

**Southwest Trip Journal of Al and Maren Schober
April 4 - April 19, 2008**

Friday, April 4, 2008 Hartford, Conn. to Phoenix, Arizona to Sedona

"Real Men Wear Kilts"

Wow. This is the day. It is finally here! We are actually going to do this. For years I have dreamed of someday getting out to the Southwest to visit the Grand Canyon and our other National Parks...to see this vast land of ours...and today is the day. Al has always wanted to see the Mesa Verde cliff dwellings of the ancient Indians and he is very excited too. Dreams do come true.

Once again we are traveling with our good friends Bob and Earlene Chasse of Maine. We have planned this trip together.

Our day starts at 2:00 a.m. with the shrill ring from our clock radio. This is serious. We can not delay. We have a plane to catch. We dress, close up our suitcases, gulp down some juice and we are out the door.

The car ride to Bradley Airport in Hartford takes an hour. It is pitch black out, windy and cold. We drop our car off and take the valet van service to the airport. Checking in ahead of me is a woman with shining eyes.

"We are flying to Vegas", she tells me with a wide grin. "They have 24 hour a day Bingo there. I love Bingo!"

Al and I are flying to Denver for our first "leg" of the trip. I look out the plane window and see the sunrise. After a few hours we arrive in Denver and see the snow capped peaks of the Rocky Mountains to the West. It is beautiful.

We change planes and soon we are on our way to Phoenix, Arizona. Beneath our plane rise the snow peaked mountaintops. I can hardly take my eyes away from this awesome sight. I take out my rosary and offer prayers of thanks to God. Misunderstanding me Al remarks, "Well, whatever works."

He thinks I am panicking!

We set our watches 2 hours back. From that time on we are never sure of the time as we drift from one time zone to another on our trip! The correct time is an allusive thing and frankly it didn't matter. For once we can forget about the time.

Coming in for a landing at Phoenix was very interesting because we could see the city of Phoenix appeared to be in a deep bowl of a valley surrounded by mountains. Our watches get set back another hour. We collect our baggage and wait for Bob and Earlene to arrive.

I try not to stare at a fellow passenger who looks unique. His hair is long and curly and he is dressed in kilt, shirt, shoes and knee socks. "Real Men Wear Kilts" is printed out across his shirt. I have to smile.

Al and I notice limousine drivers holding up signs as they get their group together.

"I'll make a sign for Bob and Earlene," Al says.

He finds a black marker and prints out a sign saying, "Chasse" on it. When we spot Bob and Earlene coming down the escalator, Al holds up the sign. They see it immediately and get a good laugh over it.

We hug each other warmly...gad, it is good to see them.

We check in with our car rental company, "Advantage". Walking to the rental center, I become lost! Al and Bob and Earlene take the escalator down and I take the elevator down. I step out of the elevator at a different place. Where are the others? I wander around and around until I hear, "Yoo Hoo! Up here"! We finally get together and soon we are heading out of Phoenix in our Chrysler mini van. We are on the way and it is afternoon.

We are heading north to Sedona and we are hungry. We come to a sign that says, "Black Canyon City" and Earlene speaks up,

"Let's get off here. " (Earlene is our main planner and navigator.) They have a Rock Spring Cafe here. Good food."

As we are exiting a billboard appears that reads, "Byler's Amish Kitchen".

Al and I become unglued and together we shout, "Byler's Amish Kitchen! Let's go there! We want to go there!" (Bob and Earlene are wondering what this is all about.)

Al is driving and he whisks us into the parking lot where we jump out and enter the "Amish Kitchen." You see Al and I have this "thing" about Byler's. When we were in love and dating at my college in Pennsylvania, we took bike rides out into the Amish countryside and passed many a "Byler" mailbox. We joked that they were all Bylers out there.

So here we are now in Byler's Amish Kitchen in Arizona. What are they doing out here? It turns out that this family came out from Ohio many years ago and started up this Amish restaurant. We sit down feeling right at home and have a good lunch.

Nothing prepares us for the red rocks towering over the city of Sedona! As we approach there they are rising up high and mighty dwarfing the town below. All sizes and shapes, these red rocks are everywhere. We check in to our motel and feel the peace seep into us. The rocks and surrounding area are a sacred place. We each feel it. It is in the air and all around us. We learn that they whole area used to be under water many years ago, buried in the sea.

I am anxious to meet my "Garland" cousins, so after checking into our Kokopelli motel, we drive out to "Garland's Jewelry Store". I have distant cousins living in Sedona and I can't wait to meet them.

When we arrive at the store, I am very disappointed to learn that Dan, Jr. and his family have all gone off for the week-end to a family wedding! But we are told one "Garland" is here. He is Gary Garland, owner of the Garland Lodge down the road. We do not leave immediately; the Navajo jewelry in this store is an extensive and impressive display! We browse around and I buy a ring for myself and something special for my sister, Kris. Al also buys a ring for himself, a Navajo story ring. I am happy to own a piece of jewelry from the story owned by my cousins.

We then drive down the road and cross over the running brook leading to the Garland Lodge. We actually drive through the brook a short ways. How neat is that.

The Garland Lodge is set in the hills among the towering rocks. It is a lovely location and includes an Inn and rental lodges. The longstanding chef, we learned, serves one meal an evening. It is home-cooked and very delicious we learn.

Gary and his wife Mary do not expect us. Mary greets us hesitantly as I launch into the explanation of who I am! Gary arrives and we chat further. Apparently Dan, Jr. has not told them we were coming. I give them the autobiography my mother has written and show them on page 77 where my mother explains how the family started from my great uncle Charlie Isham when her left Cincinnati and started a new life in Flagstaff, Arizona. Gary Garland is my second cousin. They both warm as they learn about our family and we have a long chat with them. Mary writes down for us places to see along our route and especially the great eating spots along the way that offer home cooking. We are grateful for the suggestions and take our leave - out and through the brook again. Before we leave we do walk around behind the Lodge and up the hill to the orchard and gardens. It is very lovely.

Back in Sedona we have supper at "Pago's Italian Restaurant" and then flop into bed in our motel. With the time change, it has been a very long day, but a wonderful one. A great start in our trip.

Saturday, April 5th Sedona, Arizona, Red Rock Chapel, Jerome, Verde Canyon Railroad Ride

"Be still and know."

Today is our first full day in Arizona. I walk outside our motel room and stare straight ahead. Am I dreaming?! Right outside our motel stand the most beautiful red rock formations. They are huge and towering. I feel like a dwarf next to them. I want to run to them and spend time with them, but first things first.

After breakfast we head for "Food City" where we stock up on snacks for the next several days. These snacks will be our car lunches during our road trips. This will save us much time as we spend our days sightseeing. None of us want to stop midday for a restaurant lunch...we want to keep moving, to see all we can see.

Bob and Al take turns each day driving the van. Earlene is the Navigator. I am the spontaneous, "Stop here! We need to see this."

We take a drive looking at the red rocks of Sedona. We drive back and forth looking at these towering beauties from all angles. We decide to make two stops and the first is the "Chapel Of The Holy Cross" nestled into the red rock

mountainside. It is a hike up the winding paved walkway to the door of the chapel and the walk feels like a pilgrimage. The sacredness of this red rock area is tangible. It can almost be touched and felt. We fall silent in this holy atmosphere which surrounds us. Speech is senseless. Feeling is everything. The red rocks are close by and towering over us and they seem to speak a message to us. It is mystical, an inspired place. A young woman sits yoga style on top the stone wall in front of the chapel, her face lifted to the sun, deep blue sky and red rocks. This area of Sedona is known to be full of "vortex" spots. Places of silence and inspiration. This woman has found her vortex and taking advantage of it. I would like to do the same, but can not. But that does not mean the peace and serenity of this place does not seep into me. It is impossible to ignore and who wants to? This area is steeped in history and voices from the past seem to hang over everything. The spiritual life is as close to us as our physical life. God is ever so near and His message is clear.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know that I.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Moved by what we see and feel we move on after spending some time inside the chapel and outside soaking in the peace and beauty of this spot.

Back in the van, Bob drives us up a mountain to visit the old resurrected mining town of "Jerome". It is now more of a tourist spot with lots of visitors squeaking their cars into tight parking places, walking the narrow streets and poking into small shop doorways. We simply stop briefly and admire the view down the mountain into the valley.

"Let's go further up the mountain," Bob says. We find ourselves once again in the van winding further up the mountain on twisting narrow roads. None of us want to look over the edge. There are no guard rails to try and keep vehicles from cascading down the mountainside. We fall silent as Bob guides the van ever higher and higher. Fervent prayer hangs in the air.

"We don't have time to go higher, we need to get back to Clarkdale for our train ride. I will turn around at the next possible place."

You have got to be kidding! Turn around here?! Where?! Bob finds a tiny place to attempt the turn around. Earlene and I hold our breaths. Inch forward, inch backward, inch forward, inch backward. Are we going to make it? With one big turn of the wheel we make the turn high up on the mountain. Earlene and I let out a loud collective sigh of relief. We can breathe again.

Winding our way to the bottom of the mountain, we drive on to Clarkdale where our train is ready. We take our seats for the 4 hour train ride into the Verde Canyon. The train is a long one and winds slowly through the desert canyon. We move out to the open air cars and watch the sights unfold. A guide

points out specific sights..."Look up there. Do you see the eagle on her nest?" He sees what the rest of us can not see. Most of us never see anything he points out! It is too distant and hidden from our untrained eyes.

"Over there! Do you see the blue heron? There is an osprey. Look sharp! Up ahead is "elephant rock". Do you see it? This rock takes the shape of an angel. Can you see it? It is said the angle looks over the valley and protects it."

Whether we see "it" or not, we are enjoying being outdoors and seeing things we have never seen before.

Close to the end of our run, I spot something the guide seems to miss!

"Look over there," I say. "It looks like we are being "mooned"! Sure enough a young man has dropped his pants and is showing us his bare backside. His "moons" gleam in the sun. There is no mistaking.

"Oh yes," says our guide, sheepishly. " He is always there for the train. He loves doing it."

There are all sorts of tourists on this train with us. The ones that caught our eyes most were the "lovers". They only had eyes for each other. Constantly enfolding each other, snuggling and kissing, they seem oblivious to their surroundings most of the time. "Love is blind" they say.

"I wonder where they went after the train ride," Bob muses aloud.

"They probably went to their car and finished things," I commented. No one argued with that.

This is the end of one wonderful day.

Sunday April 6th Sedona, Airport Mesa, Red Rock State Park, Sunset Crater, Wupatki Ruins

"It's only a rental, only a rental!"

Before breakfast, I take a walk in the nearby neighborhood of houses. One house has a sculptured lizard decoration sticking to the house shingles near the front door! This is a sign that lizards are plentiful out here.

We go to a gas station to gas up the van.

"I washed the windshield, " Bob declares proudly.

"I know," answers Al. "It came over the car and sprayed my eyeglasses! I thank you for that."

After breakfast at the motel we drive up the long winding hill to what is known as Airport Mesa in Sedona. From the top of this hill, which also holds a private airport, we look out at the majestic red rocks of Sedona and down on the town of Sedona below. This is another of those VS's (vortex spots). I think anywhere close to those red rocks is a VS! All is still and silence and the town of Sedona looks like a miniature village down below. From this perspective, Sedona is just a speck on the ground below...of little significance. What really is felt is

the spiritual power all around us and this lasts as long as we are among the rocks.

A mother comes and stands beside me holding her young son by the hand. They stand in silence some moments in awesome wonder as we all do and then,

"Look at those rocks," she says to her boy. "How do they make you feel? Don't they make you feel small and unimportant? Isn't it wonderful to know that there is something greater than ourselves here? Don't you just feel that? That is why it is good to come and see these places. It makes us know that we are not very important in the face of all this nature. When we have problems we can look at these rocks and know it doesn't really matter. The problems are not problems up here. They will go away. These rocks teach us this lesson. It is good to be still and appreciate this truth."

I feel like I have just listened to a sermon and I am not even in church! Strange, I feel like I am in a worship service, only it is outside.

On the way back down the hill to the town below, we stop once again at a scenic place and walk around the rocks. On top of one of the rocks sits another woman with face and hands lifted up to the sun. She has found her vortex spot.

Earlene and I walk around with our heads down looking at the ground...looking for glimpses of the first spring mountain wild flowers.

"Look! Over there," shouts Earlene. "Some yellow flowers. We go running over and lean way over to take a close up picture of some tiny yellow flowers.

"I see some purple ones over there," I shout. We rush over for a close up picture.

"Do you see the white ones?!" And so it goes.

Bob watches us with unbelieving eyes. He scratches his head and I know he thinks Earlene and I have "lost it". I think he believes we are looking at a bunch of weeds!

There are so many different kinds of cactus plants along the sides of the roads and over the land. The type we see the most is the "prickly pear" cactus with its round shapes. Indians extract juices from the cactus but have to get to the center first.

We drive over to Red Rock State Park and when we arrive at Schnebly Hill Road a large sign warns us to turn around and go back! The road ahead of us is not fit for travel due to winter storm damage. A vote is taken. Al and Bob vote to drive on anyway, and Earlene and I vote to turn around. Isn't that always the way?! Along comes a jeep tour full of tourists in the back and the guide tells us we will probably do all right in our mini van, but to proceed cautiously. That is all the encouragement we need. "Drive on!"

Riiiiight! This dirt road goes from bad to worse quickly as we bounce side to side swerving around pot holes and deep ditches. Al is at the wheel. He will not admit this doesn't seem like a good idea. We come to a ditch in the middle of the road and "bottom out"! Crunch, goes something under the car.

"It's all right. It's all right," Bob says. "It is only a rental. Only a rental." We all take up the theme, "only a rental, only a rental"! We do not succeed in convincing ourselves and soon Al finds a turn off to park the van and announces, "This is as far as I think we should go. Let's all get out and walk up the road a ways."

I have weak feet and can not walk as far as the others, so I stay near the van as the others walk up the hill and come back in about 30 minutes. Then we turn and drive out of the park.

I haven't mentioned the weather yet. Phoenix is in the valley and Sonora desert area and so it is hot there. Sedona is north of Phoenix and very pleasant. In the 60's maybe? We need a light jacket.

Before we leave Sedona we visit the Garland Navajo Rug Store which my cousin owns. It started out as just selling the rugs but they now sell Indian pottery as well.

Have you ever seen a Navajo rug before? If so you know they are Indian made, large and very colorful. The Indian patterns are amazing and brilliant with color. When you look at the price ticket, do not be surprised at the high cost! A very large rug will cost thousands of dollars. Why so much?

A framed sign in the shop tells us why. Total number of hours to make the rugs is approximately 388 hours!!! 260 hours is the actual weaving time and the rest of the hours come from shearing sheep, carding the wool, finding the plants they will use for the colors, dyeing the wool into the bright colors, making the loom, etc.

None of the owners, my cousins are around. The family has all gone off to the wedding this week-end. I am thankful that Gary and Mary Garland at the lodge are home! It was wonderful to meet just one cousin!

We say good-bye to Sedona reluctantly.

On our way to Flagstaff we take the Oak Creek Canyon drive. It twists and turns up and over a mountain and the views from our windows are again breathtaking.

At the top of the mountain we turn off at the look-out, stand and stare at the valley far below us. The road we have just taken looks like a winding snake below.

Navajo Indians have set up long tables to display and sell their crafts at this look-out site. We walk from table to table admiring their artistry and skill in making carved silver and turquoise jewelry. The prices are very low compared to what we see in jewelry stores. I buy two pendants and two rings. I cannot resist! It feels right to be friendly and supportive of these Indians who are poor and work so hard at their crafts to make some money for themselves.

Now we are heading towards Flagstaff.

"There's the painted desert" Earlene points out. Sure enough stretching out in the distance off the road appears a most amazing pastel colored scene. It is what is known as the painted desert. We stop. We take pictures. I am taken

with the brilliant blue sky with white drifting clouds. I point my camera to the sky and "Click"!

Bob turns at the sound and watches me. I know he thinks I have "lost it" again. I am a sure case for the "nut house."

We drive past the painted desert and make two stops. First we stop at the Sunset Crater Volcano and walk around this volcanic ash area. The ground is completely blackened with ash.

Then we drive on and park at the "Wupatki" ruins. Ancient red brick ruins of the Indians. We climb up the small brick steps and peek through holes in the walls into what used to be their living rooms. Some of us can even squeeze into some of these rooms. Not me. However it is fascinating to stand in a crumbling structure that was built so long ago.

We stop for the night at the Cameron Trading Post and, at the suggestion of a friend of Earlene's, we order a "Navajo Taco." Sounds innocent, doesn't it? What can go wrong? I will tell you what can go wrong. The waitress brings out a Navajo taco that is large enough for 4 people to eat. She sets it down in front of Earlene and disappears to get the others. They are equally as huge and filled with all kinds of things...everything but the kitchen sink.

After that we stumble off the bed. Another great day.

Monday April 7th Grand Canyon

"How would I know one if I saw it?"

This is it. This is the day we spend at the Grand Canyon. The "Grand Dame" of all canyons. Just saying the name brings a sense of awe. Who has not heard of the Grand Canyon? Once you see it, you never forget it. The Grand Canyon.

Because I live in New England, I am hoping and praying our days will be sunny with little rain. No problem. We are in the land of perpetual sun and little rain. Blue skies, bright sun and little rain are our constant companions. Such is the Southwest. And the sky is vast. It stretches above us from right to left, front to back as far as the eye can see. So unlike New England. Not better than, just different from. I can not describe the feeling of standing under such a huge dome of open sky. It is a good feeling.

We spend the day following the south rim of the Grand Canyon and making many stops to admire the views of the canyon. The first stop is the most awesome. What can I say? You get out of the car and walk out to the rim of the canyon and stare in disbelief. What we are seeing is unbelievable. What words can I use? Breathtaking. Magnificent. Awesome. Fantastic. It is all of these and much more. But we can't even say the words. Words fail us. We stand in silent wonder. Who? What? How? Who really has all the answers? Later on we visit an Imax Movie Theater and watch an exciting movie trying to answer the questions. It is only a feeble attempt. We understand that we are

looking at the results of thousands of years of erosion and that the tiny ribbon of a river far below known as the Colorado River, is the reason for much of it. The land was once flat but years of river and wind and climate interwoven have carved out the deep canyon walls in front of us. We don't understand how exactly and we don't even care. It doesn't seem important to know all the answers. It is a feeling that it is what it is and it is good.

I have my own personal feelings and I attribute it all to the **Master Designer Of All Ages. King of Kings and Lord of Lords.** That is what makes sense to me. And all my praise and thanks goes to **Him.** Have you ever sung the song, **How Great Thou Art?** If not, you should. The composer of this loved hymn was inspired to write the words and feelings from just such scenes. **America The Beautiful** also comes to mind. We have all sung that in school growing up. I know you have sung that song. When you sing these songs, think on these things.

We spend the whole day at the Grand Canyon at various scenic stops. We never got tired of seeing the same canyon all day. Each view was a little different from the last view.

At one stop we take a walk to the next stop along the rim.

Here we saw something unique going on. A young woman stood near the canyon rim holding her arms out in front of her and twirling a kind of wheel shaped antenna back and forth in the air. It looked very odd. Earlene was the only one brave enough to ask,

"What are you doing?!"

"Oh," she answered, " I am a naturalist and I am trying to track down a California Condor. These birds are almost extinct and I know they are in the area."

"How would I know one if I saw it?" Earlene presses on. This is a good question. A group of tourists have stopped now to listen to the answer.

"This California Condor is huge and has a very wide wing span. The ends of each wing look like fingertips".

We walk on looking upwards for the California Condor.

"I see it," shouts Earlene, and sure enough a couple of them are flying by. One heads right for us and Al grabs our camera, points, aims and clicks. Al gets the perfect picture of the Condor flying not far over our heads! We are thrilled and especially Al!

Not far from the woman tracking the Condors with her antenna, sits an obvious Indian woman on a wall. She is middle aged looking and is wearing the most beautiful bright black and red Indian designed jacket. I think to myself she must have made that herself.

I sit down next to her and strike up a conversation. She is indeed Indian and from California. Her tribe name is long and unfamiliar sounding to me.

"That is my daughter over there who is tracking Condors," she tells me.

I finally get around to the big question.

" Did you make that beautiful jacket yourself?"

My mind is showing me this Indian woman sitting in front of her loom interweaving the black and red strands of wool back and forth, back and forth, but I am brought up short by her surprising answer.

She smiles at me and shares,
"Oh, no! I bought this jacket at Walmarts or Target! I can't remember which. I shop in both stores."

This revelation silences me completely. I have lost my tongue. I just nod at her, smile and walk away. Wonders never cease.

We make a side trip to Tuba City Trading Post so I can see the place where my Great Uncle Charlie first worked when he came from Cincinnati, Ohio at the age of 18 to start new life. The owner is Indian. Earlene goes in first and tells the owner why we have come. He takes in this information very nonchalantly and never speaks to me directly. It is the Indian way not to talk with "outsiders" unless they have to. It doesn't matter. I have seen the place and I am content. We drive on to Page for the night.

At our motel restaurant tonight Earlene and I meet a nice looking couple. After a few minutes chatting, the woman tells us about the man she is with.

"He has already had five wives. That is why I will not marry him!"

She also tells us not to eat in the motel restaurant.

"The prices are good, but the food is nothing special."

So Al and I and Bob and Earlene leave the motel, cross the busy highway, and trek from steak house to steak house checking out their prices. The prices are very high! So we trek right back to our motel restaurant and proceed to have a very good dinner at moderate prices! So much for going someplace else.

Earlene misreads an item on the menu.

"Look here, " says Earlene. "This says Vegetarian Mutton Stew. That sounds good."

"It can't be vegetarian," I say. "They would have to leave out the mutton for that. It doesn't make sense."

"You are right," Earlene comments. "Let's ask the waitress."

The waitress looks at the menu and tells us,

"It says Vegetable Mutton Stew. Not Vegetarian. " (both of us have read it wrong!)

"OK," says Earlene. "I will have that."

Earlene also tries a regional specialty called "Blue Corn". It comes on her plate looking like some kind of mush.

"I don't care if I never have this again," she comments after tasting it.

After dinner we head back to our rooms for some much-needed sleep. Earlene stays up longer as usual going over her maps and planning the next day's travel. I don't know how she gets the energy to do that.

Tuesday April 8th Glen Canyon Dam, Lake Powell and Zion National Park

"A water dribble...."

Today we leave our motel and stop at the Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell. Lake Powell is a huge lake and reservoir. The large dam is very impressive and the controlled waters are used to supply electricity to thousands of families in the area. Boating is allowed in this lake and Bob and Earlene are thinking of renting a houseboat someday on the Lake.

We then drive on to Zion National Park. All the national parks out West are struggling with what to do about the increasing number of tourists at these sights and the traffic/pollution problems caused by so many sightseers. The parks are now making the drivers park in one location only. From there they take a shuttle bus that makes various stops and lets passengers on and off. We can sightsee and hike all we want at a stop, then get on the next shuttle bus for the next stop. The buses come along every 8-10 minutes or so. It really is a good system.

At Zion Park we get off in a couple of spots. We hike a trail among the huge rocks and I sit by the babbling brook and soak in the peace and scenes in front of me. A father is teaching his children how to skip stones on the brook and I think back to my father teaching me the same thing.

At another stop we hike a mile up stream to what is supposed to be a dramatic waterfall. It is a water dribble instead. Just the time of year for the dribble. Zion Park is beautiful its own unique way with its own unique rock formations. We love it.

Wednesday April 9th Bryce Canyon, Kiva Coffee House, Boulder Mountain, Capitol Reef National Park

" Please do not wash your shoes in the sink."

This morning following breakfast we take the short drive to Bryce Canyon. Is it very cold and snowing lightly this morning! I have brought two fleece jackets with me and wear them both along with the red mittens in my pocket.

Bryce Canyon. I have seen pictures taken by our niece, Pam Kowalski, and I knew it would be beautiful. I am not prepared to see how very beautiful it is this morning with the snow drifting down and coating the jagged peaks of rock in white powder. My reaction is " I've got to take a picture of this." Any adjective I can use to describe the snow covered peaks of Bryce Canyon, is a big understatement. I have no words. It is what it is and it is indescribable.

So at each look out point, I took pictures; a lot of pictures!

" I will take this picture the vertical way", I thought to myself. "Maybe it will look better the horizontal way. I like this scene on the right. I will take the view on the left too."

Then I would run back to the van and try to get warm again. I did this at

each stop! In other words I was so excited I didn't know what to do! So I just took pictures....all day. No one had to look at me as if I had "lost it". I knew I had "lost it" and was going nuts.

The good thing about using a digital camera, is that there is no film to buy or develop! I could afford to "go nuts."

The rock formations at Bryce are reddish-orange in color and they are tall and skinny and jagged. Most of the formations look like a crowd of people standing up. Very unique. I never get tired of looking at them.

A couple hundred pictures later we leave Bryce Canyon and drive along Boulder Mountain. Boulder Mountain is filled with pine trees. The falling snow drapes these pine trees in what looks like confectionary sugar and the snow covered woods gleam in the bright sun. We are driving in a winter wonderland. We are not stopping and in my excitement I continue to take pictures right through the car windows. My trigger finger will not quit. It is out of control.

We drive through the little towns of Kanab and Escalante. Mary Garland has given us a list of cafes to stop at for a meal along our route. She has actually written an article about them in a magazine called "Sojourns".

So in Kanab we look up this cafe called, "Kiva Coffeehouse". We would never find this delightful place without looking for it. It is hidden from the road and nestled in the hills overlooking a valley. It is not mealtime for us, but we just want to see it.

The seating area is by a wall of windows overlooking the mountains and valley. The view is superb. We know the owner makes everything fresh and we wish it were supertime for us. We chat with the owner, have a cup of coffee and admire the pottery she has made displayed on shelves. I find just the right coffee cup. It is rough and the color of the land. I love it.

"Did you see the sign in the ladies room?" Earlene whispers to me.

"No. What does it say?"

"It says, 'Please do not wash your shoes in the sink.' "

I understand why. Red rock dirt is everywhere outside. It sticks to shoes. I guess someone washed their shoes in the sink and it made a mess! Thus the sign.

Driving on to Torrey I am struck by something. I realize that the beauty of the rocks and mountains, valleys and trees is not contained to the National Parks. It is between the parks as well and just driving down the road and looking out the car windows is memorable.

In Torrey we take a drive through Capitol Reef Park. The sun is setting and lighting up the rock peaks. It is so very lovely.

Back in our motel room Al transfers my pictures from the camera to our laptop computer.

"You have taken 327 pictures today." Wow. That is a record. I am tired and happy.

Thursday April 10th Mesa Market, Goblin Valley State Park, Dead Horse Point, Canyonland National Park, Bucks Grill House

"Flashes of light between the sheets"

I do not sleep well tonight. The air is so dry I am uncomfortable in my own skin and in the morning I have small nose bleeds. I know this is all due to the dry air.

During the night I turn back and forth in bed to get more comfortable and when I do I see these flashes of light! At first I am startled! "What the heck is that?!" It almost looks like fireflies between the sheets. Then it dawns on me that it is the light from friction. After that realization I just laugh everytime I see it.

Mesa Market is a small cafe in Cainesville that Mary Garland has recommended to us. We drive there in the morning and are rewarded with the delicious whiff of home baked bread when we walk in. The assistant is so pleased to see us and we praise the taste of the rolls we purchase. She shows us the greenhouse out back and talks to us about the farm and the growing of vegetables. Then Randy the owner joins us and shows us the outside oven where he bakes fresh bread every day. Another out of the way stop where we get to meet some local people. Thank you, Mary!

Along the way to Goblin Valley State Park, we pass many buttes. Al's niece, Pamela, recommended this park to us. Buttes are these short and square looking extensions of large rocks that are everywhere along the roads we travel. "Another day another butte" we laugh.

Driving out to Goblin Valley is like driving into the land of no return. I kid you not. It is way out there - miles from any civilization.

We park the car and walk over to the valley. We stop and stare in disbelief. There as far as the eye can see is a valley filled with people. They are rock people with heads and bodies of all different sizes and shapes...but definitely looking like people. It is astounding. It is said that long ago some cowboys discovered this valley when they were looking for cattle. They must have been as surprised to see this as we are.

We walk down the path and wander around this "ghost town". It is spooky looking even during the day. You couldn't pay me to spend the night here. We have fun posing next to some of them for a picture and it is a unique experience.

Our next stop is Dead Horse Point and Canyonlands National Park. There is a story here to tell at Dead Horse Point - Coyboys were rounding up horses and they drove the additional surplus horses off the edge of the cliff. A sad tale.

Canyonlands is another gorgeous series of canyons stretching out as far as your eye can see. We stop at many scenic turn-offs, mesmerized by the view

of the canyonlands. The land used to be flat but was shaped into the deep canyonlands by erosion.

"Where did the land go?!" Al asks the ranger. The ranger just shrugs his shoulders. No one seems to know.

We drive to Moab and find "Bucks Grill House" which is another of those recommended by Mary Garland. We have a delicious dinner which we talk about the remainder of our trip!

Earlene has the Buffalo meatloaf, I have the blue cheese stuffed chicken breast and Bob has the elk stew. No one remembers what Al had. Even Al can't remember! It was something foreign sounding and hard to say.

Once again we have Mary Garland to thank for a memorable meal.

We spend the night in Moab.

Friday April 11th Arches National Park, Lowry Ruins, KoKo Pub, Comfort Inn Cortez, Colorado

"Do Not Enter With Shit On Your Shoes!" and Corn Snow!

Today we visit Arches National Park. This is a very special park with rock formations that have formed into arches through rock deterioration and collapse. What once was solid rock just erodes and collapses leaving the shape of an arc or arch.

It is another sunny day under blue skies. I have never seen so many sunny, clear days in a row! In New England this just doesn't happen. It really is incredible. And that sky! That wide uninterrupted sky. What a feeling to be under the big dome of a sky. It feels like a different world out here.

I use my walking stick with great care as it is stepping up stone steps. The climb is rewarded with a terrific view of the rock formations and arches.

These arches have all been given different names: "Delicate Arch", "Pine Tree Arch", "Tunnel Arch", "Landscape Arch"...

We come to a section in the Park leads to a long walk. I walk slowly on account of my weak ankle and enjoy what I can. Then I head back to the van when I get tired. The others go on a ways without me.

On the way back I see two senior citizens using what look like ski poles to aid in their walking. There is a "ski pole" in each hand, but they are not ski poles. They are used like ski poles to aid in cross country skiing, but these are walking sticks. I talk to these people and it all makes sense to me. They were ordered online from the Sierra Trading Post and they are "Komperdell" sticks. They are light weight and collapsible. I make a note of it because I know that they would greatly aid in my walking as well. They will fit into a suitcase. I will have to check this out when I get home.

On the way to Cortez, Colorado we take a side trip down a country road to the Lowry Ruins. These are ancient Indian stone house ruins. The paved

road becomes a dirt road and it is way out there past farms and cattle. We have fun poking around the ruins and squeezing into one of the inner rooms.

We do not stay long as it is very cold and we need to keep warm!

Have you ever heard of corn snow? I never have, but we stop to look at a view and these little white balls start hitting me in the head. They look so strange. They make me laugh and laugh! Tiny moth balls? Hailstones? What is going on here?

"Why, haven't you ever seen that before?" Bob asks incredulously. "We get this in Maine. It is corn snow."

Corn snow! No, we don't get this in Connecticut.

We find room at the Comfort Inn in Cortez, Colorado. The Inn has an indoor heated swimming pool and Earlene and I are psyched.

First comes supper at the KoKo Pub next door. You gotta have clean shoes when you enter here because a sign in the dining room states, "Do Not Enter With Shit On Your Shoes!" This is farm country. Can you tell?!

After supper, Earlene and I put a weeks worth of dirty clothes in the washer at the Inn, put on our bathing suits and head for the pool. We have a very nice swim and then sit in the hot tub. Bob joins us. What a great way to end our first week of vacation together - clean clothes and a swim in the pool. We are refreshed and ready to tackle the 2nd week!

Saturday April 12th Mesa Verde National Park, Monument Valley at Sundown

"Take a picture of the back of our van, Maren! We are covered in red dust!" "It's only a rental!"

Mesa Verde National Park It is a dream come true. Al has wanted to see this many years and today is the day.

Al thought that the Mesa Verde cliff dwellings of the Ancient Indians was one house in one location. He found out that Cliff Palace in Mesa Verde Park is only one of thousands of such cliff dwellings in the area! Taking the hike down and up is well worth the trouble. The ancient Indians used to live on top of the mesas but for some reason they went from there to building these cliff dwellings. Single dwellings were added onto and some became multi family dwellings all connected. When you stand there and look at the crumbling remains you are awestruck. This is our history. This is our past.

We spend a lot of time here and then driving and looking at many more cliff dwellings. We never get tired of seeing them.

We drive a long ways and finally arrive at Monument Valley at sundown...just as we wanted. They say you don't want to come at any other time. Sundown is the best time and I can see why.

First of all these huge red rocks separated and spread out over a large area look familiar! What is it? Oh, yes! It is John Wayne and the other cowboys

riding by on their horses with these rock shapes in the background. This is the live set! We are here. Where is John Wayne?! Where is the saloon? We have seen these rocks in the movies!

I must tell you these rock shapes are "down right" eerie looking. At sundown the whole area of rocks is lit up in the deepening glow of the setting sun. It is a beautiful sight and yet an eerie one at the same time. That rock over there...who are those people? They are rock people but very convincing. Let's get out of here while it is still light!

The Navaho Indians are coming here tonight in droves. It is a special night for them here... a sacred place.

We find a place to sleep in Kayenta, Arizona for the night. It has been a very long day and we are ready for a meal and bed.

Sunday April 13th Canyon de Chelly, Navajo woman

"I dropped my camera, and there is nothing. Completely nothing. My camera is dead."

One of the places that Mary Garland has recommended for us to visit is de Chelly Canyon. She put three stars *** next to it so we knew this had to be special. We decide to try and see this and to take the jeep tour of the canyon as she suggests.

This canyon is a ways from our motel and we get up very early in the morning to have breakfast at McDonalds and get on the way. We wonder if it will be worth the effort to get there in time to get our tickets for the 9:00 a.m. departure time.

Each day is an adventure like this. This is real living.

On our way we pass more huge rock formations which we never tire of seeing.

We arrive at the Canyon in time to get our tickets. Just as Earlene steps out of the van, her camera drops to the pavement. Earlene picks her camera up and inspects it.

"Oh, no!" she sighs. " I dropped my camera and there is nothing. Completely nothing. My camera is dead."

This is a real tragedy especially on a once in a lifetime trip like this! I feel very badly for her and assure her I will send her pictures from my camera. Small consolation, I am sure.

I walk into the gift shop to get some postcards and then I sadly return to the van expecting to see Earlene looking dejected. Instead Earlene is grinning from ear to ear!

"Did you hear what happened?!" she asks me. I told Bob and Al what had happened, and Al suggested we check the battery. Opening the back of the camera, we found the battery was missing. We walked over to where I dropped the camera, and Bob found the battery on the ground. I put the battery back in my camera and now it is working fine!!"

From dejection to utter joy, just like that! I am very happy at this outcome!

Other tourists are lined up waiting for the tour of the bottom of de Chelly Canyon. This is to be a 3 1/2 hour trip. Our transport is a former Korean War truck with seats in the back, 6 huge tires, and a big winch on the front. Passengers climb up and fill in the seats. We will need a second truck to hold all the people waiting in line. Our party climbs into the second truck when it arrives.

"Hi, my name is David," says the Navajo Indian who is our guide. And off we go!

It is a glorious sunny day under blue skies. This is a bumpy ride but this is fun. We are out in the open air holding on to the sides so we don't bump off! We soon come to some shallow waters and I look around to see how we will get around the water. I don't see any road leading around it. Then to my surprise David just drives us right into the water! He takes us bumping and rocking through to the other side and past a pickup truck that is stuck in the water! I am hoping we don't get stuck like that.

"This is not a river," David tells us. "This is spring run off."

We just hold on tight and look up at the canyon walls towering above us. Taking any pictures is difficult as we can't hold the camera still!

We just laugh under the sun and have a great time holding on and looking at the sights.

Now and then our guide stops the truck and points out various ancient cliff dwellings along the way. It is always fascinating to see these dwellings and try to imagine the Indians living in these house villages.

We also see Navajo families camped out and enjoying the bottom of the canyon. Children play by the water, parents are sitting by tents and some are horseback riding. We are on Navajo land.

Some young Navajo girls come alongside our truck showing us some necklaces that they have made and are selling.

Later on we stop two more times for a rest and at places where Navajo Indians have set up outside tables showing their hand made crafts for sale. Here I buy a gift for my sister in law and my daughter in law.

The jeep tour continues and we are taken back to the starting place after 3 1/2 hours. It was been a wonderful, wonderful experience...one we will never forget. Thank you, Mary Garland!

We get in our van and drive on to Twin Buttes, New Mexico for the night.

Monday April 14 Malpais Scenic Route "Shangri-La"

"Stop here, now! "

Today we take the scenic route called, "Malpais" which means bad land. It is just that - bad land. Land that has trees but the earth is dry dirt and so

rocky that nothing can be grown on it. Homesteaders have tried to live there in the past but had to move on to more fertile areas. It is an interesting route nonetheless.

We drive out of that area and are driving on a back road that Earlene has discovered on her map. This is a beautiful area of tall pine trees and it is the middle of the day. The sun is shining and I am looking out the van window as the pine trees zip by. And then I see it. The perfect spot. The brook is coursing down from the hills, gurgling and sparkling in the sun.

"Stop here, now!" I find myself saying. I guess Bob hears the urgency in my voice because he stops. We find a little parking place off the side of the road and we all get out. We wonder why we are here and we take a short walk into the woods and down a little hill. Here at the bottom of the hill we all stop...awestruck. We are at a clearing of trees. From every direction it seems sparkling brooks are running down from the hills fed by the melting snows up above. This is a true spring run off and it feels like "Shangri-La"! Just that sudden perfect spot. It was like, "No one, move! No one, speak!" We were afraid that any noise would frighten it all away. It really was the perfect moment.

Bob commented, "Why is it that I never have my fishing pole when I need it?"

We just soaked in the moment a few minutes and climbed back into the van, lost in wonder. Everyone should have moments like this in life!

We drive on and suddenly we are in prairie dog land. There are the telltale holes in the ground and sure enough we begin to see prairie dogs popping up out of the holes and walking around. They are fascinating to watch.

Now we come to a steep climb and once again we are driving on the edge of a mountain looking down from dizzying heights. Little or no guard rails are alongside the road. It is beautiful down but low.....but.....it is a long way down! I sigh in relief when we finally come down the mountain.

At the end of the afternoon we drive past a huge copper mining operation. We actually drive right through it and into Safford, Arizona. Bob and Earlene have a friend named Jim who works in Safford as a geological consultant to a mining firm, and we plan to meet him tonight.

There is no motel available in Safford so we drive on to Willcox for the night. Jim meets us there by the poolside for a glass of wine before dinner. We have a good dinner together and Jim promises to show us his drill site in the morning.

Tuesday April 15th Jim and the Drill Site in Safford, Chiricahua National Monument and Sunset

**"I'm going over there to take a picture of that cactus."
"Oh, no you're not!!"**

This morning Jim takes Bob and Earlene and Al and myself to his drill site...the site where he is working as a supervisor. I don't think of this as any big deal, just an interesting trip out to his coppermine. I envision a short ride over flat land....boy am I wrong.

Bob and Earlene met Jim in Maine where they live. They all go sailing every summer and Jim actually lives on his sailboat all summer in Maine. Bob and Earlene now have a chance to see what Jim does for a living.

We meet Jim in Safford and after Jim shows us the core shack where they store cores of rock in long tubes, we all pile into Jim's SUV. We drive for miles over this flat land I look around to where this copper mining site must be. Strange, I don't see any coppermine in the area. Jim takes us down the narrow paved road and I see a large mountain coming up. I still don't see any coppermining operation. The narrow paved road turns into a narrow dirt road and we drive right towards this mountain. How dense I am. I still haven't figured out where we are going.

I glance up the side of this big mountain ahead of us and I see a tiny winding dirt road going up and a pick up truck is just reaching the top and disappearing as it goes over the top. In a flash I understand.

We are about to climb up that same dirt road in our SUV. We are going up and over just like that pick-up truck!

I try not to panic. In my fresh memory is the mountain we went over in our van just yesterday afternoon and how relieved I felt to think that was probably the last mountain we would have to climb.

Now I am facing another mountain and no paved road. No guard rails. No nothing to keep us from falling down the side of the mountain "should something happen."

I think of our sons, Rob and Ben, and how much I love them. I want to see them again. Dear God, let me see them again!

Only one thing can save me from horrible thoughts of disaster...God. I pray to Him silently and I pray to him fervently. I ask for safety and then I thank Him for safety all the way up. And it is a loooooong trip up.

Jim is very careful with his driving. He makes this trip once a day to the drill site to check and see how the guys are doing. So here we are bumping and swaying up this tiny dirt road on the side of the mountain and I am sitting in the outside seat in the back. I do not look over the edge. The whole way up I look at the inner side of the mountain try to keep my mind off of where we actually are.

Earlene speaks up...(God love her!) and asks, " What happens if another vehicle is coming up when you are coming down the same road?"

"That's a good question," answers Jim. "That has happened before. It is usually a heavy truck carrying water up to the mine site and I am the one who must back up and find a place to pull over so he can pass."

I take another look at our road. Back up? Pull over? Where????!!! I don't see any place to pull over.

"Dear God, don't let us have to do that. Don't let us meet the water truck coming up when we are coming down. Thank You!"

And Earlene, don't ask any more questions, I am thinking!

Earlene doesn't hear what I am thinking.

"Do you see any rattlesnakes out here?" she asks.

"Oh, yes," Jim replies, "I see them out here but they don't bother us.

Course this time of year they are coming out of hibernation and they are apt to be grumpy after their long sleep."

Great. A grumpy rattlesnake. What a thought.

We climb this mountain very slowly inch by inch. I am scarcely breathing. I am very tense. We climb up and over and through a kind of pass and then the dirt road becomes flat again as we bump along a couple more miles to the drill site.

Now I am breathing easy again and trying not to think of the trip back. Jim is all relaxed and shows us the site and the drilling that is going on. It turns out that it is not a good day with the drilling. They have come to some kind of snag in the drilling and tempers are short. The foreman is talking with one of the men operating the drill using a lot of hand gestures.

"That is a sign that all is not going well," Jim tells us.

After a while Al says to me,

"I am going over there to take a picture of that cactus."

He points off into the distance among the cactuses and shrubs.

"Oh, no you are not!" I answer. "Don't you remember about the rattlesnakes being grumpy this time of year??"

"Oh, yeah," mutters Al and he does not go into the brush.

I calm down enough to listen and learn about the drilling operation. Then we each use the outhouse that is set up, and I won't go into detail about it. If anyone has any questions about outhouses on this trip, just ask me. I am an expert by now. I can't tell you how many outhouses I have visited in our National Parks. But it is right up there.

Jim completes his check of the workmen and once again we climb back in to the SUV for the trip back down the mountain. We travel slowly over the flat land and I know we are heading back to the pass. I try and keep my mind off of it. The scariest part will be when we go through the pass and start down the steep decline. I just think of other things and when we get to the pass and start down I am comforted by the fact that now I am on the inside track of road hugging the mountain and Bob who does not like heights is on the outside. I say a prayer for Bob that he will stay calm.

The trip back down was a lot less scary for me. I just relaxed more and the lower we got the more I thought we might make it after all! When we did get down, and without meeting the water truck coming up, I was very relieved.

Jim takes us to a nice country restaurant and we have a good lunch together. A great way to wind down. Jim is very friendly and informative and interesting to listen to. I am very glad we have met him. After lunch we say our good-byes to Jim.

We are staying another night in the motel in Willcox. Willcox is the native town of Rex Allen. A life-sized statue of Rex Allen stands on the main street and a museum across the street is filled with things in his memory. He was a well-known cowboy actor and in the museum you can see one of his old movies.

Late in the afternoon we take a ride out to the Chiricahua National Monument about 20 miles out of town. We pass right by a crumbling "ghost town" on our way. The National Monument is a Park full of interesting rock formations...different from the others we have seen, if that is possible. Every bend in the road we see a unique rock formation and Earlene and I have to jump out of the car to take another picture. Honestly, I think our men are saints to put up with us. Both Bob and Al, which ever one is driving, always oblige us that way. No complaints. I really appreciate their patience and kindness.

On the long stretch back to Wilcox we pass cows grazing, rabbits hopping about in the prairie grass and Earlene spots a coyote running off. We are heading west and the sun is setting. We are out under the big dome sky and I think of the words to "Home On The Range."

The sky is lit up now in crimson and blues and golds and it grows more beautiful minute by minute. Now our eyes are glued to the sky. I can not describe to you the colors we see and what the sunset looks like. It is indescribably beautiful. No one can paint the colors of a sunset like God can. Any artist can only attempt it, but it is a feeble attempt at best. You just have to get outside yourself and see this to believe it. In my excitement I took so many pictures of that sunset, from inside the car and from the outside. There just are no words.

I am reminded of a bookmark I have in a book at home. It shows cartoon figure Iggy standing and looking at the colors of a sunset and he claps his hands and says,

"Go God!"

Amen.

Wednesday April 16th Lake Cochise, Amerind Museum , Kartchner Cavern State Park, Road Runner, Border Patrol, Trattoria Restaurant, Green Valley, Arizona

"Who would have thought we would see all this at a sewage pond?"

Before leaving Wilcox this morning, we make a stop at Lake Cochise just outside of town for some birdwatching. It is about 9:00 a.m. and Earlene has her bird book clutched in her hand. Bob drives slowly around the lake and he has to stop every few feet when we spot yet another group of birds. This lake is full of

bird and duck species. They are not easy to identify as their differences are small. We take a full hour just to bird watch and we are well rewarded. We are amazed that these beautiful birds are living and thriving on what is known as the sewage pond. This is no joke. A large sign at the entrance to the Lake announces this and warns against drinking the water or coming into contact with it.

"Who would have thought we would see all this at a sewage pond?", Earlene muses.

We stop back in town at a gas station just as a man peddles by on a low lying bicycle. His bicycle is pulling a little wagon filled with knapsacks. He is obviously going a long distance on that bicycle. Al talks to him for a while and then he peddles on.

We now drive to Dragoon, Arizona and visit the well known Amerind Museum. This is a fascinating museum filled with artifacts of various Indian tribes. It is all about Indian history. One could easily spend most of the day here, What I remember most is looking at vests and hats and shoes decorated with Indian bead work and quills. Fascinating.

We drive on from there and stop at Kartchner Cavern State Park. Two men not many years ago discovered this beautiful underground cavern while they were exploring. It took them completely by surprise. "A cave explorer's dream discovery". This is how it was described in the movie we saw in the visitor's center. Kartchner was the name of the family who owned the land. It has since been made into a State Park and visitors can walk down into the cave for a 1 hour guided tour. We thought about but decided not to make the underground trip. Some of us (like me and Bob) would not feel comfortable in a place like that. We did see the movie and know it must be a beautiful sight.

We drive on to Green Valley, Arizona which is just south of Tucson. We check in to the Best Western and this one has an outside heated pool. We are now in the desert area near Phoenix and it is hot here. We shed our warm clothes and take out our spring clothes!

Walking around we discover the "Trattoria Restaurant" and go there for dinner. It turns out to be the best place in town for dinner. This one was not on Mary Garland's list, but it should have been. The meal was absolutely delicious. I had the roast duck, Bob had veal, Al the lamb, and Earlene the shrimp fettucini. We all agreed we had hit "gold". All this at reasonable prices.

Once again Earlene and I used the washers and dryer at the Best Western and it felt good to have clean clothes again.

Thursday April 17th Green Valley, Arizona, San Xavier Mission, Sonora Desert Museum, Saguaro National Park

"We have a cactus here that blooms only one day a year...and today's the day!"

After breakfast this morning we drive out to visit the San Xavier Mission. This is a Spanish Catholic Mission Church founded many years ago and a church serving the Navajo Indians. We visit the church and chapel and take our time admiring the different cactus plants in the garden.

"We have a cactus here that blooms only one day a year," we are told, " and today is the day."

We look at this cactus and sure enough it is flowering for us this mid-morning in the sunshine showing us bright yellow blossoms. It is beautiful to look at.

We travel on to the Sonora Desert Museum and this museum we truly love. It is a living, active museum. It teaches and shows us all about cactuses, animals, and Sonora Desert plants. We could have spent more than one day here. Lizards, all kinds of rattlesnakes, Harris Hawk, ...the reptiles were indoors but the rest of the exhibits were all outdoors. We just wound around and around past the cactus's and plants, mountain lions, prairie dogs - and so much more. It was hot in the sun and we took refreshment in the cafe when we were done. I could not do all the walking, but I did a lot of it.

From there we drove a short distance to Saguaro National Park and drove through that area. Saguaro cactus...these were the tall skinny ones with long arms reaching out and skywards. They were all spread out in the Park and they all looked liked people. Spending the night with them must be spooky.

These cactuses have holes in them in which birds nest. Even owls use the holes.

After dinner at the Best Western all four of us enjoy the swimming pool and hot tub. Our last night our West. A beautiful way to spend our last night. We are happy to find this lovely spot.

Friday April 18th Phoenix Botanical Garden, Butterflies, Allan and Carol Cumming Peterson

"Stand still! Don't move an inch! "

Our last day. Tonight we'll fly out of Phoenix back to Conn. and Maine, changing planes in Newark, N.J.

We pack up the van and drive to Phoenix this morning. Our very last day of a full two weeks exploring the Southwest. So much has happened. We have experienced so much. A trip of a lifetime. Memories for years to come. God is so good and blessed us so much. We are blessed to have Bob and Earlene as our wonderful friends. We are blessed to be able to make such a trip. We are blessed to live in a very beautiful land of great abundance and variety and we are blessed to see it. Blessed be our Lord God forever and forever.

Today I am meeting up with my good high school friend, Carol Cumming and her husband Allan Peterson. They lived in Vermont most of their married life and now live in Gilbert, AZ, a suburb of Phoenix. Al and I were at their wedding

over forty years ago in Summit, NJ. and we have not seen them since! I am very excited to be seeing them today!

We arrive at the Phoenix Botanical Gardens around noontime and I call Allan and Carol on the phone. Carol is in the shower (again) and I talk with Allan. We agree to meet at the outdoor cafe.

We walk there directly and slowly since it is very hot today. We pass so many interesting plants and cactuses. One group of cactuses looks like a pumpkin patch. A little round pumpkin patch.

We order salads at the cafe and sit down. Presently Allan and Carol find us and join us! How happy is our reunion!

Talk, talk, talk, pictures of this and that...

Allan has invited us to visit the special butterfly pavilion with them and has paid for our tickets! We walk over slowly in the heat and step into the pavilion. Hundreds of butterflies are in this pavilion...all flitting about.

"Stand still! Don't move an inch!" "A butterfly is on your shoulder."

They are everywhere and the trick is to take a close up picture of one before they fly away again.

"Over there! Don't you see it?"

It is a delightful experience.

Allan asks where we have to drop off our van and he says "I know just where that is. Follow me."

And he leads us in our car through Phoenix and to the airport and to our car rental area. We are so grateful!

After we have the car inspected and pay for the rental, we meet Allan and Carol at the Airport restaurant. We have plenty of time and have a nice leisurely supper with Allan and Carol.

It is finally sad to say goodbye.

We have the "red eye" flight tonight. We are on the same airplane leaving Phoenix at 10:30 p.m.

All is well. Thank God, all is well. Thank God for this trip, and I do!