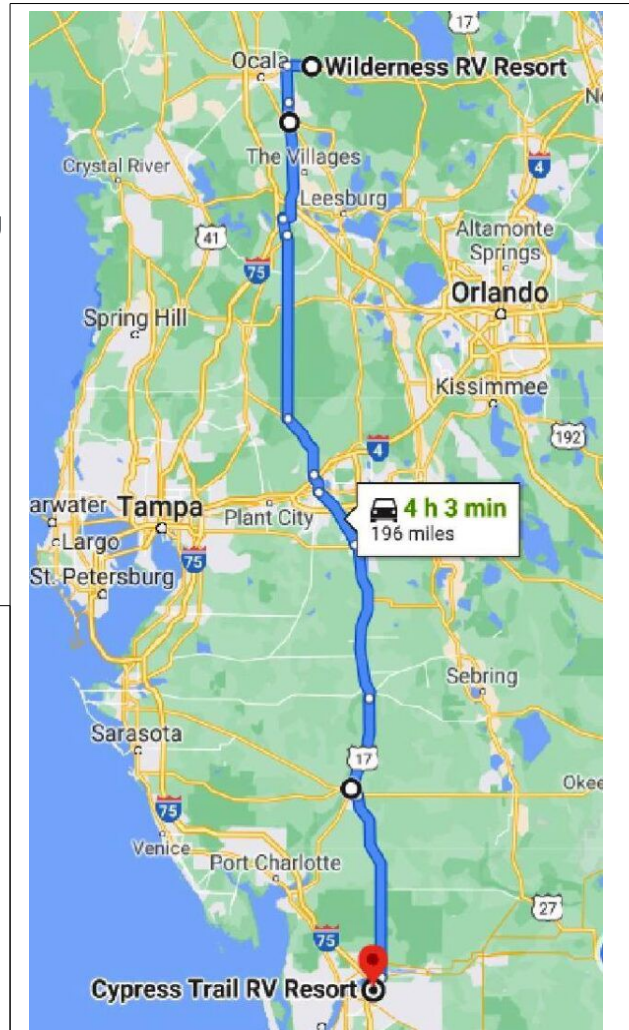
8 Oct 2020

197 miles via FL 40, FL 35, US 301, FL 471, US 98, FL 31 and FL 80. 211 truck miles. 1703 cumulative tow miles. 2075 cumulative truck miles.

This was not the fastest route - that would have been via I-75. But that route would have tested the limit of the

gas tank. So I opted for a safer, shorter but slower route. There were no problems, just a lot of traffic, especially Our final one-night stop on the TS6 was at the [Wilderness RV Resort](#). This resort was interesting to me because it is, like our resort, a place where snowbirds can own a site. It also offers seasonal and yearly leases. It is near Ocala which probably makes it too cool for Jett, but it was worth looking at.

It is nice - well maintained and nicely landscaped. But the roads and the concrete pads are short and very narrow. In fact, I was assigned \*2\* sites because no pull-thru site could hold both the RV and the truck. Also, the grounds were very wet so it was impossible to get the RV onto the pad without digging deep ruts in the grass. And even when the RV was positioned close to one edge of the pad the steps descended onto wet grass. Probably not a place we could stay for a season.



TS6 Hop 9



Our 2 sites at Wilderness



Home!

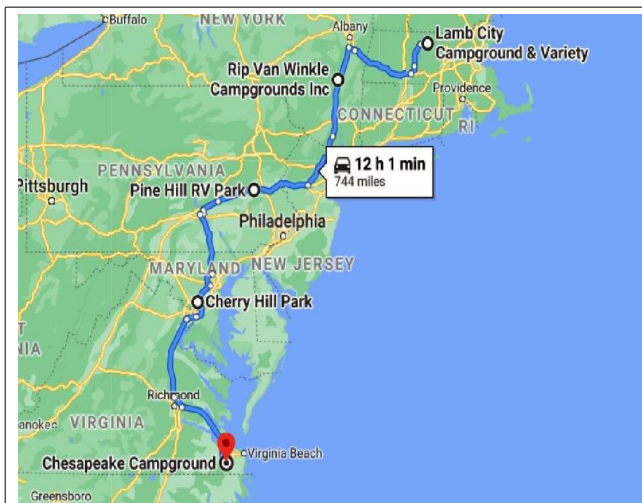
But others might be interested. I will say that the seasonal rental rates are very attractive: about \$700 per month (plus electric) for a one-month stay and about \$650 per month for a 6-month season (under \$4000 for the season!). Many resorts farther south have rates in excess of \$2000 per month during season.

So we are safely (until the next hurricane hits) at home in Fort Myers. Tomorrow I will do a wrapup of the TS6.

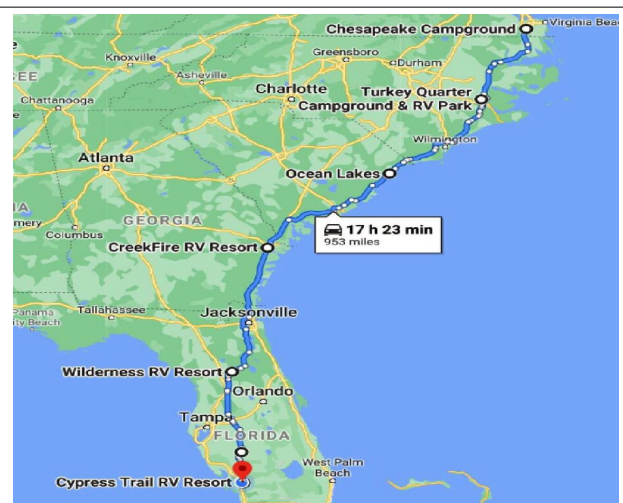
## TS6 wrapup

8 Oct 2020

The 6th trip south (TS6) started 5 days later than planned due to fuel line failures in the truck. It was initially planned to consist of 8 hops and 17 nights but ended up being 9 hops and 16 nights.



TS6 actual – segment 1



TS6 actual – segment 2

The numbers:

- 1703 tow miles and 2075 truck miles
- Campground costs: \$1027 (\$64.17 per night)
- 242 gal of diesel fuel (9.4 mpg)

Highlights:

- No truck failures. The oil pressure was high throughout but didn't affect the truck's performance.
- Seeing Jett's sons, spouses and grandson in VA. Getting together with family is always a joy.
- Trip planning and navigation. Jett was not up to providing any navigation support so it was all on me. The GPS handled the route well (except as noted below) and I didn't get lost except in minor ways.

Lowlights:

- Jett's health. Despite getting an upbeat assessment of her cancer battle before we left Massachusetts, she continues to deteriorate physically. She had to ride in the back seat of the truck, so there was no joy in the travel, just tolerance. And because she needed so much care it reduced my ability to tour the areas where we stayed. This was particularly evident in Chesapeake VA where I had hoped to see both Jamestown and Yorktown, but saw neither. I had also hoped for two nights either in Savannah or Silver Springs but both became one-night stops as we just wanted to get her to Florida ASAP.

- The nail in the RV tire, necessitating a switch to the spare before Hop 8.
- The weather. From Pennsylvania to Florida the weather was rainy and dreary and, until we got to Georgia, cool. Not great weather for seeing any sights.
- The GPS failure north of Charleston. Despite having the latest maps loaded, the GPS totally lost its mind in South Carolina and forced me into a 3-mile detour.

So, all-in-all, a successful trip but not a joyful trip. I hate to say it but if Jett's health doesn't improve this may have been our last RV trip.

## Jett has died

**15 Oct 2020**

It was sudden and it was gentle. We signed up for hospice at 6pm yesterday, primarily because I thought hospice care would have a better chance of dealing with her malnutrition (I had been unable to get her to consume more than 500 calories for any day in the previous 2 weeks). But this morning, before I even had a chance to get the new meds, I was unable to wake her to take her regular pain medicine. I called hospice, a nurse arrived and confirmed what I already knew - that she had slipped into a coma. The nurse made her comfortable. Another nurse arrived at 2pm to monitor her condition. At 2:45 she urged me to come into the bedroom because she thought death was near. It was. At 2:53pm her loving heart stopped beating.

21 hours in hospice. Must be some kind of record.

I will write an appropriate tribute tomorrow. Tonight I will sleep. Alone. Well. Rusty will be with me. But it will feel very lonely.

## Jett, 1951-2020

**16 Oct 2020**

We met at a Parents Without Partners dance on June 21 (the summer solstice and the longest day of the year) in 1997. She had come at the request of another PWP member, though she was reluctant to do so, thinking it would be a waste of time. So she sat in the corner, talking to the president of the chapter. As luck would have it, I was treasurer and had to get the president to sign the check to pay the DJ. I sat down at the table, Jett on one side of the president, me on the other. We greeted each other, then began chatting in a very flirtatious way (and why not? Jett was thin, blond, vivacious). The president soon said "I think I had better get out of the line of fire" and left. We moved closer, chatted a bit more, then began to dance. She told me later that she never would have dated me if I had been a lousy dancer. Fortunately for an old white guy I could dance pretty well (Test #1). I had a similar standard, but the way she moved her hips convinced me that this was a woman that I would like to know better.

After the dance we joined some other members for a 1am breakfast at Bickford's. Jett had brought no money (she knew that, being thin and blond, men would buy her drinks and she really didn't expect to meet anyone). I paid for her muffin and coffee and she picked home fries off of my plate. This meal intimacy absolutely infuriated a female member of the party who had been trying to get some dates with me and she stomped off. Not everyone was happy that we met that night.

After breakfast we found a place to park - in her car (no way was she going to get into a strange car with a strange man). We talked until sunrise. Then she had to leave because she had to do a Sunday shift at the



Jett before cancer

department store where she worked. I could go home to sleep. But before we parted ways she asked to see my chest hair - she couldn't date a man who had no chest hair. Fortunately, I had plenty and showed her (Test #2). I asked her if she shaved her legs. I knew she did, but that was a damn good excuse to put my hand on her leg.

She also asked me if I would be her date to her brother's wedding, 2 weeks hence. I said I would. Then I suggested a date for the intervening week (no moss grows on this stone). She suggested a road trip to Rockport MA, about an hour away. I said fine.

Rockport, which I have featured several times in this blog, is a lovely town. It is also where she spent many summers of her youth and was her "go to" place to find serenity. It was also where her headstone was located, next to her mother's, in the Beech Grove Cemetery. So, yes, on our first date we visited her grave.

I will visit it again next week, to put her body beneath her headstone.

After Rockport we went "over the bridge" to Gloucester MA where there was a carnival. We rode the ferris wheel and she ate onion rings. Or, to be precise, she ate the breading of the rings - she didn't actually like onions, so she pulled the onion out of the breading first. Strange woman. I liked that.

Then we had a drink at a Gloucester pub and had a lively and erotic chat that at some point involved the bartender. We actually got him to blush. He said that was a first. We were very proud. We made a good team.

I will draw a curtain on the rest of the evening. Suffice it to say that from the moment we met at the PWP dance until 2:53pm yesterday, we were an "item." Barb - the woman who had invited Jett to the dance - had known both of us for several years. She had been trying to fix me up, but not with Jett - with a librarian she knew. She never thought that Jett and I would be a match. She was very mistaken. We were a great match.

We dated for a while, then lived together for several years. We married in 2003 - a French-themed wedding in an Italian restaurant with Irish music. We were nothing if not eclectic.

We went "on the road" in 2012. Our RV life is documented in this blog.

It was a good life. Because she was a good woman.

I can't even start to imagine how much I am going to miss her. But I guess I am going to find out.

## Jett's funeral

**30 Oct 2020**

Some of you were probably wondering whether this blog would continue. It will. But, as you might imagine, I have been rather busy these past two weeks. I want to document it all, as much for my own therapy as to inform you.

Immediately following Jett's death I contacted a funeral home in Rockport MA (where she would be buried) and they contacted a funeral home in Fort Myers to arrange transport of the body. Her body would be embalmed in Fort Myers, then flown to Massachusetts.

The local funeral home arrived promptly and removed her body by 6pm, well before Jett's twin sons arrived at 9pm. They were too late to be there when she passed, but were able to view her body the next day, Friday, after she had been embalmed. I am glad that they did not see her in her bed; she looked much better in the funeral home. It was a very sad few moments, seeing her lifeless body in the company of her grieving sons.

I decided that I wanted to drive the truck to Massachusetts, to clean out the storage unit after the funeral. Her sons agreed to accompany me. Rusty, too. I was grateful for the company. And with three drivers we were able to drive straight through. We left at 9am Saturday and arrived in Alexandria VA at 1am - a 16-hour drive, of



which I drove maybe 5 hours. Her sons handled the rest.

It would have been a 15-hour drive had it not been for a wrong turn and getting stuck at a railroad crossing of the world's longest train. I estimated it to be over 200 cars long.

I stayed in Alexandria two nights, to get "some pins back in my box" as Jett would say. Rusty stayed in Alexandria when I drove to Worcester MA on Monday, to spend the night with Jett's brother Ray and his wife Kim, an ordained Methodist minister who married us and who agreed to officiate at the grave.



Devin at the wheel, waiting on the train

Tuesday was spent making final arrangements. I drove to the [Greely Funeral Home](#) in Gloucester MA to pick out a casket (a very nice solid pecan one) and a crypt, select mass cards, approve the obituary and pay for the whole thing (just over \$12K - very reasonable, I think, given that the body had to be flown up from Florida).

I then went to the cemetery in Rockport to take a photo of Jett's headstone, took that to the monument office to arrange for engraving, then back to Gloucester to find a venue for the after-burial luncheon. My first choice was booked, but I found an acceptable alternative, at [Oliver's Harbor Restaurant](#). I wanted an outdoor space, for increased safety during the pandemic. What they had was a patio area that had been enclosed with plastic, with plexiglass partitions between the tables. Having the luncheon would be a risk, but I felt it was a risk I had to take.

I stayed with Jett's sister Christine Tuesday through Friday. Wednesday was devoted to shopping (I needed a better shirt) and working on the eulogy. She and I drove together to the viewing Thursday night. It was my first view of Jett in her funeral dress, with makeup applied and I have to say that she looked wonderful. Jett would have approved. She didn't look gaunt and seemed at peace. Lovely, really. Kudos to Greely's.

One concern I had about the viewing was grandson Zachary. He was very close to Jett and had never seen a dead person in an open casket. I thought he might freak out but he was very comfortable. He had no qualms about holding Jett's hand. It was very touching.

Besides family and a few close friends that I had called, we were visited by several people from the Rockport area who knew Jett from long ago. Several others showed up the following day, at the graveside, in response to the published [obituary](#).

One detail that I settled on Monday was the set of pallbearers. The obvious choices were her sons in front and her brother Raymond and I at the back. But who in the middle? As I was driving, the answer struck me like a slap on the face: her sister Christine and her niece Allison. Allison and Jett were very close. Allison said Jett was a "second mother" to her.

As it turns out, a seventh pallbearer was added at the last moment: my son Frank. I was grateful that he wanted to participate, as a sign of respect.

The hour before the procession was devoted to eulogies and remembrances, all of which were very touching. There wasn't a dry eye in the house. In addition to the roughly 20 people there, two of Jett's nephews - Christine's sons - were able to see the event remotely via Zoom.

I gave the final eulogy. It was the hardest thing I have ever done. I choked up many times and had a hard time reading my notes through my tears. I will publish the eulogy tomorrow.



Zachary giving his grandmother a final goodbye

The procession went very smoothly, led by our big brown diesel dually. I had originally considered riding with someone else, but then realized how totally appropriate it would be to have our big truck leading the way. This is the vehicle in which Jett rode over 40,000 miles, visiting all "lower 48" states.

It was a lovely day. The graveside ceremony was brief and solemn. 18 of us then proceeded to the restaurant. I was originally planning on providing wine and beer for a toast, but when the time came I decided that the only appropriate toast had been given, by me, at dinner Thursday night after the viewing: "I wish you were here."

I was also originally planning on having only appetizers, but Christine insisted on a full luncheon with her picking up the tab. The food was good, the service was excellent and there was even some laughter. It was a fine end to a very sad couple of days. Thank you, Christine.

I stayed with Christine Friday night, then traveled to the storage unit on Saturday, cleaned it out and terminated the contract, then stayed with Ray and Kim Saturday night. I departed early Sunday and took a long, slow trip to Alexandria (4 accident delays!) where I had an excellent homecooked meal.

On Monday Rusty and I departed and traveled to Knoxville TN where I stayed two nights with my old college roommate and his wife. On Wednesday we departed Knoxville, intending to travel to Atlanta. But I encountered torrential rain, thanks to Hurricane Zeta, and stopped in Chattanooga TN for the night. By Thursday morning the storm had passed and I decided to push through to Fort Myers - a 10-hour drive. We arrived around 6pm Thursday night.

Over 3,500 truck miles and no problems. A minor miracle. I am grateful because I really was not emotionally ready to deal with a truck breakdown.

Now I begin my Jett-free life. I am not eager.



After the graveside ceremony

## My eulogy for Jett (delivered at her funeral 23 Oct 2020)

**31 Oct 2020**

I met Jett on the evening of June 21, 1997 – the summer solstice. From that night until her death at 2:53pm October 15 we were pretty much constantly together. Our first date was a trip to Rockport and Gloucester. She loved Cape Ann, as did her mother. When her mother died in 1979, Jett buried her in Rockport and obtained the plot next to hers for herself. When her mother's headstone was engraved she engraved hers too, but of course it was incomplete. We visited Jett's grave on that first date – the same grave we will visit today for a rather less romantic reason. The headstone is still incomplete but will be finished soon as the missing data – the date of death and her last name at time of death – are now known.

Barb Rifkin, our common friend who didn't fix us up because she didn't think we would be a good match, has admitted that she was wrong. We were a very good match because we had shared interests and goals. And we were fearless. Dive into housing rehab and rental? Fly to Paris for a weekend? Go to Mexico on vacation when my mother was warning us about banditos? Go on a cruise when there were frequent reports of sickness and disaster? Sell our 2000-square-foot home, move into a 400-square-foot RV and travel the country full-time? We did all of those things and did them eagerly. We loved adventure.

If there was any doubt that we were compatible, the fact that we survived in a 400-square-foot RV for 8 years without killing each other is proof that we were. We may have disagreed but we never argued. The decision to go "on the road" was the best decision we ever made. No regrets. We traveled over 40,000 miles to all "lower

48" states. The well-worn truck in which she traveled those 40,000 miles will lead the procession today. We met great people, saw great places. We wanted to be "on the road" for 20 years or more . We loved our life together.

But we didn't get 20 years of travel; we got only 8. And, in truth, we had fewer than 6 good years on the road. Starting with our transatlantic cruise in 2018 which we had to abort due to Jett's low hemoglobin, she never felt really well again. Our travel became a matter of getting to a destination so that she could rest. I got out on my own to see places but she rarely felt well enough to accompany me. Yet nothing seemed to be seriously wrong. The hemoglobin problem was resolved by large doses of B12 and she got a clean bill of health from her doctor in the summer of 2018.

But 10 months later in May 2019, as we started our trip north for the summer, she went into the ER in Palm Coast FL with severe back pain. She was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer, metastasized to the brain and the spine. The tumor on the spine, of course, was the source of the back pain. The diagnosis was a shock – there had been no sign of cancer less than a year earlier – but it wasn't a surprise as she had smoked heavily for over 50 years. Our planned 3-day stay became a 5-week battle of survival.

She nearly died there. She was presented with the option of entering hospice and was told if she did that she would be dead within 2 weeks. Her family – who rushed to her bedside – convinced her to try one round of chemotherapy. Just one. Then she could decide if hospice was best.

She did one round of chemo and it didn't go well. But she decided to try immunotherapy and the results, for a year, were fantastic. Her doctor actually called her response "miraculous". All of her tumors shrank. Her last MRI, just a month before her death, showed that the tumors were continuing to shrink. But she continued to lose weight and became very frail and unstable. I told her daily that she needed to eat more. That malnutrition was becoming more critical than cancer. Nothing worked. She would nibble, then push it away. I believe that in the 2 weeks prior to her death there was not a day when she took in more than 500 calories.

The end, when it came, was sudden, unexpected and very gentle. We arrived in Fort Myers on Wednesday, October 7. She arranged to see her oncologist the following Monday, but when Monday arrived she was too sick and asked me to cancel. I refused and instead went to see the oncologist myself. I described Jett's fragile condition, my concern about her weight and her increasing hallucinations and mental confusion. She was sensing that her mother was near. And her grandchildren. The doctor said that people nearing death often saw or sensed the presence of departed or distant loved ones. She suggested that we talk to hospice as they would be better positioned to intensively treat her malnutrition.

The hospice nurse arrived at 4pm on Wednesday and spoke to us for 2 hours. Jett was cheerful, responsive and helpful. We agreed that she would enter hospice, with the understanding that if she could regain some weight then cancer treatments would resume. The papers were signed at 6pm.

At 8pm a truck arrived, delivering oxygen. I thought this urgency was unnecessary as Jett, despite her lung cancer and COPD, had never needed oxygen.

At around 9pm she called me into the bedroom, as she often did. But rather than requesting coffee or assistance into the bathroom, she pointed at a pile of bedding and said "Why did you kill that other cat?" Of course my response was "When did I ever kill a cat?" She looked at me, accusingly, and said "I read it in a book." She fell asleep soon thereafter. She may have mumbled a bit as she drifted off, but nothing intelligible. Her last words were to accuse me of killing a cat. That is either silly or too deep for me to comprehend. But, like so much else about Jett, it was truly memorable.

Around 11pm that night I went into the bathroom to brush my teeth. Her light was still on and her eyes were slightly open. I asked if she was awake but she didn't reply. I believe now that she was already in a coma.

But I wasn't particularly alarmed until I tried to wake her at 8am Thursday. Usually a light touch woke her but that morning nothing worked. Touching, shaking, shouting. No response. And her eyes were half open. I called hospice. A nurse arrived and confirmed that she was in a coma. I started sending out the alarm.

That nurse left around noon and another arrived at 2. Between nurses I was alone with her and sat with her, The morning nurse had put her on oxygen – the oxygen that I didn't think she would need just 12 hours before – but she was breathing partially through her open mouth. I thought her mouth was dry so I wet a washcloth and rubbed it gently on her lips. Though she was completely unresponsive in all other ways – no movement of her limbs, her eyes open and staring into space unblinking - at that moment a single tear escaped her dry eye and ran down her cheek.

That tear. That tear will haunt me forever. Was it an involuntary response of a comatose woman? A recognition of impending death? Or, perhaps, a final, farewell kiss? Her way of telling me "I love you and I loved our life together."

Today, if you see a tear escape my eye and run down my cheek it will be my way of telling her "I love you and I loved our life together."

## The long drive home

**9 Nov 2020**

I stayed with my sister-in-law Christine the night of the funeral. We played some Hand, Knee & Foot in Jett's honor. The next day I loaded up the truck with everything left in our storage unit and terminated that contract, then had some pizza with my lovely granddaughter Liliani. Sister-in-law Kim took off her minister hat and put on her chef hat, serving me yet another wonderful dinner. The next morning I departed, starting the long (and pretty lonely) trip home.

I took the "southern route" (I-95 rather than I-84) through New York City and regretted doing so. I encountered no fewer than 4 delays due to accidents. I didn't get to Alexandria until nearly 8pm. But I was served another wonderful dinner (spaghetti and sausage) when I got there. Rusty was happy to see me, more or less.

The next day, Monday, Rusty and I drove to Knoxville TN where I stayed 2 nights with an old college friend. Another home-cooked meal (see a pattern?). Wednesday I drove to Chattanooga, mostly in a driving rain (tropical storm Zeta). I had wanted to get to Atlanta, but it just wasn't worth it. I got a room in Chattanooga at LqQuinta (\*very\* nice - I will have to look for LaQuinta the next time I need a hotel). The storm had passed by morning so I decided to push through to Fort Myers. 10 hours with one refueling stop (and to walk Rusty). Got home at dusk Thursday night.

## Working the polls

**9 Nov 2020**

One of the reasons that I had to hurry home from the funeral is that I had committed to being a poll worker at the local precinct for the Nov 3 General Election. I was given the job of "deputy" which is actually pretty responsible, despite the fact that I was a complete newbie. One of the duties of the deputy is to swear in all of the other workers. So I had to arrive by 5:30am and, as my first official duty, swear in the other 10 poll workers.

Then I participated in setting up the polling place - assembling the voting stations, running extension cords to the registration verification tables, putting down the 6-foot separation markers (to minimize the chance that voting in the pandemic would kill anyone). Then I had to go outside, measure a 150-foot perimeter, put up signs banning political activity within that perimeter, put up the "Vote Here" signs, put on my vest (see photo) and make sure no one entered the polling place before 7am.

After the polls opened I had to monitor the flow and keep the crowd from building up inside the polling place. In truth that was only an issue for the first 2 hours. The line of people waiting to vote may have reached about 30 people at the peak, but things flowed pretty well. The last 10 hours had only minor lines.

For 12 hours I was not allowed to leave the building. I brought food and drinks in a cooler that the Lee County Elections Commission thoughtfully provided. While the work was tiring, it was not overwhelming. But I was very happy when we could close and lock the doors at 7pm. I think the final tally of voters was somewhere between 500 and 600.

I then had to participate in the teardown of the polling place while the paperwork for the final tally was being prepared and the results uploaded. I had to sign off on the final numbers, along with 3 other workers, and had to verify that the ballot boxes - needed for a recount that won't happen - were locked and secure.

All-in-all it was a positive experience. The team - a pretty balanced mix of Republicans and Democrats - worked together efficiently and congenially. I felt I made some friends. It was a great example in how people with different political views could work together toward a common goal. Congress: take note.



Deputy Sparky

Thanks to my neighbor, Mark, for walking Rusty at noon. He (Rusty, not Mark) wasn't happy to be left alone most of the day, but at least he didn't have to hold his water.

## Eta

**13 Nov 2020**

One of the risks of living in Florida is hurricanes. I have no intention of being in an RV in the path of even a minimal Category 1 (75 mph) hurricane. I was fortunate that Florida was not targeted during the two weeks that I was away for Jett's funeral. But when I returned I had to deal with [Hurricane Eta](#).

Twice.

Yes, in this very busy hurricane season they ran out of names and had to dig into the Greek alphabet - Eta being the 7th letter there. Eta was a very unusual storm. First it devastated Central America as a Category 4 (130-156 mph, hundreds of deaths and over \$5B in damage), one of the most powerful storms ever to appear that close to the equator. Then it wandered around the Caribbean Sea like a drunken sailor for many days, crossing Cuba and the Florida Keys and bringing torrential rains to Fort Myers (hit 1), then curving back out to sea for a few more days. Then, on Monday and Tuesday of this week, it finally decided to head straight north, raking the west coast of Florida (hit 2) before making landfall near Sarasota, crossing Florida and continuing up the east coast of the US as a tropical storm.

Frankly, it was little more than a nuisance for me. The main impact was rain. Lots of rain. The first pass dumped

maybe 4 inches of rain on my site and the second pass probably added 2 to 3 more. The winds were strong, but the highest gusts were probably around 50 mph. Enough to rock the RV, but not particularly worrisome. While many sites in the resort experienced minor flooding, mine had none at all. The drainage ditch behind the site filled but didn't overflow. As the RV is on wheels and the shed is on blocks, even a foot of water would have caused no real damage. I might have had to replace some mulch.



Flooded drainage ditch, second pass

## COVID in the park

**17 Nov 2020**

Last spring, as the "season" was winding down and COVID was ramping up, there seemed to be an air of invincibility in the resort. Lots of going-away parties, nary a mask in sight and no social distancing. It seemed to me that people were taking a lot of risks, but they got away with it - there were no reports of COVID in the park.

This year is different. Shortly after I returned from the funeral (Oct 29) a notice went out that a resident couple had both tested positive and were self-quarantining. Shortly after that a workamper tested positive. Now a pickleball player has tested positive after playing pickleball with 18 people. Pickleball is an outdoor activity so the risk of transmission is reduced, but still... that is 4 confirmed cases and potentially several dozen other people exposed. And the park is no more than 50% full - maybe 300 people, tops. That means that potentially up to 10% of the residents have had some exposure to the virus. It seems inevitable that more cases will follow.

A couple of days ago I ran into (from a distance) one of the regular pickleball players. He invited me to return to the courts and I promised that I would, soon. Well, maybe not so soon now. And I am glad I wasn't one of the

18 who were exposed last week.

Maybe residents will start to take this pandemic seriously now.

## Life without Jett

**18 Nov 2020**

It has now been a month since Jett slipped the mortal coil. My life without her is coming into focus. Some of the changes are obvious but others are more subtle and surprising.

First, the obvious. I miss her. Every day. I don't miss being the 24/7 caregiver that I became in her final months, but I miss her companionship, her wisdom, her unwavering moral compass. I miss being able to share things with her. The other day I witnessed something in the resort and my immediate thought was "Wait 'til Jett hears *this*", followed about half a second later by the cold realization that I would never, ever be able to share anything with her again.

The increased responsibilities. Jett, at one time, handled the cooking, most of the cleaning, all of the social engagements, care for Rusty, the laundry and remembering birthdays and arranging for Christmas gifts. With her illness I took over the cooking, cleaning and laundry, but it wasn't until she was gone that I had to deal with the full burden of care for Rusty and responsibility for birthdays and gifts. I have created a calendar of birthdays and will soon have to figure out who is on the Christmas gift list. I haven't had many social engagements yet but when they come it will be up to me to handle the arrangements. I can do it all. But I don't want to.

Meals. During the final two months I was constantly on the lookout for high-protein foods that I hoped I could get her to eat. She ate very few of the things I bought. As I am too cheap to throw away perfectly good food, I am now consuming the items that I bought for her. High-protein snack bars, *Ensure* shakes, coffee and chocolate ice cream (okay, not high protein but nutritious and things that she would eat, until the end). I am also trying to clean out the very full freezer that has items like frozen asparagus and cooked shrimp - things that she used for appetizers. I will eat them all. Even when not consuming items that I bought for her or things that she bought to serve to others, my cooking habits have changed. I now eat smaller, quicker meals. I cooked 5 bratwurst and 4 hamburgers on Sunday. Those will be my entrees for a week.

Altered priorities. When we arrived in Florida the item at the top of our priority list was installing the washer/dryer in the shed. That would be the culmination of over 2 years of effort and would thrill Jett who would no longer have to make the tiring trek to the laundromat. Now, with her gone, the urgency is diminished. I can do one trip to the resort laundromat every 2 to 3 weeks, for about \$11. How long will it take to break even on a \$1500 washer/dryer investment? Years. Yes, the convenience is a factor, but I was driven mostly by a desire to make Jett's life easier. I think I have a higher tolerance of laundromats than Jett did.



Repurposed table

Freedom to use "her" space. The RV has a bath-and-a-half. The full bath was hers, except when I needed to shower and shave in the morning. The half bath was mine. Now I have full use of the full bath and rarely use the half bath. Similarly, the dining room table was hers, used to keep piles of papers, periodicals and "to do"



tasks. Now it is mine and I am using it right now to do a jigsaw puzzle.

Some of these changes are improvements in my life. But I would happily trade all these improvements to have Jett back again.

## Completely re-tired

20 Nov 2020



Re-shoeing the horse

Sorry, couldn't resist. Too damn clever for my own good.

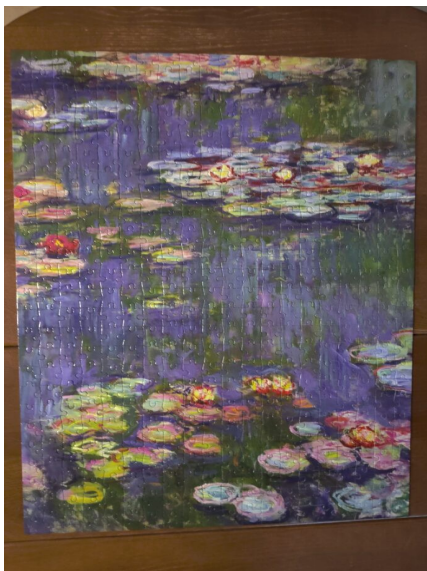
After getting 3 new tires for the truck last week, I got one new tire and one tire repaired today on the RV. The repaired tire was the one that took a nail on the trip south a few weeks ago (seems like years).

Between the two I have spent about \$1200 on tires in the past 2 weeks. Well, tires and lugnuts. I had to replace all 32 lugnuts on the truck for reasons that aren't interesting. But that was nearly \$200 of the \$1200 paid.

But with the new tires and the hitch reinstalled yesterday (I am getting too old to lift nearly 100 lbs!) the rig is now ready to go. If I decide I want to go somewhere.

# Thanksgiving for one

28 Nov 2020



New jigsaw



Thanksgiving dinner

That sounds sadder than it was. It was a very quiet day - just Rusty and me - but I rather enjoyed the solitude. I finished the jigsaw puzzle I was working on, watched some football and a couple of movies, read a bit then cooked myself a nice dinner: pork roast, asparagus, mashed potatoes with pork gravy. This really required no special culinary skills. The pork roast came from the freezer, as did the asparagus. The potatoes were courtesy of Bob Evans and the gravy was in a jar from Heinz. But I cooked the pork perfectly and it all assembled quite nicely. Tasted great.

When I was walking Rusty before dinner two neighbors stopped me and invited me to join them. I was touched by their kindness but gracefully declined. I was really enjoying the solitude and was looking forward to the pork roast.

For the evening walk, I took Rusty on the usual around-the-pond path. And encountered a site where the owner must have worked his ass off all day putting up Christmas lights. Very impressive. But I think my Thanksgiving Day was better than his.



Site lights

## “Bombshell” by Catherine Coulter

30 Nov 2020

[Copyright 2013 by Catherine Coulter. Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York NY.](#)

I had a really hard time finishing this book. I felt that I should be liking it more than I was. I blamed the good weather, the holidays, Jett's death, demands of a long To Do list.

But now I think that the book just sucked.

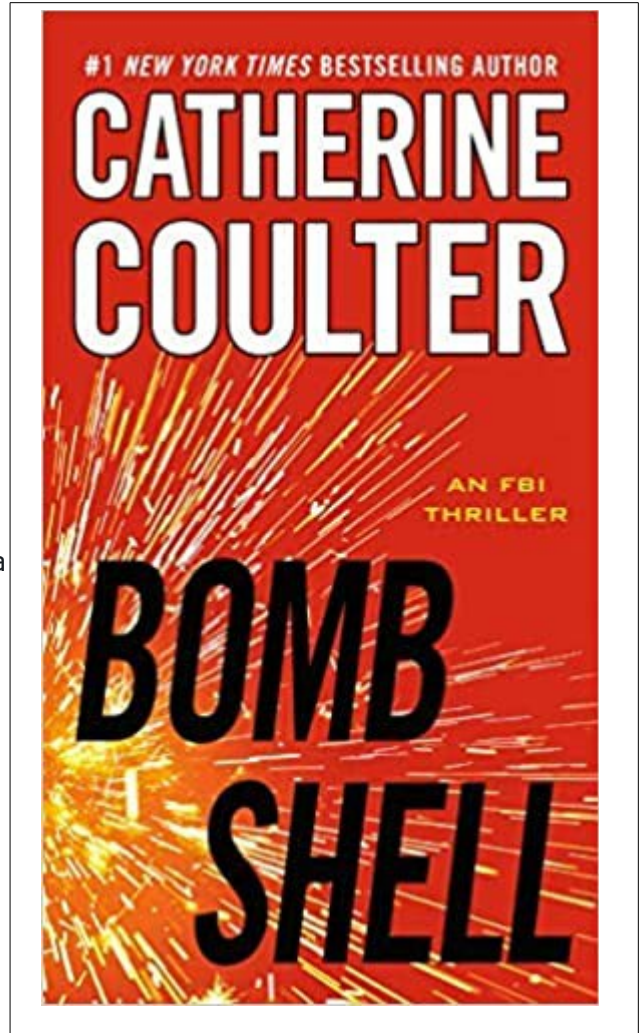
This was my first Catherine Coulter book and it will be my last.

Let's start with the title. Bomb Shell. I have no idea why she chose this for a title other than it catches the eye. There are no bombs in the book. There isn't even a busty blond.

Next, the plot. Or rather the plots because there are two: a mysterious set of events resulting in murder in a rural Virginia town and the murder of the grandson of the ex-chairman of the Federal Reserve in Washington DC. I expected that these two plotlines would eventually converge. But other than having some of the FBI folks involved in both there was no connection. I think Coulter just had two ideas that she couldn't turn into stand-alone books so she threw them together. Lazy. I hate that.

Also, the rural Virginia plot involved the MS-13 gang and a world-famous classical musician teaming up to distribute drugs from a cave. I couldn't help but liken this to a plot from the Hardy Boys books that I read as a pre-teen. Completely ridiculous.

Don't waste your time. 2 out of 10.



## Being tidy or being disloyal?

12 Dec 2020

Maybe both?

The question arises because I have been going through the stuff that I brought south from our storage unit in Massachusetts. It turns out that much of what has been stored up there for years is memorabilia - items saved from our many trips in the RV and our cruises. Jett was much more sentimental than I am. Jars of sand from beaches we have visited were very dear to her. To me they trigger some fond memories but they are, ultimately, just jars of sand. They will have absolutely no meaning to whoever is unlucky enough to be saddled with cleaning out the shed when I die. So I figure I am doing someone in the future a great favor by getting rid of

this memorabilia now. Goodbye, sand. Farewell daily cruise calendars. So long, campground maps.

All gone, sent to the trash bin. It felt good to be tidy.

But it felt like I was being disloyal to Jett. Sorry, darling.



Discarding memorabilia

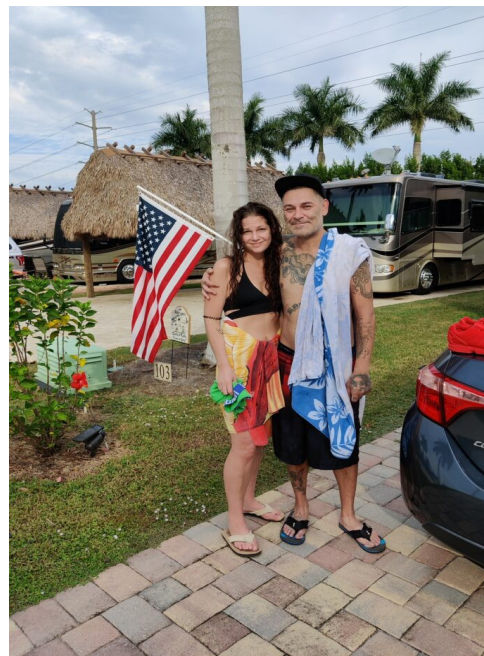
## A visit from son #2

**13 Dec 2020**

I suppose I should apologize to Charlie Chan, that inscrutable oriental detective. But since he referred to himself as "oriental" which most asians now regard as derogatory and since none of the 5 actors who played him in the movies was actually asian, I won't apologize much. I doubt that he was even inscrutable, whatever that means.

The point being that my younger son, Frank, visited me for a week, leaving yesterday. This was my Christmas gift to him - a week in the Florida sun. Thanks to the pandemic the airfares are dirt cheap, as are the hotels. He brought his girlfriend and the total cost for airfare and hotel was under \$700. I let him use my car for the week (I had the truck). Cheap, cheap, cheap vacation for him.

Notice that I said "a week in the sun" rather than "a week in the heat." Because it was sunny but cool. But 60s seems warm to those who endure 30s and 40s this time of year. And it did get into the upper 70s twice during the week. Warm enough for a northerner to use the pool.



Frank and Rachel

Frank and I went out Thursday night, sans girlfriend, for some father/son bonding time. Had pizza at [Capone's](#) then had a beer at [The Lodge](#). I got the pint while Frank opted for the "large" thinking it would be 22 oz, as they serve in MA. But this was a full 32 ounces. Huge. He finished it. Fortunately he wasn't driving.

We also spent a day touring the area, including visiting Sanibel Island and the [Ding Darling Nature Preserve](#). I was hoping to find some large alligators, but I guess it was too cold. Struck out at Ding. But we did get to walk the beach at the southern tip of Sanibel and get to dip our toes in the Gulf of Mexico.

So, a pretty good week. So good that they decided to return for Christmas. On their dime.



Frank and his quart of beer



Frank at Capone's



Frank and Rachel on Sanibel



Frank at the pool

# My first (and second) COVID-19 test

18 Dec 2020

When my son was visiting me less than 2 weeks ago I spent a few minutes researching how to get a COVID-19 test in Fort Myers, thinking that he and his girlfriend might need to get one to be allowed back in Massachusetts. Well, they were less concerned about that than I was and they were right - MA took them back, no questions asked. But the seed of thought was planted. And, because I had been in close contact with them - and because I am still considering attending a Christmas party with over a dozen other people - I thought it might be a good idea to get tested.

Fort Myers has a large, free testing site that gives rapid COVID-19 tests - results in less than 30 minutes. And while that instant gratification was appealing, I had also seen the lines of cars waiting to enter that site. And I had no compelling need for instant results. So I looked into the drive-through testing being offered at my local CVS pharmacy (I had seen the signs when I had been there recently). It turns out that the testing there, too, is free. And while an appointment is required, the "out time" was in minutes rather than days. I discovered this at about 2 pm on Monday as the first appointment time offered then was 3:10 pm. What the heck? I booked it.

I had to wait 25 minutes in line at the drive-through pharmacy window, which gave me time to review the video on how the test would be conducted. I thought I was prepared. When I got to the window I was handed a testing kit containing a swab and a vial. I abused myself with the swab, sticking it about 3 inches up each nostril. I sneezed. How does anyone not sneeze? But I put the swab in the vial and, when breaking off the tip of the swab (as required), I spilled some of the liquid in the vial.

Two days later I got the results - negative but inconclusive (insufficient DNA), I don't know if that was because I didn't swab correctly or because I spilled the liquid, but I had to retake the test. CVS, to their credit, were on the ball and called me to reschedule. I went back yesterday - no waiting this time - and redid the test, being careful to not spill the liquid and putting the swab even deeper in my nostrils this time. But I still sneezed.

I expect I will be negative, but the experience was instructive. It is indeed, easy to get a COVID-19 test now, which is great. If only it had been easy 6 months ago it might have saved thousands of lives.

## Surprise!

21 Dec 2020

My COVID-19 test result was **POSITIVE**. While there is a chance that this is a false positive result, it is far more likely that I either have the virus or had it and didn't know it. I can't tell which because I have **NO SYMPTOMS**. That could be due to me being one of the lucky ones who is not made sick by the virus. Or it could be that I was actually infected previously - perhaps as much as 3 months ago - and had minor symptoms that were never bad enough for me to think I had a potentially deadly disease. The test can show positive due to antibodies from an earlier infection.

But at some point - either now or as some point in the past - I was probably infectious and didn't know it. I am not aware of anyone who I may have infected with COVID-19, but the possibility that I made someone sick without knowing it bothers me a lot.

The ability of this virus to be passed by asymptomatic carriers is one of the characteristics that makes it so insidious. I took the test on a whim and not because I thought I was infected. I have to wonder how many other people like me are out there and haven't been tested.

I spoke to my doctor today and he agreed that I should isolate myself for at least another week, then take

another test. If that test is negative then the first one was probably a false positive. If it is positive then I was definitely infected, but it won't shed any light on when I was infected.

A perfectly crappy end to a perfectly crappy year.

## My best Christmas gift ever?

25 Dec 2020

I wasn't expecting any gifts this year. But I did get one gift and it was a good one. Probably my best Christmas gift ever.

My health.

It has now been at least 10 days since the exposure that resulted in the shocking positive COVID-19 test. I think that means that I am no longer infectious, if I ever was. And that I am unlikely to get sick.

I feel like I have dodged a bullet. Better yet, this probably means that I have some immunity to COVID-19. I won't go crazy now and start kissing people in the ICU but I think the time between now and whenever I get vaccinated will be relatively stress-free.

I will retest in a couple of days. At this point I am really hoping for a positive result. Because if it is negative then the possibility of a false positive remains.

The photo is my flowering hibiscus. The red and green make it an appropriate Christmas photo. And a cheerful one, to match my mood. But I was also amazed at the clarity. This was taken at dusk, in low light.



My Christmas hibiscus

## Damn

30 Dec 2020

My second COVID-19 test was **NEGATIVE**. This is very disappointing as it strongly suggests that the first result

was a false positive. I was really hoping for confirmation that I had, in fact, had an asymptomatic case and had developed antibodies without ever getting sick. Now I know that I either had the virus or didn't. Not very helpful.

So all I have gotten from this whole episode is a whole lot of worry and loss of a Christmas holiday.

One final loss to end a year full of losses.

## 2020 wrapup

### 31 Dec 2020

How to describe 2020? To borrow a phrase from Judith Viorst, it was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad year.

Highlights:

- A wonderful 2-week MSC cruise in the Caribbean
- A positive experience being a poll worker in the 2020 general election
- Completion of shed construction (though some trim work remains)

Lowlights:

- Jett's death
- The COVID-19 pandemic, punctuated by a positive COVID-19 test result at the end of the year, followed by a second negative result 10 days later, with a lot of stress and the loss of a joyful Christmas in between
- Many truck expenses, including several rounds of fuel line repairs and replacement of the turbocharger uppipes
- Many health problems for Jett, prior to her death, including several falls
- A very difficult TS6
- A joyless TN6, with an initial delay due to truck problems

I think we can all agree that the Lowlights outweigh the Highlights.

I will be happy to send 2020 on its way with a hearty "good riddance!"





Ft Myers sunset



Jett

