

January:

January 1, 2015- Christmas RV Park



Quiet day today, once again the days are overcast and rainy at times. Floridians don't take well to these many gloomy days, and tomorrow is supposed to be the same.

As customary for Thursday nights we enjoyed Bingo. Dinah, Chucks' wife was gracious enough to introduce us to Sheila and Leonard and they joined us at our table. So many here, like Chuck and Dinah, are seasonal and Carla and I stay to we so as not to occupy chairs their friends might want. Sheila and Leonard are not full-timers but do go off on long vacations in their "*Intruder*" motorhome. Their plate says Virginia but back in the day they were both from the Titusville area. We did win one game of bingo while we at Christmas, now we have laundry money for this week. Today, the 2nd, will be spent with Mary Ann at her home doing another Christmas.

3rd

Just heard back from my brother that mom is being released, from the hospital. We are all looking forward to having her back at home; priceless. On a different note, today the 10th, Scoots has been declawed and she is recuperating well in the coach. She's in a little pain and really dislikes the collar she must wear to prevent her from nibbling at her stitches. This Wednesday we will be going on a field trip to experience the Tampa RV Show once again. It's inexpensive and very interesting.

22nd

Next Thursday we'll pack up and begin our trip to Tampa for a two-day stay. After that we're off to Wauchula, FL for a two-week stay. This is the beginning of our utilization of the Thousand Trails Campground for less-expensive camping. Thousand Trails will permit us to stay up to fourteen days here for nothing; a savings of almost \$300 over what we would normally be paying. Our three months in Christmas was as enjoyable as the last time we were here twelve months ago Bill and Gina are the new managers and are doing a great job. RT and wife Debbie (live in the rig below) are full-timers at the park and live here year-round.

We spent these three months camped next to Harold and wife Phyllis. They've been camping here for years but this year they're RV is a Newmar Mountain Aire, not something we could afford especially at forty feet. From Nova Scotia a nice couple were camped in their Travel Trailer. Chuck and Diane were camped just down the road from us and were seasonal from Michigan. Next to them a delightful couple from Iowa; Bruce and Bev.

Since Iowa is one of our destination venues, we were anxious for any information they would share with us and share they did. Jerry just dropped by on his way back to his camper, (his wife Alisa.) and saw we were able to get on the campground Internet, happens rarely.

Story be told they live on the family farm, that's been in the family for a couple of generations and is now being worked by a family member. Virtually all farmers and truck drivers, and there are many, own fifth-wheels. If I could have managed ours, we would have kept ours. Hank, a solo camper, who we got to know a little better than the others and friend of the campground owners from Vegas, came to Christmas for the season. He enjoyed Christmas for only a few months then passed away during his stay here. He enjoyed his gambling but mostly his vodka.

29th New Home: Itasca Suncruiser

Yes, we did it once again! This will be the last time due to its awesomely homey floor plan. Let me show you some pictures. You will have to excuse the little bit of mess since we took these pictures right after we arrived in Peace River.



As it turned out it was a close trade. The additional cash could be justified on the new tires and window dressings which would have cost us over ten thousand dollars to do ourselves, not to mention the inconvenience. Carla's refrigerator is a little smaller than the full-size residential she ended giving up, but this one will have enough storage space for our needs. The windows are full view with no split windows to obscure the view outdoors. Imbedded in the dinette seats are two huge "drawers" for storage of dry goods and other kitchen items. We still have room to spare. Scoots enjoys snoozing if space is available.



Counter space in Carla's kitchen area is awesome. Thankfully this coach did not come with an oven. Seldom does anyone ever use the ovens provided. She appreciates more the extra drawer space. Countertops are Corian. Our Kitchen.

At first this may not look very big, but if we clean up after ourselves, on a regular basis, nothing piles up and the area is almost always free of clutter. The drawer on the counter is not clutter, just another piece that is not going back as easily as it came out. This picture, as well as others to follow on the coach, are the updated ones. In a few months we will be having the linoleum and old shag carpet removed and replaced with what you see in these pictures.

New flooring replaced in December 2015



This little section located across from the television/fireplace wall unit will be in high demand by both of us. Richard and Christine, this picture below is for you. The Grenier plaque you sent us has found a home above the entrance way. However, as I mentioned once before, living in a Motorhome has limited wall and storage space, besides, at our age, we have no need for any more stuff. Receiving a card or a call is more appreciated. We look forward to hearing how family and friends are doing more than anything else.



Another unique feature of our coach is the sink in the bedroom. In the more expensive and much larger coaches you'll find a bath and one half. Without a doubt this would be a very nice option, but it would add thousands to the cost of the coach not to mention an additional seven feet for the length. This will work great for us.

The picture below shows the TV/Fireplace unit. Just in the hall area is a generous closet area with drawers on the lower section and additional drawers by the bed unit.



By everyday standards, those living in real homes, this might appear to be an impossible storage and living space to live with, but it's not. In fact, we have space yet to use in both the closet area and drawers as well. A rule RVing folks learn early is that we carry all that we need and what we will use on a regular basis. *There's rarely a day that goes by that Carla and I don't give thanks to Him for giving us the opportunity to enjoy this lifestyle.* Opposite the TV "section" (not big enough to call it a room), hangs a cross stitch picture of our anniversary date, a reminder for me. It was a wedding gift and is treasured. Joyce MacDougall did the design work and her husband, Don, built the frame. For 25 years it has hung in our bedroom, but the wall in the back of the coach seemed very appropriate. I've yet to forget our special day. Sadly, these two items have used up just about all of our available wall space. *No! This does not mean we should start looking for a bigger coach.*

30th.

Tanks are empty, our rent is paid, and electric will be due in the morning. We hope to be on our way by 11 AM Thursday morning. Since we should be on the go quite a bit from now on.

FEBRUARY:

2nd Peace River RV Park- Wauchula, FL

Peace River RV Park in Wauchula, FL is conveniently located right off US 17, very easy entrance with excellent directions to check in when you arrive and ample parking as you check in.



The pool and club house have two swings on their porch. Another picture of our coach, what better way to start our walk.



The street we're camping on.

Warning as we approach the Peace River.



Still walking,

Getting closer.



Couple prospecting for, would you believe dinosaur bones? *Didn't think so, how about shark teeth/bones. They told us the entire area was all flooded once upon a time, and, yes, they did find teeth!* This is the Peace River. Young family canoeing on the river. We were surprised how fast the river was flowing.



This was a great "back to nature" walk just from the campground.
Pool tables Wi-Fi media meeting room.



The camp store, did you notice the ice cream chest? Log cabins are also available to rent. As typical with TT, all sites are back in. Virtually all the sites are easy back-ins. The back lower portion of the campground is subject to a muddy condition after heavy rains. In general, this park will make for an excellent stay.

6th

Last Monday was a quiet day with Bingo in the evening... did not win. Wednesday evening was Bingo again and Carla won \$12...*Laundry money, about time!*... Thursday was a once-a-year roll out party.



The entire park was invited to an outdoor buffet with every finger food you could imagine. The party was held outdoors on the front and back porches of the club house. Strawberries with three trays of warm chocolate not to mention veggies galore. No way of knowing but it looked like over four hundred were in attendance. A Chinese auction with some very nice and expensive prizes were in the offering. Friday, HHR needed to see the doctor, *less than \$20;*

priceless!

7th Sat.,

What a beautiful daytime temperature around 70 and nothing but blue skies. Carla and I took a short walk to the club house, craft show in the parking lot, nothing much to look over. Then we walked over to the pool area hoping to snatch one of the two swings TT has on their porch, *no luck!* Each is being occupied by campers with Kindles or tablets. Western parts of the country are expecting the Pineapple Express, torrential rains, and the Northeast is expecting 8-15 inches of snow. *Being stuck in Florida is not that hard to take!* Rain is expected on Monday however. Sunday we will be visiting Mom in Boca, it's been awhile since we visited last. Below you can see the pool and hot tub located on the campgrounds.



Decided to give my foot a rest and have some ice cream. Mr. Carl, a solo camper, was sitting in the swing next to us. Chatted with him and gave him some additional information on Thousand Trails (TT) camping packages. Currently he's not a member but I'm sure he's giving it some careful consideration. Turns out he was single camping just down the street from us. Told us he was heading to Vegas this summer. This was at the end of our walk. In a couple of weeks, we will move from here to Bradenton, FL and stay at the Winter Quarters Manatee Campground for three weeks then off to Clermont, FL staying at the "Orlando" campground there.

10th Lake Placid, FL

Today, Tuesday, we will visit Lake Placid, City of Murals. Never thought we'd experience such an awesome visit. Lake Placid in the center of Florida. It was not always as notable as it is today.



The story begins in the early 1990's. Harriet and Robert Porter had just retired and were planning a vacation trip to Canada on their Gold Wing Motorcycle.

TURPENTINE INDUSTRY. Completed in 1994 and measures 62 feet by 14. Personally, I never thought too much as to where turpentine came from. The Coachman's Consolidated Naval Stores own over two million acres of Florida's pine forests. Workers remove the bark from pine trees and collect the gum from these trees. The gum is collected and refined into turpentine.



THE LOST BEAR CUB. Completed in 1997 and is over 46 feet wide. Lake Placid was once one of the best bear hunting grounds in the country. Vegetation and berries made for easy eating and bears grew fat. It's been told that at times the mother bear would be killed. If she left cubs behind, many times they were taken and kept as pets and became very friendly. The Lost Cub symbolizes Florida's last habitats as a warning to the possibilities of extinction of the species.



A mural painted on a metal canvas attached to a park bench. Then again, another example of the practical application of art to beautify and entertain. **TRAIN DEPOT.** Completed in 1995 it reiterates the efforts of Dr. Melvil Dewey, whom we spoke of earlier. Through his efforts a depot was built in Lake Placid which greatly added to the growth of this small town. The Atlantic Coast Railroad began servicing Lake Placid in 1927. This mural was painted by a father and son team from Chemainus, BC, which we also spoke of earlier. If it were not for the Porter's visiting this small town in BC Lake Placid might look far different than it looks today. In fact the town would, most likely, still be known as Lake Stearns. Freight trains still pass through Lake Placid. The RR Depot is now the home of the Lake Placid Historical Society. *I WISH TO THANK THE PUBLICATION "THE MURALS OF LAKE PLACID" FOR MUCH OF THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION I'VE PRESENTED IN THIS TEXT.*

14th Clown School-Valentines' Day



It's been a good, long and tiring day. Doing this mural trek is fun but do it on a cool day and bring water. We got to this mural and took the picture. Then we noticed it was on the side of a building advertising a Clown School.



We were told that this was possibly the only museum dedicated to Clowns. The museum contains hundreds of pictures of clowns of the past and their many make-ups. One of the most famous of these clowns was Red Skelton. The museum has several portraits of him on their wall. I believe these are the only two shots I took of him. Another of the greats was Charlie Chapman. As seen in the next picture applying make-up. The museum is very proud of this photo. Not sure but I believe it's a one-of-a-kind collector's item. Many portraits are about Ringling Bros. Circus. The founder of the American Clown School in Lake Placid was Keith Stokes, also known as Toby. At this time, he was retired but had a need to stay involved. As a cure for this need to stay active he volunteered his clowning at hospitals in the area. Patients loved him. With his need to do more in the early 1990's he started the American Clown School. He graduated his first class in 1993. To assist financially to this effort a non-profit foundation was established. Big AL will be your host should you visit this unique shop. If you're lucky Toby will be there as well.

14th Valentine's Day

what a nice weekend we had. Travelled to Ft. Myers, FL for our coach to be worked on. As we waited for the coach, we met Larry and Marsha. We first met them a couple of weeks ago as we were transferring our belongings to the new Winnebago. They had just purchased a 2010 Tiffin Phaeton forty-footer. Work took longer for each of our coaches so we each changed plans and decided to spend the night at Cracker Barrel Restaurant. We got together for dinner and had breakfast together the next morning. No complaints on the food...Excellent!

19th Thursday

What a pleasant day this was. This morning we were fortunate enough to meet up with Stanley and Cathy Parker. Long story short, back in '67 I went to work for his father, Stanley Parker, Sr. He owned Parker Drug Stores in Littleton, NH and was a legend in his own time. Back in this day if a Pharmacist was lucky enough to own one drug store he was happy. Stanley Parker had four pharmacies at the time and, I was told that he once operated over twelve in its hay day. Now back to the original story. I first met young Stanley and his wife at the time in 1967 just before Christmas. It was a very brief introduction and never thought I'd not meet him at least not again until 2015. We were told that he had died. Then by accident, as RV people tend to continue bumping into one another, we met folks that were from Littleton, NH and knew Stanley and Cathy.

We contacted Stanley and Cathy and then met up with them for breakfast the next day at Pioneer Restaurant. The meeting and the food were so good that we were there over three hours. Pioneer staff began asking us if we would like to stay for lunch as well, we declined. We each went our separate ways and promised to try to meet up again before we left the area. That afternoon we had to prepare to leave the park for Ft. Myers, FL. To fix a couple of minor problems at North Trail RV. Our appointment in Ft. Myers was for 10 am so we were compelled to do the three-hour trek in the evening-*not what I was looking forward too!* We arrived at Cracker Barrel in Ft Meyers just after 9 pm. For an overnight stay. Next morning, sadly we had to wait six hours for the coach to be looked at. Work was completed at 6pm, too late to drive back to Wauchula, so it was back to Cracker Barrel (CB) along with Marsha and Larry, Motorhome friends from ours, for another night at CB.

March 2nd Winter Quarters Campground- Bradenton, FL

Last night at Wauchula would be a night that would be hard to forget. No pictures on it, however. Yesterday we experienced a very heavy rainfall. To add to that we were in the lower section of Wauchula, known for flooding.



Sure, looks serene and harmless, doesn't it? We spent all day yesterday watching those large and heavy diesel pushers being stuck in a foot or two of mud. I figured that was expected, since, after all, their heavy engines are in the rear of the bus, and ours, of course being gas, was up front. I felt our chances for being engulfed in mud were slim to none; *sure!* By noon yesterday we were ready to begin our trek to Fort Meyers to have some fixes done to the coach. We moved all of six feet and found ourselves deep in the muck.

Fast forward three hours and a big tow truck later we were finally freed from Wauchula. We arrived at Cracker Barrel in Fort Meyers, FL in the evening for our appointment at North Trail the next morning.

Manatee Campground



It's now the end of February, and not even the Canucks are in the pool, but they do enjoy soaking up the Sun. We leave in a few days so just a few pictures to introduce you to this truly beautiful campground. We did very little at our stay here, just relaxed. Carla caught up on some reading and below I worked on the coach and freed it from the mud from Wauchula.



The temperatures are delightful which makes it nice to do some manual labor. The evenings were hard to forget. Most were much like this one. We're still hibernating and haven't begun our second season of coaching, but April is just around the corner.



The roadways are as pristine as you could ask for and all the sites have cement pads. The campground is dotted with cabins as we've seen in so many other campgrounds, *must be money in cabins*. The Clubhouse has bingo and has a full calendar of activities for the entire winter.

MARCH- Clermont, FL

Orlando Thousand Trails (TT) Campground

The Clermont campground is referred to as being in "Orlando" although Orlando is about thirty minutes from here. Orlando strangely does the same thing when referring to the "Attractions", which are in Osceola and Polk counties; *whatever!* We'll be here for two weeks on lot A-90 over by Azalea Rd just past the RV Show area.

3.02.15

Carla and I arrived in TT Orlando and settled in very easily and comfortably. Parking the coach with dinghy attached was facilitated by the overly spacious RV/car parking area at the Registration area.



As with most Thousand Trails (TT) campgrounds we were advised to travel the campground and pick the location we feel good about. It's nothing to write home about but it's close to the Clubhouse, Wi-Fi and pool area and, more importantly, the price is right. This location A-90 is about a five-minute walk or a two-minute bike ride to the clubhouse. As always with these Campground Blogs I'll let the pictures do most of the talking, the park is so big it has several laundry rooms strategically located around the park for easy access. Another reason this

is an Encore TT Campground. Over one-hundred acres and easy access everywhere

3.03.2015

Temp is 85 degrees. At the Clubhouse there's a flyer to drum up RVers for a trip to Alaska. Alaska is not possible for this year but we're optimistic for 2016. This will give us time to be more familiar with the coach and budgeting for this expense. This is in the clubhouse. We're sitting just about where that individual with the blue shirt is sitting. Just ordered some French fries will be in the pool by 1pm. Just picked them up, *wow!* Wish I had the Nikon to take a picture of the size you can buy for \$1.50...*awesome!*



Another section of the clubhouse. They offer small orders of fries, tacos, burgers and franks. Picture above is the Ballroom. Otherwise known as the Bingo hall. Tonight, is bingo night. Just to reaffirm that we do have quite a few youngsters here; this is a picture of just part of the game room for kids. There are a lot of kids here and today is noon Tuesday and not a vacation week. Home (RV) taught kids, once again.



Another look at the size of these buildings. It's just after noon. Guess it's time to return to the coach, relax a bit and get ready to go to the pool.

6th Kind of a do-nothing day. Overcast and a bit chilly. Hard to believe two days ago we were in the pool. It was rewarding, however. The electrical connector from coach to dinghy was not working properly to the point that whenever we made a turn the signal was not being carried over to the HHR. A simple purchase corrected this problem.

On another positive note I was able to reach a very good and old friend, Jim Ferguson. If all goes well, we should be getting together on the 11th.



8th We are expecting Karen Rodgers to visit with us later this afternoon. According to the weatherperson 30% chance of rain was expected, instead we have a beautiful sunny day in the mid 70's.

3.12.2015- What a week this has been. Last Sunday we were visited by Karen Rodgers. She's our accountant. Turns out she's thinking of picking up a travel trailer soon. She visited with us most of the afternoon then picked up our paperwork and headed off back home. Wednesday Jim Ferguson joined us for the afternoon. It's always a pleasure spending time with him. We enjoyed BLT's and a lot of good conversation. He has four daughters, three graduated and one graduating this year. He's also mentoring a grandson, around twelve years old, on the intricacies of the Stock Market. Hope I'm still around when he's 21, a day-trader in the works. The week culminated with a visit to Amy O. She's an event coordinator with Met Life.

12th- Disney-Boardwalk with Amy O.

It's hard to believe that our time here at TT Orlando will terminate this coming Sunday. It's jacks up Sunday morning as we head to Vero Beach, FL. Amy O. is Carla's niece, originally from Turner's Falls, MA. She's an event coordinator with Met Life. Not sure what that job fully entails but I'm told it's a heavy dose of stress balanced with the joy of traveling the world on someone else's dime.



This time Amy, the one on the left in the picture above, was working out of the Swan Hotel at Walt Disney World.



It's always nice to have friends that hang out in Five-Star hotels. We arrived just after 6pm and Amy joined up shortly thereafter. Took an awesome walk on Disney's Boardwalk and headed to an Italian Restaurant, Trattoria Al Forno, and translation- The Bakery Café. I have no pictures of this restaurant but I'm sure it can be Googled online. Very nice to mingle with the upper Five Percenter's. Carla and I enjoyed Lasagna, an item we quickly identified on our Italian Menu. Amy had a very colorful plate, Chicken Parmesan. Our waitresses were extremely knowledgeable on all the items on the menu, the English names not to mention the wine list. We ate slowly and enjoyed every bite but knew we all needed to spend some time walking off this meal. Disney never disappoints. We walked the entire Boardwalk enjoying cool breezes and temps in the low 70's.

3.16.2015

Of course, mom is on the left. Abby is our go-to person between us and the real world. She collects some of our rents and mail should any of our mail go to the wrong address.



For all we pay in mail service, I'd like to have her collect all our mail and pay her a bit more for the extra service; I'll have to remind myself about this later. Although I wonder if she could use the extra money. Abby is our go-to person between us and the real world. She collects some of our rents and mail should any of our mail go to the wrong address. For all we pay in mail service, I'd like to have her collect all our mail and pay her a bit more for the extra service; I'll have to remind myself about this later. Although I wonder if she could use the extra money.

Sunshine Travel RV Campground,

15th, What a great campground. An Encore Resort in Vero Beach, FL.



This morning we had to pick up a couple of items from Walmart, then we decided to lock in a site here for Jan, Feb and March of 2016. I've been trying to stay with the "free" stays but this is the only campground that's convenient for us as far as Boca and our Doctors in Titusville. Currently we're locked in at just \$13 a day but we're hoping to pick up a deal in the future that would bring us closer to \$10 per day. I know this sounds like I'm splitting hairs, but it's the mindset and goal of the majority of RVers to do this lifestyle as frugally as possible. Thank you, Nancy, for getting us such a great rate. Two men in the pool were talking to one another and the first mentioned that he had just spent eight thousand going to Hawaii, his friend replied that he would be spending the year here at Vero Beach for only six thousand dollars. He had no inclinations to travel that far for the same sun that can be found in South Florida.



We must be very satisfied because we rarely see an RV worthy of selling the Itasca and moving up. Will not be a NEW coach, to many problems with them. The only brand we're ever a little excited about is Newmar, but that would require taking too much out of savings. So, we lose very little sleep over things we either don't need or can't afford. This weekend and, for the near future, LaMesa RV will be having a mini RV show on the campgrounds in the triple overflow area by the office.

March 22rd, Mom's Birthday

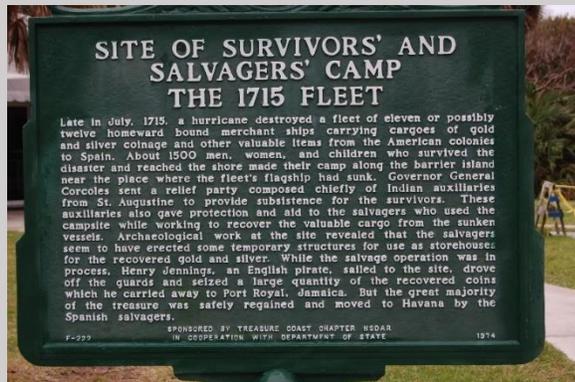


We travel to Boca today to, once again, celebrate Mom's birthday. Today will be her 97th. We were all fearful that this might be her last birthday, and within the next three months, on July 3rd, HE would finally call her back to join HIM and my father who had passed fifty years earlier. Condolences were extended by so many of her friends, but down deep my brothers and I knew that, except for her last two weeks, she'd had an excellent, satisfying and happy ninety-seven years. We were all sad, but we knew she was ready to go and was in total peace with HIM. Yes, that's mom and dad with, of course, me and my brothers. They're finally back together again. It will take about twenty-five years, but I expect we'll have a grand family reunion then. A sixty-year-old picture, someone always gets elected to try to keep and organize the family history. That will end with my demise. My kids have no interest in family lineage, but that's their problem.

March 23th. Today is my Dad's 50th Anniversary of his death; it was a long day. *What a pleasant surprise he'll have in three months when mom comes a calling.*

3.24.2015- McLarty Treasure Museum

I don't know about you, but have you ever wondered why it's called the *Treasure Coast*?



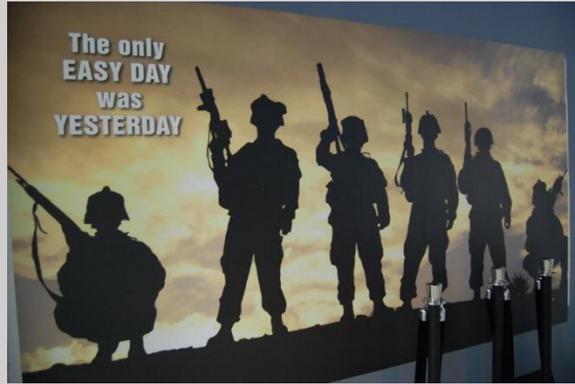
As it turns out the area of Sebastian has two museums on sunken treasures, this is one of them. In 1715 a fleet of merchant ships were caught up in a fierce hurricane and sank in various areas from St. Augustine south to Sebastian Inlet Florida. The entire fleet sank with, in today's values, would be valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars, in gold bars and gold relics and other artifacts.



Above is a rendition of a typical vessel in the 17th century. Most of the ships were much larger than the Atocha but nonetheless they were all carrying millions of dollars in jewels, gold, diamonds and artifacts from all over the then known world, including America. To make a long but very interesting story short a contractor, who had an Oceanside home on the outer reef barrier island used to take walks beach. Occasionally he would come across the small metal discs and he used them to skim across the water. One day he decided to take a closer look at these metal items. They were doubloons dated no later than 1715. He soon discovered that each one of these doubloons were worth around \$800 or more. He could only assume the doubloons were coming from a wreck and were being washed ashore. Then he learned about the hurricane of 1715 and the ships that were lost. Being an older person, he knew he was not trained enough to search for the treasure so he hired a diver from California, Mel Fisher. Mel sold everything he owned and moved his young family to Florida. The contract between the two men was simple. Fifty-fifty even split on everything Mel would find in this part of the ocean, after Florida received its 25% tax on treasure found in coastal waters. Since that partnership, back in 1964, they have split hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of treasure and most of the treasure is still in the ocean today. Fifteen hundred men, women and children were fortunate enough to swim to shore during the storm. Above are some of the tools they used during that era.



27th Navy UDT Seal Museum



This day we visited the Naval Seal Museum. We also viewed the Seal Commemoration wall.



Visiting this museum is a very sobering experience. Other than that, all I can say is that you must visit it to fully appreciate the museum and the great sacrifices the few have made for the majority. Just one last picture to end this experience.

This venue was so emotional. This museum incorporates everything, artifacts, stills video and original documentaries.

3.29.2015- Second Travel Season Begins Today

Hard to believe but this will be the first day of our second travel season. We celebrated mom's birthday on the 22nd and remembered dad on the 23rd. Today, the 29th, we left Vero Beach heading north to Mims Florida. It's was only a one-hundred-mile drive, but we wanted to meet up with our Abby to say good-byes with her. She visited with us for a couple of hours and then we left for Daytona to visit with Mary Ann, Carla's sister.

As planned, we met her at Cracker Barrel (CB) which looks like it is located at turns 3 and 4 of the Daytona International Speedway, just a stone's throw from where we were staying. We visited for a few minutes in the coach and then had lunch at 5-Guys Hamburger shop in Port-Orange, FL. After a great meal, never disappointed there, we joined Mary Ann at her home and visited for a while.

30th

After a great night's sleep and a casual breakfast, we were back on the road again. We were hoping to get started by 10am and were only off by a few minutes. We arrived in Lake Park, GA about three hours later. To our surprise we found ourselves with a dead battery in the HHR, went to Sam's and got a new one. Interestingly the battery we replaced was the original battery when the car was built in 2006. We arrived back at CB we noticed the entire back RV parking lot roped off with yellow caution tape, almost looked like a crime scene. Turns out every year this CB does an Easter egg hunt for the neighborhood children and those kids eating there at the time if they wanted to participate.



It was fun to watch. This guy (big white bunny) gave me some concern, but he thankfully did not show up in my dreams last night. *Some folks can't handle clowns, but this guy really made me nervous.* Once again, our plan was to overnight at the CB in Lake Park, GA, with a goal of arriving in Umatilla, GA by mid-afternoon on the 31st.

APRIL: GEORGIA

4.01.2015-Southern Trails Resort, Umatilla, GA

(an RPI Resort)



I should look up the definition of the word "resort". This final leg was a delightful ride in the Itasca as well as uneventful. Here I sit at Southern Trails Resort RV Park. It's just an open parcel of land with all "pull troughs." TV reception is good, location is good and the price, at \$10/night, is great. We strive to stay at TT resorts, but occasionally we must use one of their over eight-hundred other campgrounds available to us at very reduced prices.



We're trying to do all free campground stays, *but sometimes we must pay the fiddler.* We are planning to stay here for six nights.

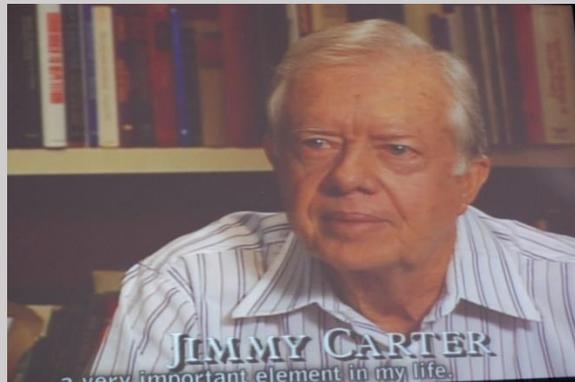
4.02.2015- The Jimmy Carter Homestead

Plains, GA

This blog is not to be confused with the Jimmy Carter Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. It is truly awesome that we begin our second travel year in Plains, GA, home of President Carter.



The school, I'm sure, has been renovated and I'm sure looks better now than it did back then. Above we walk through a first level corridor. This building is thoroughly dedicated to Mr. Carter, family and friends. This is what you see when you enter the High School. For some reason I forgot to take a picture of the school. It goes without saying, I'm sure the information desk was not there during his stay.



The school auditorium offered a 45-minute movie, a short documentary on the President's life.

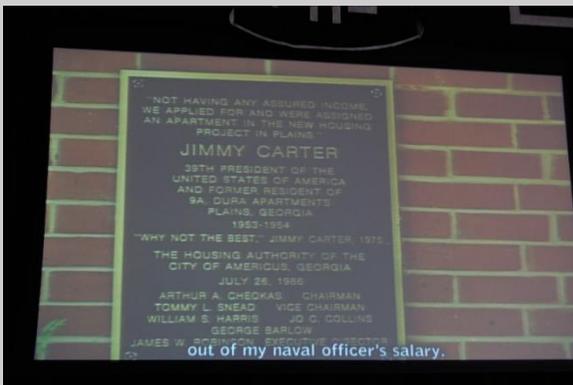
Image courtesy of the Carter Museum-Jimmy Carter today



Image courtesy of the Carter Museum-Jimmy graduating for Naval Academy in 1943.



Image courtesy of the Carter Museum-Jimmy and Rosalynn, the day they married.



They began their married lives like most of us, a bit poor, with not the faintest of all ideas of how much he would accomplish during his lifetime. When he retired from the navy, he realized how much in need the Georgia school system needed some new leadership, so he ran for the School Board. He then realized he had a great deal to offer through politics, so he ran for Governor, and won.

4.03.2015-Good Friday

Stations of the Cross course, then off to purchase a B&W Laser printer. Bingo is on schedule for Saturday and we won for a change, *not even enough for the washer/dryers.*

6th and 7th -Shoal Creek Campground, Buford, GA-We arrived in Buford, GA at the Shoal Creek Campground, *Awesome!*



Only planning to stay here two nights and then it's up and go again. This campground was basically a stay for us to experience Stone Mountain. Except for a youngster, Alison a tent camper with her family, our stay was quiet. Let me let the pictures tell the story of this site. This is another Equity Lifestyle Property an Enjoy America campground. This, for us, is a ten dollar a night stay, very hard to beat that when you see the surrounding grounds Lake is called Lake Lanier in Buford, GA.

Roads and most all the RV sites were paved as well. Basketball and swing sets for the kids. Here we are, thought I'd forgotten to take a picture of us on our site.



4.07.2015-Bottom line, I could easily enjoy staying here a month or longer. The quiet, solitude and spacious sites; *Priceless!* Doesn't get much better than this, especially if you have a boat. Marina in the background.



As always, our stays do come to an end and it's time to hit the road again. This is such a nice park/campground to spend a few days with family and friends.

4.07.2015- Stone Mountain, Atlanta, GA



Purpose for the stop - experience Stone Mountain. This seldom happens, others offering to take our picture. I keep offering and most are very thankful but that's it, except for this awesome family. Visit my Stone Mountain Blog for more on this wonderful experience. As we drove in great anticipation to viewing the mountain of stone, this is what we first saw. Must get better. The grounds are very well organized and easy enough for a child to read.



Some of the grounds were as nicely groomed as Disney. Now, where exactly are we? A dogwood Carla hasn't seen for a while.



Just like Disney, the grounds are impeccable but, like Disney, there's always a line for tickets, thankfully, it was short.



Oops! Thought we were going to be on our way in the last building, so we continue to walk. Guess we've made it. Once we had our tickets it was a delightful walk to the next location. This is it; next step is up, up and away.



Yup, this is now getting serious.

Great view coming up next.



The rock striations seen in the picture are caused by the action of water wearing down gullies in the rock over the years. As I've said in the past, occasionally someone offers to take a picture of the old folks.





This is a family we met at the top and then again on the tram going down and at the bottom as well. Our sightseeing together is always a great experience, but back in the day it was even more sensational knowing that Abby had never seen much of what we were experiencing, it was always new to her. Not only did they just take our picture we had an opportunity to talk a bit as well. A young family from Louisiana. Sadly, I have no more information on them. I hope we hear from them when they get back from their vacation. You only have one go-around in life to be the best you can as either mom or a dad, this couple is confident in the great job their doing as parents. Sometimes I think much of the entertainment comes from the comments you really don't expect from a child thirteen or younger. A little envious of younger families we run into either at the campgrounds or on these escapades.

4.08.2015- Hidden Cove RV Park in Arley, AL

Left Shoal Creek early in order to get through Atlanta before the morning rush and made it. Five hours and 250 miles later we arrive in Arley, AL at Hidden Cove RV Resort. This is a Thousand Trails (TT) campground.



4.09.2015-Yes, it's well off the beaten track and as you drive up you might question your decision to camp here except for the price being so great but give it a couple of hours. Many of the sites are pull-thru, when did you hear that last. And most are 50 amp with excellent TV reception with just your antenna. What impressed me the most was Wi-Fi reception in your coach...*priceless!*



Did I mention we're on the water, with boat docks, boat house on a 35-mile-long lake, Lewis Smith Lake, with a dam on the end. Yes, we settled in very comfortably on our small but very level site with picnic table (in very good shape), fire ring and cement pad to top it all. You're right this is a rustic campground but remember this is what camping is all about. Those who disagree can stay at the Marriott for \$150 a night.



4.08.2015-Did I mention in the Lake House is a cut-out for indoor fishing? Especially nice for kids on a rainy day. For that fact I can think of a couple of grown-ups that might take advantage of the enclosure.



Very high six-figure homes are nestled across the lake. Family have asked me in the past what do you do in case of a tornado, well, this is it.



It's buried just below the ground and has a 10 feet diameter of internal space. Around here it's not if a tornado or hurricane should come but when!



Did I forget to mention we also have a clubhouse here? Yes, we still enjoy a game of pool if there's a pool table on the grounds.



4.08.2015-TT and Encore build these clubhouses to promote their vacation packages, which we belong to. Even though they have a lake, a pool is always a plus. That in a nutshell is Hidden Cove, and I wouldn't hesitate to stay here again. Pictures we haven't taken yet were of the huge play structure, mini-golf, volleyball and horseshoes. Only drawback is the fact that nothing is close-by. But then who cares!



4.14.2015-Before it begins to rain again, we take a walk and see another section of Hidden Cove. I could see the river behind us but did not think there was a way to get there, wow! Beautiful dirt and crushed stone roadway. This roadway is just to the back of us, and it has all the river views. This is one of the campgrounds' rentals. Not much to look at, but I bet they hop in the summer months, especially with this view.



This was not what I was expecting to see. A huge observation area with steps dropping to the water below. We're busy tomorrow but will be back here on Thursday with chairs and rods.



This is the Lewis-Smith Lake, and here are some of its residences.



Fellow campers we met on our last day, never got names. She said they had seven years to go before they retire, in the meantime they rent a modular, here at the park annually, and enjoy the lake on their Seadoo. I don't have the luxury of his 600mm lens, but I can crop. But it's late and time to trek on back to the coach.



On our way to the coach, I had to look back; it doesn't get much better than this. Our view from the coach.



Yup! I could easily enjoy a summer and fall right here. I've spoken about the Equity Lifestyle vacation packages often. We have the "Elite" package. Buying into the Equity Lifestyle program, if it were only to enjoy this one awesome campground, would be worth the monetary investment. Only wish I had had this opportunity fifty years ago when I was a young dad.



This campground is not that fancy but it's free and has Wi-Fi in the coach, *Awesome!* Enough on Hidden Cove. Our next travel day will be the 12th as we experience the Ave Maria Grotto.

4.12.2015-Ave Maria Grotto- Alabama

What an awesome place to quietly walk around and contemplate on some of the more important things in life. We began this experience in the gift shop and picked up a couple of items for family.



The Grotto was the brainchild of Brother Joseph Zoetl, OSB (Order of St Benedict). He began this work of constructing "miniature replicas" of significant and religious buildings around the world. He initiated this endeavor around 1912 and it continued until his death in 1961. The Grotto was dedicated in 1934.

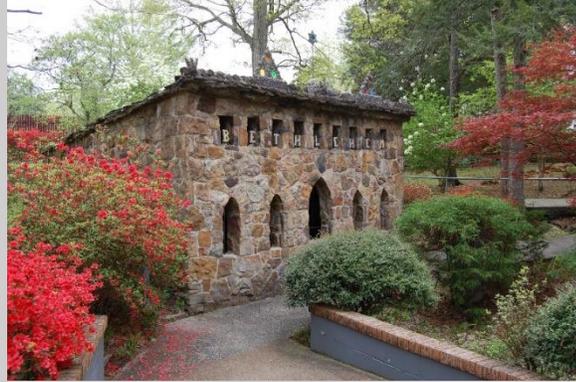


This Grotto was assembled in a former quarry. Brother Joseph died in 1961. As always, I could write a book on this but will let the pictures convey the story.

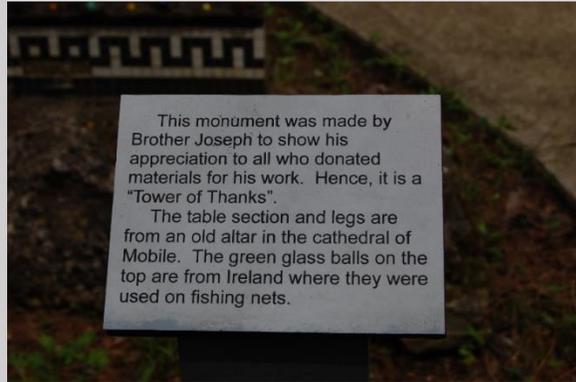
Now the tour.



You can see just how serene the area is. This project was begun by Brother Joseph. Everything was built by hand. He began this project around 1932. Eventually the grounds would be filled with tons of rocks from the nearby quarry Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. The story told is that at times Brother Joseph would visit the local pub in town and offer to buy a round of drinks to those that would offer their help for the day. He never left empty handed.



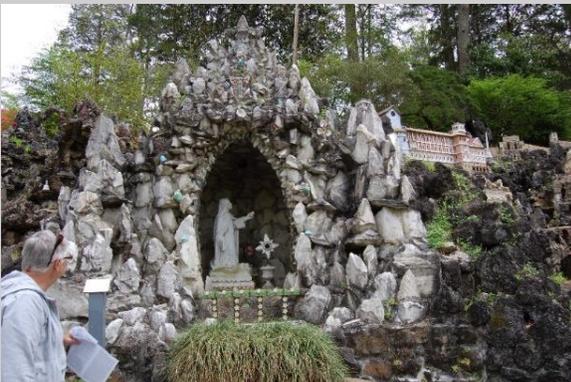
A peak inside. History tells of a load of rocks, not in the right location for that day's work. He needed just a bit of help so he asked a couple of local boys if they would help him. By the end of day, and for many days thereafter, especially in the summer vacation months, he had small hands helping whenever he needed help.



This monument was made by Brother Joseph to show his appreciation to all who donated materials for his work. Hence, it is a "Tower of Thanks". The table section and legs are from an old altar in the cathedral of Mobile. The green glass balls on the top are from Ireland where they were used on fishing nets.

Picture compliments of the Ave Maria Grotto

St. Bernard College Building. This depicts the Abby and the prep school location on these 160 acres of property the actual prep school for boys and girls is located across the street, no picture, but it's awesomely beautiful.





As with all experiences, we're on the final stretch, thank you for sticking it out. View of the Gift Shop from the walkway.



There's always a Gift Shop. As I mentioned in the beginning of this blog, these 160 acres were all part of a large quarry. As we have discussed in a previous blog on granite queries, the picture above is showing a left over piece of granite that was, most likely, carved out of this quarry. Notice the holes at the top of the rock every 3-4 inches that were drilled in order to set the explosive charges.



In the distance you can see the chapel and burial site for Brother Joseph. Brothers from the Abbey who have died are buried here on either side of Brother Joseph's Chapel. Brother Joseph's chapel and burial site. Did I mention that the Monks paid two dollars per acre to acquire the property? Inside the Chapel. And so, ends this wonderful experience, as we say goodbye to the folks that run the gift shop. They were extremely helpful to both of us in our search for family items.

4.11.2015-Saturday-Sacred Heart Church-Cullman, AL

We awoke to temps of fifty outside, coach was comfy. Nothing planned today except Mercy Sunday Eve Mass. Our nearest church is a one-hour drive. The Baptist on the other hand have a church about every country mile in every direction. The Bishop should think smaller but more numerous churches; *whatever!* Just a few lines before I had mentioned that this day would be quiet at best: not quite. Our day began a little rainy but clearing by noon, so we decided to make the best of it a travel to Cullman, AL. Our church for later today, Sacred Heart Church. We arrived in Cullman around 2pm and now we will have over three hours to kill in this small town. We first visit Sacred Heart, *Awesome!*



Today mass will be on the eve of Mercy Sunday, a day we and the entire family treasure as much as Christmas. A beautiful solemn High Mass with a great deal of discussion on Mercy Sunday; *Awesome!* The church was established in 1877. The wooden church was replaced with the current building in 1916. This area, a long time ago, was mostly German settlers. The L & N Railroad in 1877 donated the city block, now home of Sacred Heart Church (SHC), School and Parrish home and office. In the beginning SHC was just a small sodden building. The school, likewise, was a two-story edifice. The parish priests, German speaking, lived in an old pre-existing house on the property. The stone church was dedicated in 1916 and the stone school not until the 1940's. The church is an example of German Revival of the Romanesque style. The church faintly resembles the cruciform style in the fact that the eastern end of the church is slightly wider giving a somewhat crucifix look to the building. The Saturday night that we attended Mass the setting sun was brightly shining through the stain glass window up in the organ loft. The setting sun was dead center in the circular window was directly in line with the tabernacle of the alter, priceless!



The church has a total 24 stain class windows surrounding the church. They were created by the Von Gerichter Ecclesiastic Studio of Columbus, Ohio. They were built in Munich, Germany in 1914. This was, as you might have guessed, the era of World War I. As each window was built and completed the window company would bury them in hopes of shipping them back to the USA once the war was over around 1920. In 1999 the church went through an extensive restoration project. The asbestos shingles were replaced with a fish scale pattern.

The steeples, gutters and down-spouts required 23 tons of zinc and 600 pounds of solder to complete the job. There are over 4000 shingles on each steeple and the high roof. The original crosses on each of the steeples were replaced with gold crosses. The steeples and gold crosses are now a Cullman landmark. The school was established in 1878. By 1879 the enrollment was up to 100 students. The new stone school was dedicated in 1950 and currently enrolls 160 students' grades 3K thru 6th. In 1977 the first German Festival in the City of Cullman was begun commemorating the schools 100th anniversary. Cullman now celebrates Oktoberfest and has become an annual event thanks to the school.

Please don't think we're a couple of holy holies. *En Contrere!* Carla and I are fully aware of just how fortunate we are to be experiencing such an awesome lifestyle. In response it's only fair to give Him a thought, now and then. We enjoy life and are fully aware that we owe Him a big thank you every day as well as my brother Dennis for watching over the home fires, as we travel.

With still a great deal of time to kill we walk the streets of Cullman, even a furniture store; glad we no longer have a home to contend with. Across the street was the All Steak Restaurant. And enjoyed onion rings and drinks. In order to fulfill the Mercy Sunday obligations confession was next followed by the Saturday Vigil Mercy mass.

Prior to mass we had a chance to talk with some parishioners. Turns out this day, April 11, marked the 4th anniversary of one of Alabama's worst tornadoes. Two tornadoes. They struck the town and leveled a good portion of it. All this leads up to a couple of very interesting stories. One parishioner had a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in front a big oak tree. Their house was in the path of the tornado. When it was all over the tree had been uprooted from the ground, the statue, home and all the kids play items had not been dislodged. Not a shingle was off the home, but all around the home; devastation! The storm destroyed many of the buildings in town but the three Catholic Churches in the path of the storm experienced no damage at all; no tiles off the roof and no windows were broken. Alabama is only 3% Catholic. Time for Mass. A beautiful solemn High Mass with a great deal of discussion on Mercy Sunday; *Awesome!*



This picture of the Merciful Heart of Jesus greets everyone as they enter the church. Mercy Sunday, the Sunday after Easter is very important to Carla and I.

Thanks to Saint Faustina and the wisdom of Pope John II for championing the Mercy Sunday cause and bringing this to the Catholic populace. We were so fortunate to find ourselves attending a church, one-hour trip from our camp, so very involved in the Mercy Sunday celebrations. Mercy Sunday. We leave the coach around 10 and arrive in Cullman around 11, yes, an hour travel time. Once again, we have time to till. Decide to go to the church and take pictures prior to the people arriving for the service; *done!* Next stop will again be the Steak House from Saturday. This time we tried their famous Orange Roll; Delicious! Now 2pm and time to head for the church. The celebration of Mercy Sunday service was priceless. Father Egan was the celebrant and did an awesome job of explaining in detail the fine points needed to obtain the plenary indulgences available to those in attendance.

13th Monday.

Rain and our monthly mail arrived. Doesn't happen as often as we would like but Abby sent us a text, then another and another. Yes, school was in session but the class had to watch a movie, so she decided to get in touch. It was great hearing from her but after two texts we stopped just so she would not get detention. Tuesday, as expected we had rain most of the evening, but sunny skies prevail right now, with heavy clouds intermingled. Before it begins to rain again Carla wanted to take a walk and see another section of Hidden Cove. I could see the river behind us but did not think there was a way to get there, wow! Tomorrow we hope to get an early start and visit the Shrine of the Blessed Sacrament.

4.15.2015-Shrine of the Blessed Sacrament

We spent a full day at this awesome venue. The day started at the Castle of St. Michael. It was there that we were given the schedule for the day. Actually, we snuck in with a bus tour and hung out with them since they were nice enough to pay for a guided tour of this beautiful place. This building was built to reflect the architecture of the 13th Century.



Enjoy some of the pictures of this great hall, The Castle San Miguel. The inscription reads: *The Castle was built to complement the architecture of the 13th Century Temple. We pray that the Great Hall will inspire you to imitate the valor, the chivalry, the honor and the courage of both the Saints and Knights. May you obtain from the Lord God as you leave this place, a new spirit of scourge and strength to define and defend the faith.*



Upper Church. The Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament was the life's work of Sister Angelica. She is also the founder of EWTN, The Eternal World Television Network. Pictures are not permitted either at the upper church and lower church, but I had already taken some pictures of the lower altar before I was informed of that. This "Temple" was built for the perpetual adoration of Our Lord present in the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Most Blessed Sacrament. In most churches the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may occur during certain times of the year; Here the exposition all day long, every day of the year.



Mother Angela died Easter Sunday 2016



The story of interventions and visions to build this Temple is inspirational and spans almost 40 years. Mother Angelica was part of a cloistered group of nuns. Her pilgrimage began in 1962 when she founded a Monastery in Irondale, AL. In 1972, after viewing a Baptist Tele-evangelical Network a few years earlier, she knew she "wanted one of her own" networks. After many years of asking for donations she finally established The Eternal World Television Network. This television network is televised in 140 nations throughout the world, but the creation of the "Temple" would take a little more time and a lot more money. As the story goes the Christ Child with arms outstretched spoke to her, when she was visiting in Spain. There is a plaque at the bottom of the monument. She heard the statue talk to her in the voice of a young boy saying, " Build me a Temple and I will help those who help you."

The nuns in her care were able to acquire the funding needed to purchase the 380 acres in Hanceville, AL., but building a Temple would require a great deal more money. *God provides when asked and through the generosity of five families, she would be gifted with Fifty Million Dollars to begin her building program.* Not confirmed, but story has it that the funds were provided from the Bob Hope families and foundation. There may have been other families involved but this is all I was told.

Lower Church

On December 19, 1999 after almost four years of construction the Temple of the Divine Child Jesus, Our Lady of the Angels Monastery and the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament were consecrated. Our Lady of the Angels Monastery is part of the upper and lower churches. This is a cloistered order, so they have a very secluded life. The monastery was built to house as many as forty nuns but currently they have around fifteen. The Order of Poor Clare's of Perpetual Adoration. Just a word or two about these nuns. Joining the order requires high school diploma or GED certificate; sounds simple enough! What happens next is worth mentioning. First a girl contemplating a life with this order will write a letter and ask if she could visit.



If yes, and it usually is, she will appear on a designated time and date and knock on this door located on the same level as the Upper Church. This door cannot be opened from the outside, only from the inside can it be opened to welcome a scheduled guest. The girl is welcome to spend if three months at the Monastery. She will participate in all the activities of the nuns. After three months she will be asked to leave and return home for a short period of time, I think three weeks, to contemplate whether she wants to follow through on becoming a nun.

If she decides to continue her studies in the Monastery she will return to the Monastery with her parents. She will do all the hugs, kisses and goodbyes at the unopened door to the Monastery but once the door opens, she must walk directly into the Monastery and *must not look back*. This is just the first step for the novitiate to turn herself over to the order and a lifelong dedication to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Nuns at the Monastery do have the privilege to visit with parents in the sanctioned room though a small window in a designated room. Arrangements can be made for parents and family members to visit for up to three days on the Temple grounds. The entire indoctrination period takes either seven or eight years (forgot which). The child can leave the Monastery and return to the secular life at any time during that period. The order may recommend not continuing with the candidate or possibly transferring her to another order or location they feel she may be better suited for. After the indoctrination period the girl will enter Our Lady of the Angels Monastery. Life as a cloister is not what I recall from the past.

They do get up and 5:30 in the morning (that would kill it for me) and go to Mass at 6am every day. They have studies, work duties and of course their participation in the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at some time of the day. The alter in the upper church sits up against a wall that stretches from one side of the church to the other. There's no entering the back side at all. This is where the nuns fulfill their dedication to the Adoration. The public, as we did, may hear the nuns praying and singing on the back side of the partition. At times during the day they may communicate with one another, eat meals together and believe it or not, watch some TV or preselected channels, EWTN being one of them, of course. During the day they also have time allotted for play, if they want.

The Nativity Scene: Up until a couple of years ago the Nativity Chapel stood open to the outside. Thanks to donations and, possibly some cash left over from the building fund, the chapel was expanded. All the figures in the Nativity Chapel were made in Germany. It was in the Nativity Chapel that we were able to fill containers of Holy Water.



The inscription on the outside of the Nativity Chapel reads; *"and the word was made flesh for you."*. The new venue looks like this from the outside and has a "cave-like" look in the inside. The Crucifixion: To fully appreciate all aspects of the life of Christ we must consider the Crucifixion.

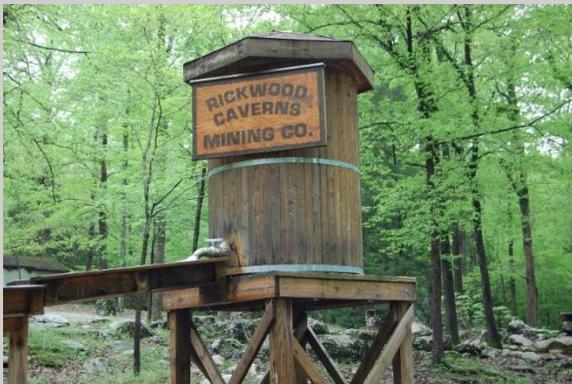


The scourging of our Lord depicted above was replicated from the particulates and stains found on the Shroud of Turin.

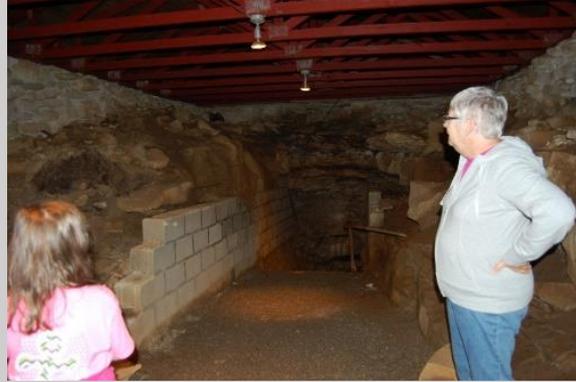


The TAU Cross: The top-most part of the cross was struck by lightning. Mother Angelica took it as a sign from Heaven and instructed the engineers not to fix the cross, but rather, leave it as the Lord, she felt, wanted it. As it turns out this type of cross, one without a top, is not new but has been around for centuries. As customary we leave the gift shop till last. It is huge, but it will be getting bigger in the next couple of years. As with every venue we visit there's always a time when we must leave. This is a venue for the entire family, and it will take most of the day to fully explore all that is here.

4.16.2015-Rockwood Caverns was about a one-hour drive from the campground in Arley, AL but well worth the ride.



My pictures don't show the parking area for campers, but this is a state park and it does have excellent camping sites for campers in the RVs. Today, as always, the Winnebago remains at the campground and the Chevy does all the traveling. If you look closely, you'll even find picnic benches. Not sure what the park offers campers for utilities, like electric, water and sewer. It does have a very nice pool. Only negative is that the pool water comes from the cavern and the cavern water temperature is around 55 degrees; says it for a swim. As the sign on the water tank tells us, this used to be a mining operation many years ago.



It's just a short walk, up a hill, to reach the cavern entrance. Then you proceed to walk down for a bit.



And our trek begins here. The little munchkin to the left belongs to Tim and his family. His family of six joined us and made the journey that much more interesting.



From the parking lot attendant to the staff in the office, everyone was under twenty; says it for making us feel older than we are. Our guide is extremely knowledgeable.



This cavern was born about 600 million years ago. Back then it was in the molten stage, as was most of the planet. Then about 300 million years later to continents had solidified and as we discussed in the Stone Mountain blog, the continent of Africa was floating around and smashed into North America, forming Stone Mountain in Georgia and had a lot to do with the formation of this cavern. Under the crest of the earth, rock did not always fill in all the spaces.



In the photo above, once the state purchased the property from the mining company, men worked in the cavern installing lighting and clearing the walkways making it safer for tourist to experience this venue. A slew of rocks was a result so in this case they built a loosely stacked rock wall. Trying to find points of interests in a cavern could be challenging. Park officials want us to note this seemingly small chunk of granite is doing its part in holding up the rock ceiling above us. None of us attempted to touch the rock.



This flat out-reaching rock you see in front of us is the "drum rock." We all took turns pounding away on it to validate its name. We were told this rock above was a rock representation of a gator. Everyone pondered that thought, but even the kids thought it was a stretch.



Not often, but in times like this, it is nice to be short. On the ceiling you will find baby stalactites. Question- *How long does it take a stalactite to grow "ONE" inch?*



We are really getting into the belly of the hole. The cavern has three natural bridges. This was the first.



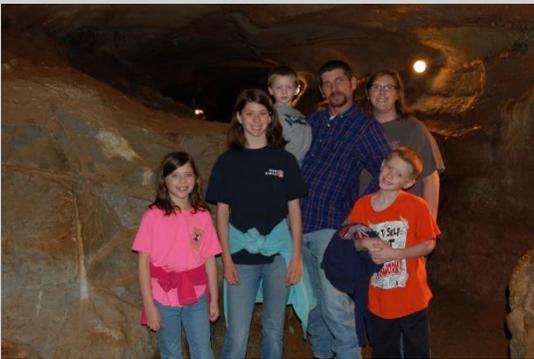
This was the second. Still traveling further into this labyrinth of stone.



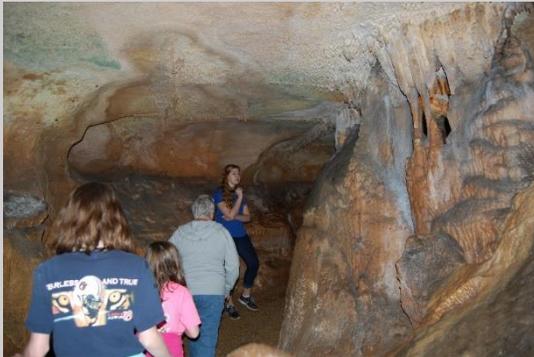
Time to go down a little deeper. What else...time to go up now. At this point we are about 200 feet underground *and no you cannot receive a phone call underground!*



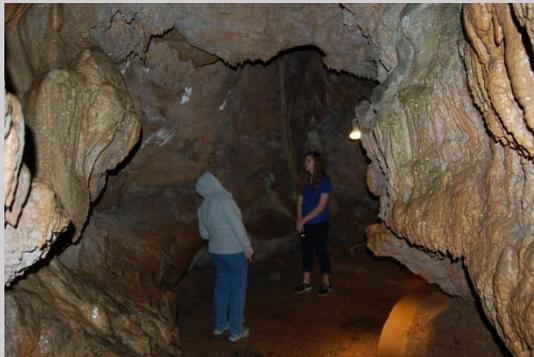
This is an example of a stalactites which over millions of years joined up with a stalagmite, which as we all remember, grows from the bottom up. Oh! About the growth answer....**ONE HUNDRED YEARS** to grow one inch; *priceless!* A young stalactite and stalagmites joining together. How old is it? I did not ask.



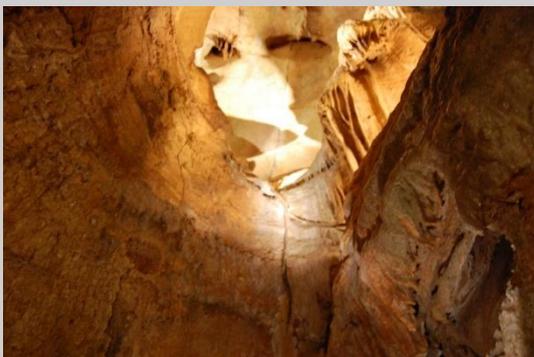
Tim's family. *Oh, to be young again!* Many of us might do things differently. This was an idea gone bad. Originally it was going to be an elevator shaft, but given more thought, the park decided otherwise. We are now at the very bottom of the cavern. This was also once an ocean bed, *yes Ocean!*



Walking uphill, must be a good sign. Go figure, going down again.



No significance, just a picture. We've been told, we're almost there. It took 375 steps to reach the lowest level.



This cavern has been designated as a fall-out shelter. It can support 1100 people for many months.



This is a stream that runs through the cavern, a definite source of water. Carla sees our way out. It's time to say goodbye to our guide.

4.22.2015-Hard to believe in just four days we'll be getting the coach ready to hit the road again, this time off to Middleton, TN, another "Equity Properties" campground, called Cherokee Landing. Equity LifeStyle Properties owns several large campgrounds; Thousand Trails, Encores, Resort Parks Intl and Enjoy America. We get huge discounts if we chose any of these parks to stay at. One of the pleasures of this lifestyle is meeting all those we camp with. Just met my next-door neighbor. His coach is so awesome. A diesel pusher, Tuscany, about 40 foot.



Like I said it's a diesel but what got my attention was the mini compressor he was using to add air to his tires. Tires for coaches cost around \$700 apiece, so maintaining them is vital. He was using a "Viair" compressor, something, I think, we'll buy for the coach next Christmas. It's a little expensive, around \$350, so we'll see what the checkbook looks like at that time. He and his wife are planning to leave this Friday and we're leaving on Monday. He'll be camping next at a campground west of Memphis and we'll be staying at Cherokee Landing just east of Memphis. Hopefully we'll meet up with them again in the future.

4.23.2015-Natural Bridge-In Natural Bridge, AL

It's now Thursday before we leave this coming Monday. Thought this would be just another quiet day at home, think again. We don't get much exercise so it's on the road to Natural Bridge, AL to see their Natural Bridge.



The Natural Bridge is not going to be on anyone's "must see" list, but it's here and we really could use the exercise. The pictures, as usual, will do most of the talking. What we'd like to do in this journal is to bring you along with us on a virtual walk to visit this unusual creation of nature. Watch you step here, we're almost there.



You've got to admit it's awesome. And there it is, The Natural Bridge. It gets its name, naturally, because it is one huge rock formed like a bridge. This location is in a portion of the Appalachian Mountains. I can almost envision Indians and possibly earlier inhabitants calling this place home and a refuge from the elements. The population of Natural Bridge, AL is under one hundred. I can't even imagine living in a town that small.



As we spoke of in the Stone Mountain journal, this too is a byproduct of the physical makeup of Mother Nature some two hundred million years ago. The town itself was incorporated just before 1900 and has had several names from time to time. It was only one hundred million years ago this stone and the matter around it was in a molten stage and now, one-hundred-million years later nature is beginning to cool off and solidify in unique forms and thanks to Africa it is now above the ground. At the same time, remember, Africa slowly smashed into North America and the pressure it exerted forced boulders, rocks and everything else up from the depths of the earth to rise above the surface. This pressure is not just being felt in this small hamlet, but also in the Arizona desert, remember the Grand Canyon and is also responsible for the many hills and mountain ranges we have in this country; thanks Africa!



Now to get back to this location. Boulders all around here were forcefully pushed up from way down under and this Natural Bridge, once buried way down under in this "bridge form" has also been forced to the surface. At this point we will continue our hike and hopefully see additional creations of nature. I will pipe in occasionally to make a comment or two, but it's a picture story. The striations and pockets in these boulders are a function of the molten boulder forming around dirt and smaller rocks.



Over time mother nature has cleaned the dirt and rocks that were imbedded in the boulder and what you get are these designs. The moss, growing on this rock and everywhere else, is as a result of a very heavy canopy of trees and their leaves, not to mention the infusion of moisture from above ground streams falling off these rocks. This venue is known as a private park. The bridge is made up of sandstone and iron ore. Only looks like I'm getting wet, what concerns me more is the cliff I'm standing next to.



This is another one of those locations, like the Flume Gorge we wrote about in my 2014 book. A great place to bring the family but in many spots navigating the terrain can be challenging, not to mention dangerous. We were told that kids will often come here and climb the rocks and walk over the bridge area.



Yup! Rocks abound here. This tree, if you look closely at the very bottom, (about the south-east position) is mostly eaten away and if you look into the large hole in this tree you'll also see a smaller hole inside.

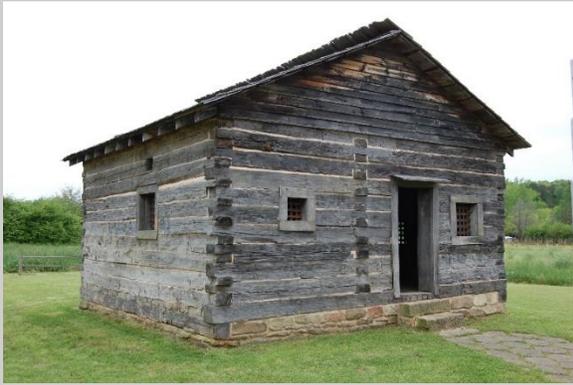


During heavy rains we've been told it's a very beautiful sight to see huge volumes of water wash over these rock formations. In the next picture the walkway is very steep, the picture does not do it justice. Dress properly to tackle this passage, especially climbing shoes. We hope you try to enjoy this venue in person sometime in the future, it will not disappoint.

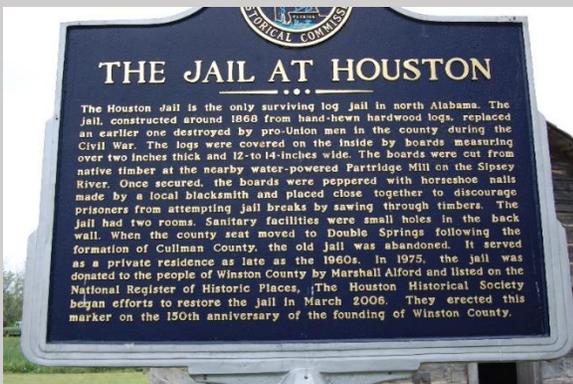


4.23.2015-Houston Jail, Houston, AL

Still energized, we're off to Houston; Houston, AL that is! Yes, there's something called the Houston Jail; bet you just can't wait!



Don't judge it until you finish reading. A plaque, courtesy of the Houston Historical Commission, stated that the county was created on Feb. 12, 1850. I took a picture to bring to your attention the system used in those days, over one-hundred-fifty years ago, to provide bathroom facility for the inmates inside. Those would be the "round" openings below the windows.



Courtesy of the Houston Historical Commission. The jail was built in 1868 but a new one was built in 1884 so this one was closed. This story is about the original jail. Three dudes were important during those days, they were; John Anthony Winston was Alabama's 15th Governor. On a more serious note he was instrumental in establishing the Alabama Public School System in 1854 and then typical of any politician Hancock County was changed to Winston County in 1858. He was also a Colonel in the Confederate Army.



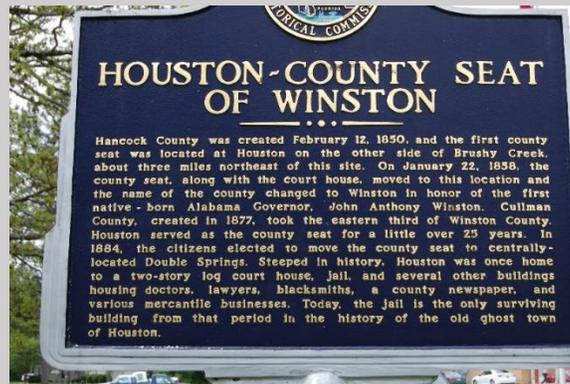
I read it twice and not much there, Richard Elliott Payne was a Confederate Officer and then after the war he went into banking and began printing his own money on brown paper; *wonder how that went?* Willis Farris was Winston County's first Sheriff from 1850 to 1853, and then again 1859 to 1865. Later he was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives.



Everyone in this picture is related to Willis Farris. The gal in the orange top is the great, great granddaughter to Willis. The lady in blue is his daughter and others are brothers and related folks. Willis was born in this county 201 years ago and these are his family; priceless! Pictures of the jail. Ok...a rhetorical question! In the picture below. What, do you think, the purpose was for having an opening cut into the wall? Just thinking outside the box on this; it might also be used by an outside person passing a knife or even a gun go the prisoner inside the cell. But No! It's a potty hole.



In the picture below, look closely and notice all the symmetrical marks on the walls and ceiling. Any ideas? Those are hundreds of nails for a very specific purpose; what? Using nails in the walls and ceiling discouraged an outsider from trying to free a prisoner by sawing him out of jail. And this was way before high pressure nail guns.



4.24.2015-We are expecting very heavy rains this evening. Just got back to the coach. Took a little walk down by the water again and met up with neighbors fishing. They originate from Arizona and will be visiting the Wisconsin Dells about the same time as us in a few weeks. Our neighbors in the Tuscany coach left early this morning heading West of Memphis, TN. Next day, 25th was wet again. What a horrific rain downpour we had last night. I was up with Scoots from 3am till after 4am, long night. Coach did well.

4.27.2015-Cherokee Landing, Middleton, TN

Left Hidden Cove in Arley and arrived in Cherokee Landing, in Middleton, TN. We're in a location that's short on amenities like sewer, that will change on Wed or Thursday when we will move over by the pool side of the campground.



We arrived here on Monday. It's really relaxing, but I can only imagine how this place hops during the season. As in most of our campgrounds, it's an Equity LifeStyle Property. And we all know what that means; security gates, good sites, great locations and with many camping plans for little to no camp fee expenses-*priceless!* This is our new resting place. Don't be alarmed we did not get handicapped on our trip up here. The site was available and we we're told we could have it if we wanted it.



We will be moving to a better site on Thursday! I can only imagine you're saying, there he goes again with the "FREE" talk, you're right! It's important, especially for those of us on fixed incomes. It's very similar to when your family were on vacation with your three kids. You can't tell me your heart begin to race when you read "kids sleep free." Even more so when you read "kids under eight EAT FREE." Bet you never read: "FAMILIES SLEEP FREE or almost free." Yes, that would have been nice. Just think about how much traveling you could have done if it weren't for all those motel fees. This is the option Equity LifeStyles Properties offers everyone. The opportunity to stay at some very nice campgrounds for free, almost free, half price and some at just ten dollars a night; and I'm talking hundreds of locations. Not all Encore campgrounds are alike, but something I've noticed...they do an awesome job of finding properties with great looking lakes or river views.



At the time of our arrival there were up to four campers in the park, including us. We woke up this morning to find the motorhome a few sites down from us pulling in his slides and getting ready to leave. Honestly, our TV was not that loud last night *whatever!* Two days later we learned what they had learned, there were sites that offered sewer on the other side of the lake... *priceless!* Not that this would have been a problem. By the way, our over-the-air TV reception is excellent here. That's us in the distance. ...Like with most RVers we would have survived nicely. It would, however, be very nice if the campground offered a honey wagon service, as we had in Wauchula. Either way it would not have been a deal breaker. Tomorrow we're going to see if we can use a canoe or rent one.



This bridge was so inviting from a distance and did not disappoint when we got closer. This bridge begins at the clubhouse and crosses a small retention-pond to an area of rental cabins. We'll be moving just down the road from here on Thursday.



Something that never disappoints is the staff at all these campgrounds; kind, considerate and very helpful. On the flip side, except for Hidden Cove Campground, WI-FI at most parks barely get a passing grade. At Hidden Cove, believe it or not, we had good, fast and service so extraordinary, in the comfort of our coach. To RVers WI-FI is so important. Having it in your motorhome at the breakfast table; *Awesome!* Plenty of table space and plenty of books and magazines to read. The WI-FI at Cherokee Landing is not available in your coach and is barely active in the clubhouse...



Disappointing! Why can't a campground be outfitted with Wi-Fi systems that have proven themselves in similar properties? Great area to picnic or just contemplate life for a few minutes. Inside the clubhouse. The lower level is called the Crow's Nest.



It's been awhile since we've shot a game of pool; not that it would have made a difference in our performance. The camping bungalows on this side of the pond. The best part of staying at another campground is the friends we get to meet. Some will only be a memory, others will pop up from time to time at different parks, then there are those you meet and stay in touch with, at least from time to time.



We met and keep in touch with Sandy. A solo female RVer who this year had set a goal for herself to travel to every state in Continental America. We connected with her in early 2016 and she had accomplished her goal. Right now, I believe, she's hanging out on the West Coast for a few months.



What a great day for the last day of the month. Before we had our last cup of coffee, we decided to pack up the coach and move it to the other side of the Campground where they have sewer options, and the campers have been coming in right and left. Early morning, we had three neighbors, the count is up to seven. Our new home, after moving from our original location in no-man's land. To our left is a 2013 Winnebago, Sandy's Motorhome. We spent most of the afternoon exchanging stories and then another couple owning a C-Class joined us as we shuffled over to Sandy's coach. Then it was off to the town of Walnut, TN to find a neighborhood Walmart and their Redbox. **That's Sandy's coach behind ours in the picture. It's like ours, a Winnebago, but much newer.** Time for us to try to find our way back to the coach. This walk was Heavenly! Come and visit next time you're in the area.

4.29.2015- Met up with Denis Van De Wield and his wife Andrea. They're Equity Lifestyles salespersons. Offering vacation plans has piqued my interest since we met the folks in Orlando. It must be equally as rewarding as listing and selling childcare centers. John Robinson is the contact person and I'll be at least touching base with him possibly this week, for a little more information. Next year it's our hope to travel Alaska, but after that, most likely, we'll be serious campers.