

**2019** Included our visits to the Grand Canyon and a Thanksgiving trip to Arizona, both times enjoying the hospitality of dear friends Mel & Amanda in Paradise Valley AZ). It was also a year we lost our dear 15½-year old miniature schnauzer, Lyla.

We'd always wanted to see the Grand Canyon. We finally did, in March, thanks to the kindness of my friend of 70 years Mel and his lovely wife Amanda, who had us as guests after we spent half a dozen days at the Canyon's South and East Rims.



Here's our slide show March 2019 - Grand Canyon, Oak Creek Canyon, and Spur Cross: [Arizona](#).

Lyla was our seventh miniature schnauzer, our only black one, and the only one Ruth saved for the purchase of and selected herself. We brought her home at in April 2004 at 8 weeks old (she was whelped on my February 8 birthday – and from then on, Ruth would tell me we were celebrating Lyla's birthday). Black is the color of night and Ruth named her Lyla at my suggestion, because I knew from my Jewish heritage of having to ask the Passover Seder question, "My father, why is this night different from all others?" that "lyla" is the Hebrew word for "night". It also does well as a female name, under varied English spellings.



This was Lyla 5 years ago. She was the sweetest dog ever. This spring she began to stumble and sleep a lot, and seem confused. Her liver and kidneys began to fail, and by summer she began lost both her appetite and weight. It became apparent in late August that she was starting to suffer and we couldn't allow that. Her ashes repose in an inscribed box in our home. We have our eighth miniature schnauzer, 3½-year old Moxie, as our companion, probably, given our ages, our last.



For Ruth's birthday, we took a brief hiatus, driving 5 hours down to Oak Island NC to stay 3 nights over that occasion. We were lucky with the weather, but not with sunburn! We relaxed and dined well.

Reached from the NC mainland by a short bridge, Oak Island is wildly overdeveloped by condos and vacation homes, but it is quiet and has a long lovely Atlantic beach, and the water in August is very warm.

You may recall that our 2018 Holiday Letter included some of the construction of our art studio. It's finished, and now rented to a lovely woman fabric artist. And we repaired the wreck the construction made of our yard by having the yard leveled and sodded.



Also, at the end of summer an incredible thing happened. I had been disputing with the Veterans Administration for nearly 50 years over what I have always contended was a service-connected disability. After the fifth totally ridiculous and contrived VA rejection early this summer, I finally wrote a reasoned, but no punches pulled, clearly angry rebuttal. To our pleasant surprise, it was accepted within about two months, which for the VA is alacrity. Not only did I receive a substantial payout, but also will henceforth receive a much greater monthly benefit. The payout only goes back three years, not 50, but I know I can't do better going up against the powerful VA bureaucracy because of both risk and rules.

But we now believe have a secure nest egg and the ability to do a thing or two on our "bucket list", so we are planning to cross the Atlantic next summer on the Queen Mary 2, visit family in Switzerland, and spend a total on three additional weeks on the French and Italian Rivas and Monaco. Plus a few days in Madrid, Spain. We'll bookend the New York City departure and arrival with visits to my sister Naomi's family and our friends Roger and Rita.

My parents' families arrived in the USA as refugees. Probably travelled in steerage. We'll be going from NY to England in a balcony stateroom. Wow!



On Sunday, October 27 Ruth and I took a ride on the oil-fueled steam-engine powered Great Smoky Mountain Railroad up the Nantahala River to take in views of the foliage. Slide show: <http://jalbum.net/en/browse/user/album/1955119>



And over Thanksgiving this year, Ruth and I drove all the way from home in Black Mountain NC to the home of Mel and Amanda in Paradise Valley, near Phoenix AZ (1807 miles, a four-day drive, each way) to enjoy the holiday in the company of those sweet friends.



On our way through Albuquerque NM we were able to spend a few hours at ABQ Biopark. Here is a slide show of 13 slides.

<http://dantanner.jalbum.net/Albuquerque%20Biological%20Park/>.

Here you see Ruth with Moxie at a park mosaic. Inside the slide show you can see Moxie captivated by the underwater aquarium views.



We also enjoyed the Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden with Amanda.

<http://jalbum.net/en/browse/user/album/1961246>



Mel and Amanda suggested we check out the Wigwam Motel on historic US Route 66 in Holbrook AZ on our way home. It also featured cars I remember well (like the '37 Hudson Terraplane or may have owned, like the 1957 Ford. <http://jalbum.net/en/browse/user/album/1961236>.



We also took in Petrified Forest & Painted Desert National Park. <http://jalbum.net/en/browse/user/album/1961236>.

The drive west and back took four days, with three overnight stops, each way, and it cured us of ever desiring to own an RV! But we did get to pass through Buck Snort TN and by the Toad Suck Harley-Davidson dealership in OK. Now, Ruth is frantically making up for lost time in cookie making and decorating, and I'm scrambling to put this out. So, I'll stop and prepare to send it before the decade ends. ***Have a great 2020 everyone!***