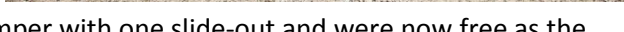
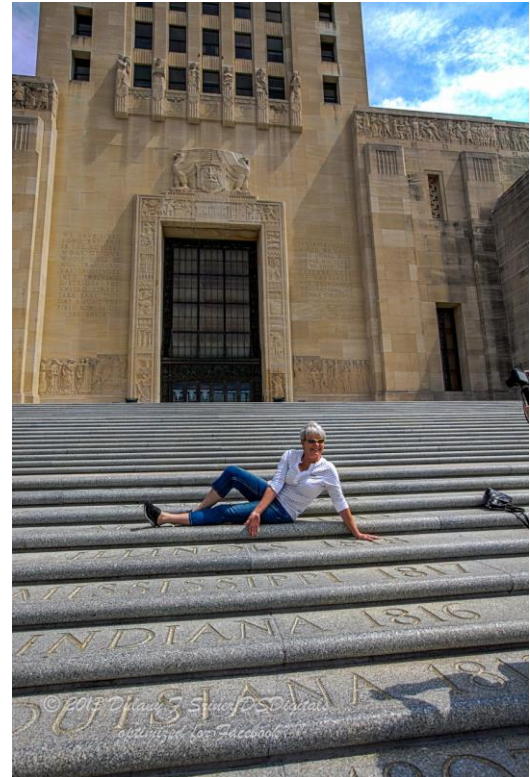


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dispelled as I slid it in like a semi-driver at a loading dock. It would be clear sailing from there. The stay there was about a week and that was way too short. I can't remember having a better time on any other vacation. We ate local cuisine, took an air boat ride in the swamp,(see picture on previous page) ate more food, and made friends with locals who tried to remember how their Moms made Roux for gumbo. The way they explained it, it was just fried flour that was the thickening agent for the many gumbo recipes. They described it in intricate detail. They were as red-neck as I have seen and we enjoyed every minute of their conversation. They were real swamp people. In contrast, we spent a delightful day touring the State Capitol with another of Patsy's more refined and educated friends. We got the whole scoop on the Capitol and grounds. It was a wonderful experience. I would have to say that on my list of hosts, Patsy would have to be at the top of the list. Our Louisiana visit was topped off with a couple nights camping in the swamps (one night with Patsy below) where the song of the bull frog put us to sleep each night. That trip will have many reruns in my mind.



Leaving Cajun Country, we headed west to Texas. You might ask, "Why would anyone in their right senses head for Texas mid-June?" We asked ourselves this same question many times over as the thermometer kept peaking around 100 degrees outside the camper and plastic plates left on the outside table would puddle during the heat of the day. Not only could you fry an egg on the camper pad, you could also burn the bacon and toast. Pat was right at home with that. The lake was so hot the fish



would jump out to cool off. The Texans call this a dry heat. I call it an oven bake! This part of our trip revolved around the wedding of the daughter of Pat's best longtime friend, Jackie. The wedding was beautiful and we would not have missed it for the world; BUT . . . . IN JUNE? . . . . OUTSIDE . . . . IN THE SUN! I was feeling a bit like those plastic plates. I could not tell if I wet my pants or was just puddling on the hot chair. Only the beauty of the bride and happiness around us could keep our mind off the heat.



We have a number of friends and relatives in the Dallas area and we tried to spend time with all of them. We had lists and schedules and itineraries and more lists and schedules to fit the most visits and quality time into our stay and perhaps that super concise planning was our downfall. We never planned any down time. From the time we got up and each stuck our head out the camper door into the easy bake oven, it was non-stop until we dragged our weary bodies back to the campground outside of Rockwall; sometimes after hours on the road getting from the other side of Dallas or the far side of Fort Worth.



Aside from the Texas wedding bake, we had a visit to Gaylord Resort with our High School friend Mary. That was followed by a dinner at a quaint family style eatery “just down the road” about 400 miles. Every place in Texas is “just down the road” about a thousand miles. We had more Texas miles on the truck than we had from the rest of the trip. Our GPS helped us get lost several times but we always miraculously arrived at the right place in spite of state line to state line construction. That is, EXCEPT once

when I put in the wrong address and ended up next door to the destination and found nobody home! Our “friends” apparently watched us as we sat in their neighbors drive wondering what to do. A quick cell call set us right. Chris and his family were great hosts and we had a good time sharing a meal. We learned that garlic oil sprayed on the yard would repel the vicious mosquito population. And I thought it was only good for repelling vampires and witches. We didn’t see any of them, so I guess it was working for them, too.

Our visit with my step-sister Loretta, was not as expected. We found her in the hospital but we were glad to be able to see her. I got the idea that she was not the most co-operative patient when the hospital staff tried to get us to take her home with us. We told them we didn’t want her to puddle and left her there in the A/C. We spent one day at the Perot Museum with Jackie and family and another day at Rim Rock with my cousin David. Both were interesting and fun. The museum was very high tech and Rim Rock was a good drive-through zoo. I had hoped to find some of the iconic west ranches or ghost towns to photograph but that was never to happen. At the time, it was hard to enjoy all the great company to its fullest because of the weather, but as I stare out the window now and see the cold snow covering the ground, that memory of oppressive heat loses some of its discomfort. On the way home, we made a quick stop to visit another old camping friend, Jerry in Hot Springs. A relaxing boat ride and dinner overlooking the lake was the icing on the cake and a wonderful way to spend the last of our vacation. After almost a month on the road, we were back home to meet our new dog!

As I think about it, I should have added the new puppy as an additional activity or new lifestyle. She has certainly turned our life upside down. Let me go back to the beginning. While on vacation, we saw a rescue German Shepherd posted on FB. We had Kim check it out and long story short: We have a puppy. Puppies and old folks do not make the best combination. You can’t run from your destiny and when Kim told us the puppy’s name was Akira just after we had lost our beloved Kira a year and a half

earlier, how could we say no? Akira, who fortunately responds to the name “Kira”, is a beautiful small German Shepherd. She was 9 months old when we got her. She had received very little training from her previous owners. As a Father’s Day gift, Kim did the preliminary house training before we got home. When Akira came to live with us, she was still a puppy but she was nearly full grown. This is a bad combination. It has been a constant battle teaching her manners. She has improved a great deal but I’m still hesitant to leave her alone with the Christmas tree. She makes up for her short stature by jumping up. One morning, we found her on the dining room table. . . Resting! She is worse than either of our kids were about eating anything in sight and anything she can dig up out of the ground or can chew off indoor and outdoor ornamental plants. I should say the ornamental part refers to the “before” plant. The “after” version is much less attractive but apparently still edible. It took chewing two places on the couch to discover that the materials used were not tasty. The seat was determined to be the best place to chew on a bone. Are you starting to see a trend here? We pray the puppy period will be over soon.



After a short time home, we were off again. This time we were joined by Kim and her dog, Sasha and of course our new Kira. We were all on our way to Wisconsin to participate in our sister-in-law, Dar’s 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. We had a great time in Green Bay with all the nieces, nephews and cousins with their families. We also made a short side trip to visit another old school friend Nancy in Sturgeon Bay. We headed north from there to the UP of Michigan and Lake Superior. At least this time

we were heading NORTH for a summer trip. We had a great time together walking the beaches and picking up rocks and driftwood. We saw lighthouses and waterfalls and most of the time the weather was great.

In early August, I went to the doctor to schedule surgery on my Hiatal Hernia. The doctor said it would be one night in the hospital and then I would be fine in a few days. I was scheduled for the last week of August. I told the nurse, “That will work out well because my wife is to have knee surgery the end of that week.” The nurse just looked at me. I could see it in her eyes; she was thinking, “He MUST be crazy!” She replied, “You won’t feel like taking care of your wife just a few days after surgery.” That was the first indication that the surgery would not be as easy as I had been informed. I was rescheduled for surgery October 1<sup>st</sup>. Pat’s knee was replaced the end of August. She would spend the next couple months recovering. PT was a little more difficult this time but she is doing well now and it is nice not having to do the “granny walk” all the time with her.





The first of October, I had my surgery and the nurse was right, I WOULD NOT HAVE FELT LIKE TAKING CARE OF PAT JUST 4 DAYS LATER! It was much more painful than I was let on to believe. All is well now. My stomach is now in my abdomen where it belongs. It is no longer encroaching on my heart and lungs. No more heart burn and no more needing to sleep in a chair.

By the end of the month, we both needed a vacation. Our final trip for the year was up to Northern Illinois to Rock Cut State Park. We went up to see the fall colors but they were way below par. The weather had just turned cold with the first hard freeze.

This condition was not conducive to good fall coloring. The cold mornings were not ideal for that morning walk with the dog. The foggy frosty morning



made me think longingly about the warm days in Dallas. The highlight of the trip was The House on the Rock. It was strangely cool. The picture at left and below show the infinity room.



Up to this point, the year was consumed by three surgeries, and three vacations; now it was time to work. I started a major remodel of the master bath on November 1<sup>st</sup> and it lasted nearly all month. Apparently, retired people are allowed, no, encouraged to work at least fourteen hour days and seven day weeks. That project is finished with the exception of repainting a wall and installing baseboard trim. I was recently reminded I was a typical Aries never finishing anything. That comment might delay completion a little longer. From there I went directly into a remodel of the basement bathroom (mine). The ceiling there had been opened to access the plumbing above for the master bath. I decided to make some wall changes and a lot of plumbing and electrical upgrades while I was there with tools. That project is now winding down and will be finished before Christmas.

Krystal and Kim are both successful and living in Springfield but they now have their own Christmas Letters.

The current cold temperatures and snow cover is making an extended trip to Florida for the winter uppermost on our "to-do" list. But that will be another chapter in next year's letter.

In the past, I have ended my Christmas Letter with such philosophical discussions as Illinois politics, global warming and even the shrinking toilet paper. Tonight, no such notable discussions come to mind. Perhaps my mental void is a reflection of the spiritual void created by the loss of Nelson Mandela. His life long fight for equality among men will long be remembered. He fought against the minority white government forcing their rule upon the non-white majority. Is it really so different here where the affluent minority rules over the non-affluent majority? Is there any wonder why public education is so underfunded? An educated populous is a questioning population and the only hope for this nation.

### ***Teachers Creed***

***TEACH A CHILD 'THE FACTS . . . . .  
AND YOU GIVE THE WORLD  
AN INFORMED STUDENT.***

***TEACH A CHILD HOW TO FIND THE FACTS . . . . .  
AND YOU GIVE THE WORLD  
AN INTELLIGENT PARTICIPANT.***

***BUT, TEACH A CHILD TO THINK . . . . .  
AND YOU GIVE THE WORLD  
HOPE !***

***Dulany F. Sriner***

May the Joy of Christmas follow you into the New Year and bring you Peace.

Love and Light,  
Dulany and Pat

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Dulany: [Dulany@sriner.com](mailto:Dulany@sriner.com)