



OurWanderYears 2014

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Cover photo: JetBlue Park in Fort Myers, Florida. Our first Red Sox spring training game, March 2014.

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New Year's Eve

1 Jan 2014



New Year's Eve, 7:30pm

We have now been in residence at the [Seminole Campground](#) in North Fort Myers, FL, for just over 6 weeks. I have been working hard and Jett has been dealing with her cataract surgery, so we haven't met many of our fellow campers. But we did get out last night to the New Year's Eve potluck social and met a couple of people there, including Jim and Lulu from - where else? - Massachusetts. We had a wonderful New Year's Eve, retirement style... the party broke up at 8:15pm. I guess it was 2014 somewhere. Maybe Iceland?

We topped off the exciting evening by cuddling with the dogs (Grace was a mess due to the fireworks over the river a few miles away) and watching the 1962 version of [The Manchurian Candidate](#), one of the movies that I remember fondly from my youth. I believe I saw it at the old Big Sky drive-in in Madison. Jett wanted to see it because we had rented the [2004 remake](#) earlier in the week and, much to her surprise, she actually enjoyed it.

I was asleep by 11:30pm, but I awoke to find that we had gotten to 2014 without my assistance.



NYE campfire

Seminole Campground

11 Jan 2014



Our site

When we planned our Nov 17 arrival at the [Seminole Campground](#) we thought we would be one of the last to arrive. Au contraire! On November 17 the park was only about a third full. It didn't really fill up until after Christmas.

Anyway, we have been here for nearly 8 weeks now, so I feel qualified to give a full report

The Weather

Hands down, the best thing about the campground is the weather. Perhaps this perception is magnified by the shitty weather that the entire northern 95% of the country has experienced so far this year, but I think most anyone would think it was pretty nice regardless. Most days have been in the 80's and most nights have been in the 60's. One day had a high of 58 and the lowest low has been in the 40's. I watched the snowy Pittsburgh/Miami game on December 8 while sitting on my patio in my shorts and t-shirt, drinking a cold brew. Because I could. I really enjoyed that game.

As I write this (10am on Saturday, January 11, 2014), it is 78 degrees, heading for a high of 82. Sunny and VERY nice.

The Facilities

This is a very nice park. It doesn't have a huge variety of amenities (no tennis court, no basketball court, no bocce court, etc), but what it lacks in variety it makes up for in ambiance. The park is heavily wooded with

large, gnarly trees draped with Spanish moss. At night it would be very spooky if not for the fact that the park is very well-lit.

Our site is shady and is bounded on the back by a lazy stream. The stream has lots of little fish and I wouldn't be surprised to see a small alligator (I am told that there is a large one - like 8' long - that hangs out in the little pond to the side of the entrance road). It is a very scenic and relaxing spot.

The campground has a LOT of dogs and a very nice dog park to accommodate them. It is a bit of a hike - probably 2/10's of a mile - but I need the exercise and so

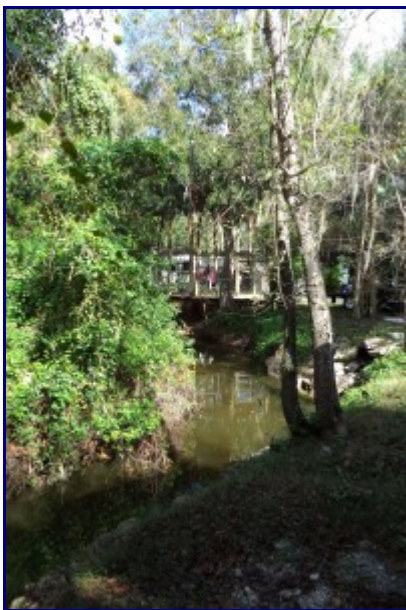
do the pups, so we make the trek at least once a day. When we don't want to go the distance we just walk around the park. As long as the dogs meet other dogs or squirrels, they are happy.

And there are a LOT of squirrels. Bold little buggers. We have been tossing crackers to the ones that hang around our site and we have become very popular in the squirrel world. Sometimes we toss some peanuts, which they really enjoy. They have become very comfortable with us, to the point that when Jett left the door open for a couple of minutes to sweep the patio, one of them bounced up the steps and went inside! Yes, the dogs were out for a walk at the time. It exited quickly when she approached the door, but the fact that the thing had the balls to go into the RV is pretty amazing.

I guess that is what happens when you get them hooked on peanuts.



Watching the snowy game



Lazy stream, looking west



Lazy stream, looking east



The office

The park has a nice, though smallish, swimming pool. The rumor is that a larger one will be built over the summer. There is also a very nice laundry room, a game room with a pool table and a foosball game, a small

gym, three shuffleboard courts (which seem to be totally unused), some very nice bathrooms (which we don't use but I am sure they are enjoyed by the people in the smaller RVs) and an office that has a few things for sale, but also offers mail services (which we use daily) and a large DVD rental library (\$1.50 for 3 days). There is also a small book exchange.



Gnarly trees



Rusty in the dog park

The Staff

The staff at Seminole is, without exception, courteous, friendly and efficient. The level of maintenance performed here is surprising. Of course the pool and the bathrooms are cleaned regularly and there is a daily trash pickup. But the trash is actually picked up TWICE a day, a truck goes around at least once a week wetting down the roads to reduce the dust (which I have never noticed), I have seen buildings that look freshly painted being painted again and someone comes around weekly to blow the leaves off of our patio. All of that I would call "above and beyond."



Shuffleboard courts



Game room



Laundry room



Pool



Santa and reindeer



Holiday Camper Santa

Another "above and beyond" thing: the Christmas decorations. Some lights were expected, but they went all-out and put up numerous inflatable displays, including a very cute "Holiday Camper Santa". It was a very festive atmosphere.

Bottom line: we really like this place! We aren't sure where we will be next winter, but if we come back to Florida it will probably be here.

A vacation for Jett

18 Jan 2014

I am back in MA for a few weeks on a work assignment. Jett is staying in the sun in FL with the dogs. I think that qualifies as a vacation for Jett.

It isn't bad right now - mid 40's. But the forecast highs for next week are all in the 20's. Brrrrr. My body is not used to that. I already had to scrape frost off my windshield once. Can't say that I missed doing that.

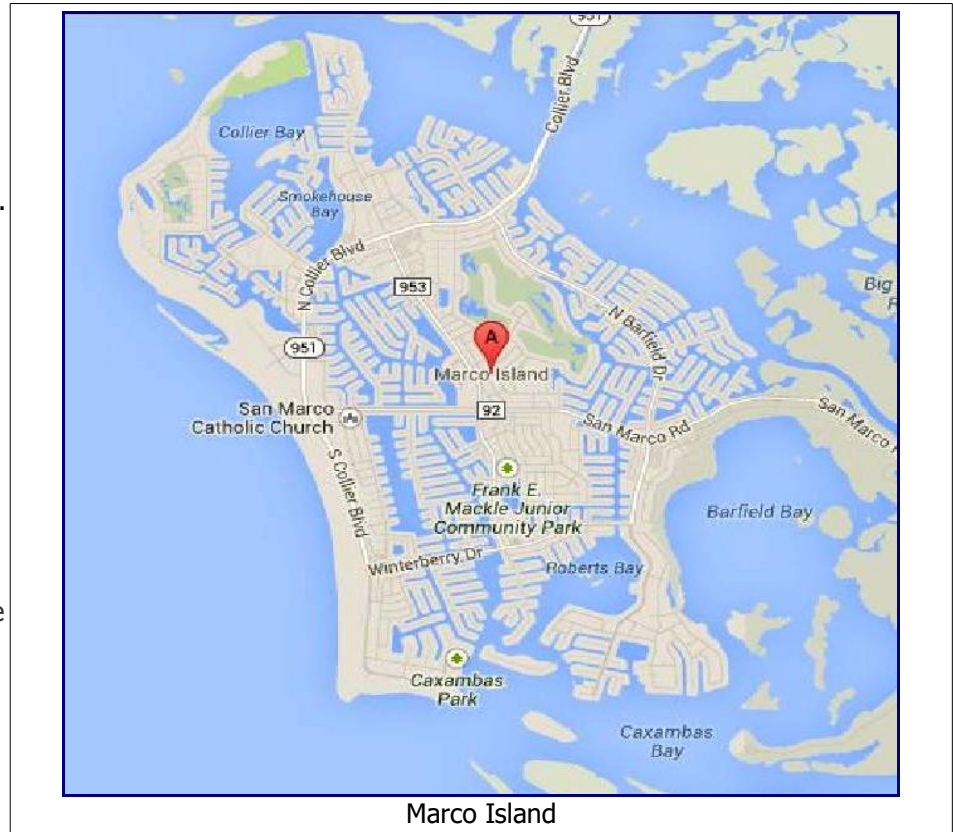
Maybe this time away will let me catch up on my blogging. I still haven't processed my Christmas photos. I also noticed that my header photos are no longer showing up on the blog, probably due to an "upgrade" at the host. Some maintenance work is needed. Fun, fun, fun.

Marco Island

18 Jan 2014

If there is such a thing as a bucket B list, Marco Island would have been on mine - a place that has always been intriguing to me. I could have died happy having never seen it. Fortunately, I don't have to face that possibility as I have now seen it.

Jett, I and the dogs took a day trip down the coast on the Sunday before Christmas to see the island and to get a glimpse of the towns along the way, most notably Naples. Which is not to be confused with Venice, the other Italian wannabe town which is north of Fort Myers. We had no particular destination in mind, but had heard that Marco Island boasted a first-rate dog park, so we did have some intention of checking that out. Actually, the dogs insisted.



The fastest way to Marco Island is straight down I-75 about an hour, then over the bridge on FL 951. But we wouldn't have seen much other than Florida swamp going that route, so we took US 41 - the major north/south route in southwest Florida before I-75 was built and still the main business route in the area. We did get a glimpse of Naples, but formed only a first impression. Which was: it was like Palm Springs in that everything interesting was hidden behind high walls. Not a place that invites outsiders. It is probably very nice and is certainly upscale, but I didn't get a strong urge to return.

Actually, I think I can say the same about Marco Island. I know I didn't see it all, but we did drive most of Collier Blvd, which parallels the beach - and never saw the beach! They keep it well hidden behind high-rise condos and hotels. When we tried to find an inexpensive restaurant for lunch we found no restaurant at all. It seems like a place where you need to know the secret handshake to find any services.

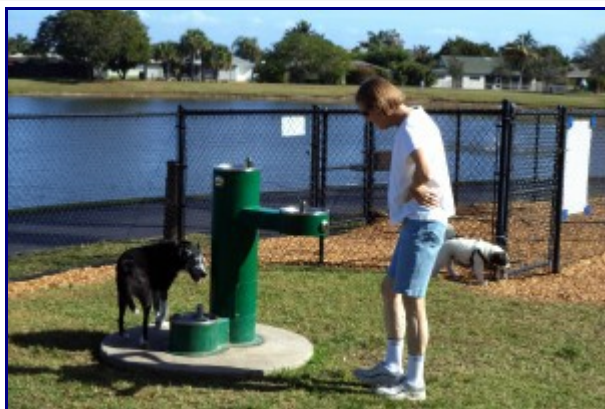
That said, I must report that the rumors about the dog park were true. It was a very nice park, with "small dog" and "large dog" sections. We had one of each, so we were torn. But Rusty likes to believe that he is a large dog, so we let him be a mastiff for an hour.

The small dog portion was more active, with about 10 dogs running around wearing themselves out. We had only two other dogs in our area, but one was a very friendly retriever puppy who came over and introduced himself. We all liked him. Rusty also had fun chasing a gecko around a rock. A very nice hour at a very nice park.

In case you were wondering, we finally found a restaurant that served a mean Reuben just a little north on US 41. We dined *al fresco* with the dogs in the car nearby. Dining outside two days before Christmas is a treat that will never get old.



Rusty after the gecko



Water at the park



View from the park

“Warming into the teens”

8 Feb 2014

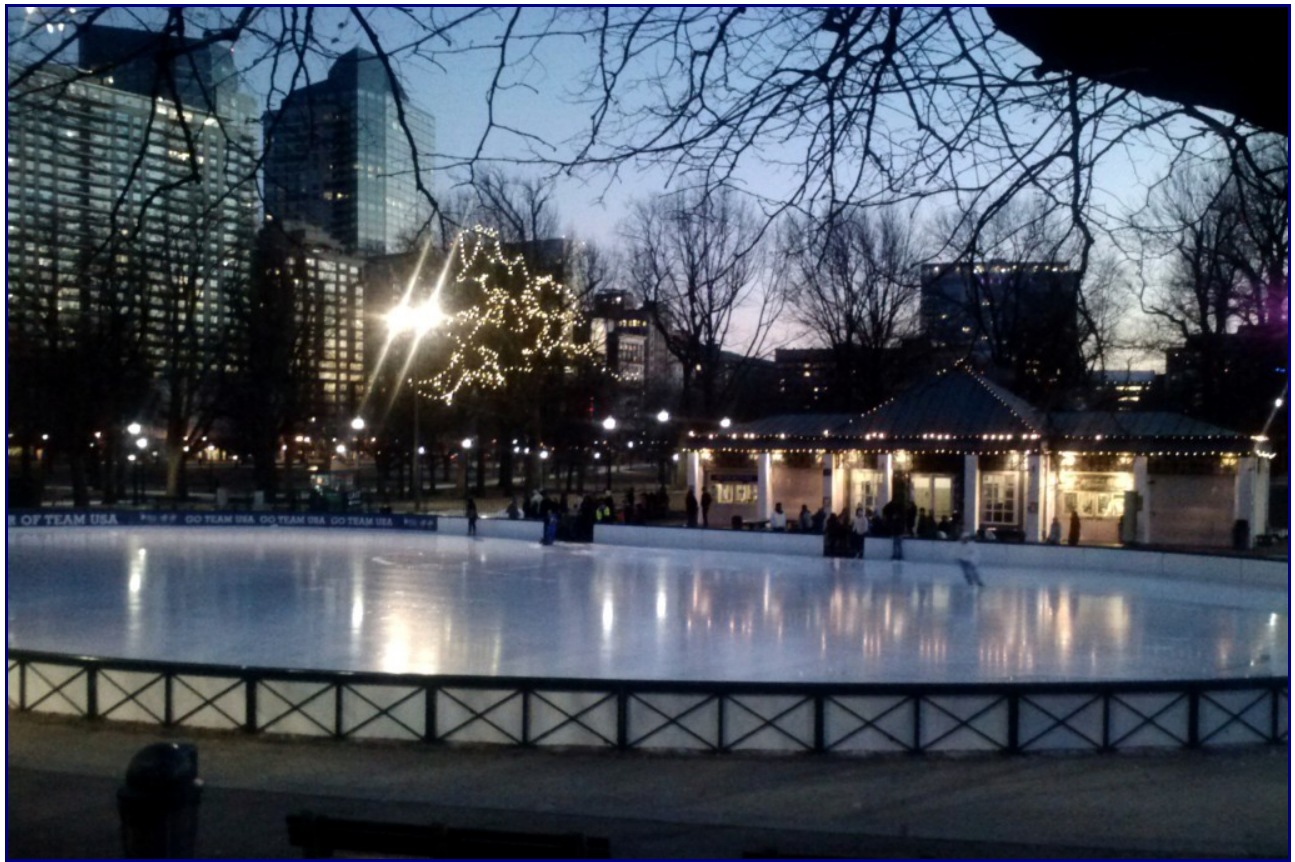
I am in Wisconsin this morning, having made a 1-day detour to attend my uncle's funeral. I will be back in Florida tomorrow where the temperature will be 80. Here? It is currently **-9 degrees**. But, as the weather forecaster says so cheerfully, "it will be warming into the teens."

Hard to believe that I survived this weather growing up. I guess it is true: if it doesn't kill you it makes you stronger.

Boston in winter

19 Feb 2014

I just returned from 4 weeks in frigid Boston. I had the pleasure(?) of being reminded what 0-degree temperatures and wind-driven sleet feel like. Can't say that I am eager to return for another winter. However, I must admit that the cold nights and white landscapes can produce some beautiful scenery. Here is a shot of the famous Frog Pond that I captured while traversing Boston Common on my way to South Station, on my way to catch a train.



Boston Common

Uncle Bob

19 Feb 2014

My uncle Bob passed away just over a week ago. He was 86, so it is hard to say he died before his time, but he was in good health and his death was a shock, particularly since his wife, my aunt Marion, had died just 10 weeks before. It was particularly shocking to my cousin Jim, who lives near his father. He got a phone call from Bob at 1am. Bob said he thought he needed to go to the hospital. Jim, not thinking that it was critical, got dressed and drove over to take him to the hospital. And walked in to find him dead, with the phone still in his hand.

Bob was a true gentleman farmer. He ran a successful farm for many years, but his life was defined more by his service to others than by his profession. He was very active in his church, veteran's organizations and various charitable causes. He was liked by everyone. And loved by his family. His grandchildren - some of whom I had never met and all of whom I had not seen since they were children - were clearly devastated by his death.

My earliest memory of Bob was his return from the Korean War/Conflict in 1953 when I was 4. He cut a dashing figure in his dress uniform and I thought him to be quite the hero for so bravely fighting the yellow hordes over there. Family events were always fun with Bob and his brother Mike bantering good-naturedly back and forth and telling awful [Ole and Lena](#) jokes. My view of Bob as a brave, tough guy was enhanced when he had a horrible farming accident some years later that took three fingers of his hand (and nearly his life). Bob somehow managed to extract himself from the machinery that was attempting to devour him, wrapped his hand in some cloth and drove to the neighbor's house to ask for assistance. Knowing that his neighbor's wife was squeamish,

he thoughtfully held his bloody stump behind his back until help arrived.

That I was able to attend the funeral was due to a combination of circumstances where everything fell into place for me. First, he died on the right day of the week so his funeral was on a Saturday. And it happened to be the Saturday when I was already scheduled to fly back to Florida. And my air carrier was Southwest which is just about the only airline that doesn't extract a pound of flesh if you want to change your itinerary. And I had just turned 65, so I got the senior discount on the new flights. And Southwest had convenient non-stop flights both from Manchester, NH, to Midway Airport in Chicago and from Midway to Fort Myers. And, most significantly, Jett had packed a set of funeral clothes for me.

Yes, she had anticipated the possibility of a death in the family while I was away. I'm sure she was thinking more about my mother than my Uncle Bob, but the fact that I had appropriate clothes to wear made the trip more feasible.

It all worked out for me and I was happy that I could attend. Bob was, after all, one of my favorite uncles.

I guess I would call it a fortunate confluence of circumstances in an unfortunate situation.



Uncle Bob

It was great seeing the cousins again - including cousin David (Bob's oldest son) who I had not seen in over 40 years since he moved west - but spending two days in frigid Wisconsin (yes, it was even colder than MA) was not pleasant. It has been a brutal winter almost everywhere in the US this year and Wisconsin did not escape. Residents were calling it the coldest winter in 30 years. The funeral and burial, in Mt Horeb, just outside Madison, took place in a snowstorm and 10 degree temperatures. It was a grim day for a grim event.

But it wasn't all grim. Before the casket was closed the children and grandchildren placed various objects of affection in the casket with Bob. One of the last items - placed there by his daughter - was a talking mechanical bear (Bob had quite a collection). The bear started chattering and continued to do so for a minute after the casket was closed. It was hilarious - an appropriate sendoff for Bob, who liked a joke as well as anyone. If he had been there he would have enjoyed the humor.



Springdale Lutheran Church



Military honor guard



Burial in a snowstorm

After the burial the church served up some classic funeral fare. It was a pot-luck feast prepared by the grateful parishioners of the Springdale Lutheran Church. But for those of you back east or down south who might not be familiar with the midwestern delicacies that have been served at such events since time began (or at least as long as I can remember), let me introduce you to some of the food that you will find if you are ever invited to a midwestern Lutheran funeral. From the 9 o'clock position and moving clockwise, we have:

- mac and cheese with crushed Ritz crackers
- macaroni salad with peas and Miracle Whip
- lasagna casserole
- ham-and-butter sandwich (yes, butter)
- cherry Jell-o with canned fruit cocktail and mini marshmallow topping

I know some of you will say "yecchh!" but I can tell you that it is all quite tasty. And you will need those calories to survive the Wisconsin winter.



Post-funeral feast



My plate

Eagle cam

22 Feb 2014

I rode my bicycle this week, for the first time in a long time. It wasn't a very interesting ride, but I did take the opportunity to stop by the local eagle aerie and get a glimpse of daddy bald eagle and his 50-something (days) offspring with the inspired name "E4". I have never seen a bald eagle in the wild before, so this was a treat.

You can see them, too, as the nest is wired for a [live video feed](#). Check it out. They are arguably the most famous residents of North Fort Myers, Florida. Not counting Jett and me, of course.



Eagle aerie

Winter in Fort Myers

27 Feb 2014

I can see why the Red Sox choose to come here for spring training... the weather is absolutely stunning! It is in the 80's most days, and sunny. Yes, it does get chilly occasionally and, yes, it does rain occasionally, but 90% of the time it is just flat-out gorgeous.

Case in point: Sunday, February 16, 2014. We drove to downtown Fort Myers - about 10 miles away - to attend a street fair/classic car show. The weather was perfect, with cloudless skies and a light breeze. We wandered around, saw some nice old cars (and some not-so-old custom ones), had some tasty fair food (including some kettle corn) and just generally enjoyed the weather.

Hard to beat.

Meanwhile it was snowing in Massachusetts.



Walkin' the dogs



Car show



River waterfront

Spring training prelude

27 Feb 2014

Speaking of the Red Sox (yes, I did speak of them in the previous post), our first ever spring training game is Sunday, just 3 days from now. To get a jump start and to clean out the RV, we went down to JetBlue park yesterday to drop a few bags of clothes and other items at the Goodwill collection drive (which had been advertised on TV). Besides being good citizens, we were also intrigued by the possibility that some "pitchers and catchers" would be on hand to sign autographs. We also got a pack of 16 Topps baseball cards containing all of the big stars of the 2013 World Championship season, but figured the chances of any of those guys showing up at the dusty Goodwill collection site were just about nil.



Goodwill collection point, JetBlue Park



Ted Williams statue

So we packed the donations and the dogs into the Yaris and drove to the park. We dropped off the stuff and were a bit disappointed to see no Red Sox there. But the very friendly (and not very busy) Goodwill staff assured us that a couple of players would be there in about 30 minutes. So we wandered up to the Red Sox Shop with the intention of buying a couple of balls to sign. We expected the stuff to be expensive, but shall we say that the Red Sox exceeded our expectations? The baseballs were \$15 each! So we got a couple of large Red Sox decals (for "only" \$10 each), got a Fenway Frank (for "only" \$5) and took a shot of the Ted Williams statue.

When we got back to the collection point, we found that a couple of players had indeed arrived. And, surprise, surprise, it was not two of the "pitchers and catchers" that had been promised, nor was it the rookies that I had expected. Instead they sent out two bona fide stars: Dustin Pedroia and Mike Napoli. So I quickly ripped open the package of cards, found their cards and had them sign them, along with the decals.

I asked Dustin if he would like to sign Jacoby Ellsbury's card, too. Just kidding, because Jacoby is now a hated Yankee. Dustin smirked and said "Nope, I'm good."



JetBlue Park

So not only did we do a good thing but I also got to meet a couple of my favorite Red Sox players.

This is what we call "a good day."



Mike Napoli



Dustin Pedroia

The robins are gone

3 Mar 2014

A week ago the RV park was overrun with robins. But for the past four days... none at all. The "glass is half full" people will take this as a sign that the birds have seen winter coming to an end and are heading north. The rest of you - the ones who are convinced that the next ice age has begun - probably figure the birds are headed even further south.

Dunno.

What I know is that Jett and I will begin our trek north in just two weeks. And we sincerely hope that we see some robins on the way.

Spring training

7 Mar 2014

So, yes, I have popped my spring training cherry. Jett and I saw the Red Sox play the Orioles at JetBlue Park in Fort Myers last Sunday. It was a beautiful day and a good game. Mike Napoli (who gave me his autograph a week ago) hit a home run and Dustin Pedroia (my other autographer) singled. The good guys won, if anyone cares.

There were some surprises. The biggest surprise to me, as a spring training virgin, was the lineup. I really expected the game to be like an NFL preseason game - the regulars might appear briefly, but mostly it would be a venue for trying out the new talent. Well, the starting lineup was pretty darn close to what I would expect to see in a regular game and, with the exception of the pitcher, who went only two innings, the starters played over half the game.

The other big surprise was the appearance of Mike Yastrzemski - Carl's grandson - in his first game ag against his granddad's old team. I got a good photo of his first at-bat - a ground out to shortstop.

I also enjoyed the park. JetBlue was built to mimic Fenway, complete with a Green Monster. It also mimics Fenway's concession prices. The beer was \$6 (\$8 for a "craft" beer). A bag of peanuts was \$4. I settled for a hot dog, peanuts and lemonade. Total: \$12.

They even got *Sweet Caroline* right.

And the weather was perfect: sunny and 84. But that's just how March is in Fort Myers.



Lineups



At JetBlue



Green Monster



Yastrzemski's first at-bat

Karakahl Inn

17 Mar 2014

I think I was remiss in not relating my experience at the [Karakahl Inn](http://www.karakahl.com) in Mt Horeb, WI, my home for the two days I was there for Uncle Bob's funeral. I ask you to click on the link (<http://julie-journeys.blogspot.com/2010/09/karakahl-inn.html>) to get another blogger's perspective on the building and its history, along with a pretty accurate assessment of its current state. I just want to tell you about my childhood recollections of the inn and my experience there in February.

As you already know from reading Julie's blog, the building was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, one of America's most distinguished and bold architects and a native of Wisconsin. As a child I did not know of the building's distinguished pedigree; I only admired the dramatic sweeping wooden arches that marked its entryway. It always struck me as being a special place.



Karakahl Inn

So when, for the first time in my life, I had a reason to stay in Mt Horeb, it was my first choice. Truth be told, there weren't many options as Mt Horeb has just one other hotel and it looked like it might rent by the hour. In any case, I was very happy to find space at the Karakahl (now called the Karahahl Country Inn) and looked forward to my stay there.

Well, my first surprise was that the dramatic entryway had disappeared, to be replaced by a Walgreen's. The less dramatic motel portion (seen above), was intact, but I had to drive through the Walgreen's parking lot to find the no-longer-so-obvious entrance to the inn. When I arrived, after 10pm on a Friday, I found two cars in the parking lot and a nearly dark office, lit just by a single fluorescent light. With growing trepidation, I entered the reception area...

... and found the least hospitable hotel reservation desk that I have ever seen. Stark, dark and **COLD**. Remember, it was below zero outside and it couldn't have been much above zero inside. Totally unheated. In Wisconsin. In February. Incredible.

It was also deserted. A black phone on the cutout countertop had a sign that said "Dial 9 for Assistance." I did just that and got a woman with a strong Indian accent and background noise of several children screaming. I said I was there to check in and heard her yell to someone - her husband, presumably - that they had a customer. The husband appeared a few minutes later in full Wisconsin winterwear, complete with earmuffs and mittens and proceeded to run my credit card and have me sign the register without ever removing them - a remarkable feat of mitten dexterity that probably came from much practice.

Anyway, I had to think of [Hotel Impossible](#) and wonder what Anthony Melchiorri would say about that "first impression." Nothing good, I am sure.

As I was leaving, the owner informed me that the room thermostat was set to 60. But it would be ok if I wanted to make it warmer.

Gee, thanks.

Puzzling

17 Mar 2014



Butterfly bastard

One of the many aspects of life at the Seminole Campground that I enjoyed was the ever-present communal

jigsaw puzzle. I have enjoyed the challenge of a good jigsaw puzzle since early childhood when I assembled one with the help of my father's wartime buddy, Dale Richter. Well, it may be coincidence or it may be something to do with guys named Dale, but the chief puzzler at Seminole was also named Dale, a happy-go-lucky whistler from Ohio. Dale and I, with the occasional assistance of others, assembled at least 5 puzzles in the four months that I was there - 4 1000-piece puzzles and, just this week, a 750-piece one. Had to have a small one that I could finish before leaving.

One of the toughest was the shape-shifting 3-D fish scene. This puzzle had pieces that had different colors and content depending on the angle you viewed it from. That one pushed the limits of fun. I could not spend more than an hour on it without risking a headache.

But the toughest was the butterfly. This was a photomosaic, a picture of a Monarch butterfly composed of thousands of little photographs. It was impossible to assemble small portions; the only categorization of the pieces was by color - gray, brown, red, blue, green. It took three weeks to finish this monster. In the early days the rate of progress was about 10 pieces per hour. Yes, folks, over 5 minutes, on average, to fit a single piece! This puzzle did not just push the limits of fun, it trampled them. I hope that puzzle is burnt because I never want to see it again.

But I still find jigsaws to be fun. Which is... puzzling.

QTN Hop 1: North Ft Myers FL to Biloxi MS

18 Mar 2014

The Quick Trip North (QTN) won't be quite as quick as the Quick Trip South (QTS). We are doing it in 3 weeks instead of the 2 that got us to Florida last November. But we are taking a longer route - Florida to Massachusetts via Mississippi - and there will be some very long travel days.

Case in point: Hop 1. The first weekend took us from Fort Myers to Biloxi, a surprisingly long trip of 674 miles. Florida is a BIG state! This involved two very long days of travel, but over very good (and mostly flat) roads.

Getting ready for the trip required some time and money. We had some difficulty finding a repair guy who was ready, willing and able to take on our repair work: replacing two slide cables (I think that makes 6 in total that we have had replaced), replacing the kitchen faucet (because Jett wanted one with a wand) and, most importantly, repairing the damage done by the Jacksonville blowout. That blowout ripped out Patience's underbelly in the vicinity of the refrigerator, leaving electric wires and plywood exposed to the elements. My concern (which turned out to be well-founded) was that we would

encounter some wet roads and the tires would throw the water up onto the plywood, further damaging the kitchen floor. At the very least the wires had to be tacked up and some kind of waterproofing applied.

We started the search before I left for MA in January. Our first choice was [Quality Matters RV Repair](#), a company that is run by a couple who live at the Seminole Campground in the winter and which came highly recommended by the staff. They were very prompt in coming by to view the work and promised to give us an estimate in a few days. Well, a few days turned into two months. Despite repeated phone calls from Jett, we never did get an estimate. They kept saying that they were waiting for pricing on parts, an excuse that puzzled



Vacant site 60

us as we already had all of the parts. I can only assume that they just weren't interested in doing the work and were not professional enough to be straight with us.

We had another company come by and, for a \$95 fee, promptly produced a ridiculously high estimate for us - one that included \$750 in parts. Again, puzzling as no significant parts were required other than the material that would protect the underbelly - something that \$20 worth of plastic from Home Depot would accomplish just fine.

We finally went with Mark from LaBrie's Mobile RV Repair. His estimate was \$770 - about half of what the other arrogant bastard had estimated. They made us a little nervous when they couldn't fit us into the schedule until the Monday of our last week in Fort Myers. And even more nervous when then had to postpone until Tuesday. But they did arrive on Tuesday and completed the work by 5pm. That included drilling a new hole in the countertop for the new faucet (which was of the center-hole variety) and doing a bang-up job on the underbelly (it looks like it was never damaged!). So all the the worry and aggravation was worth it in the end. We were very happy to pay the \$770 because we could leave Fort Myers with an improved and ready-to-roll fifth wheel.

The work on my part was mostly cleaning the rig (a LOT of leaves had accumulated on the roof and the toppers in the four months), checking tire pressures and packing the truck. I acquired a new tool box that was a bit smaller than the old one and which fit very snugly into the backside of the hitch - space that had been previously wasted. I also discovered that (1) the tripod fits nicely broadside behind the hitch and (2) the shelves on the propane grill fold under the cover which makes it much easier to pack. All of which goes to show that I am still learning how to do this right after almost 19 months of practice. Slow learner, I guess.

Anyway, after saying goodbye to our neighbors, including most notably Dale (of puzzle fame) and Linda, we got on our way at 9:45 on the morning of Saturday, March 15. Well, *tried* to get on our way. We had to stop at the office on the way out to pay our final electric bill and were surprised to discover - again, slow learners - that the office did not open until 10am. So we had to cool our heels for 15 minutes. That gave me a chance to return to the empty site and look for anything we may have left behind. I found one NylaBone that Rusty had left there. I didn't bother to look for all of the treats that he had buried in the gravel - I will leave those as treasures to be discovered by a future canine resident of the site. Or maybe the squirrels who will now have to survive without a daily fix of roasted peanuts.

In case you are wondering... yes, we are bringing the Yaris north with us. Actually, it is already there, waiting for us. We flew Jett's brother Ray down and he drove it back to MA, with a stop in SC to check out a potential vacation spot. So we will have a second car for the spring/summer/fall. I will have to get it registered in MA, a task that I don't look forward to, but it needs to be done shortly after we arrive. At least before May when our 6-month FL insurance coverage is up for renewal.

QTN Hop 1, Day 1: North Ft Myers FL to Perry FL

307 miles via I-75 and US 98.

This was a long day of driving, made longer by 3 little problems:

1. The sewer hose came loose from its bindings in the bed of the truck and started waving around like an angry snake. I had to stop on the side of I-75 to re-secure it. Note to self: buy more bungees.
2. A plastic flap near the site of the underbelly repair started flapping in the breeze. I had to stop on the side of I-75 to remove it.
3. We were delayed for about 20 minutes near Sarasota by what I assumed was a big accident. Turned out to be a single State Police vehicle assisting a broken-down taxi. The big backup occurred due to Florida's "move over" law which requires traffic to move to the left lane when there is an emergency vehicle on the side of the road. I can't argue with the intent of the law, which is to make troopers less likely to be hit by traffic. But other states have a "move over or slow down" version which has less traffic impact. I think that version makes more sense.

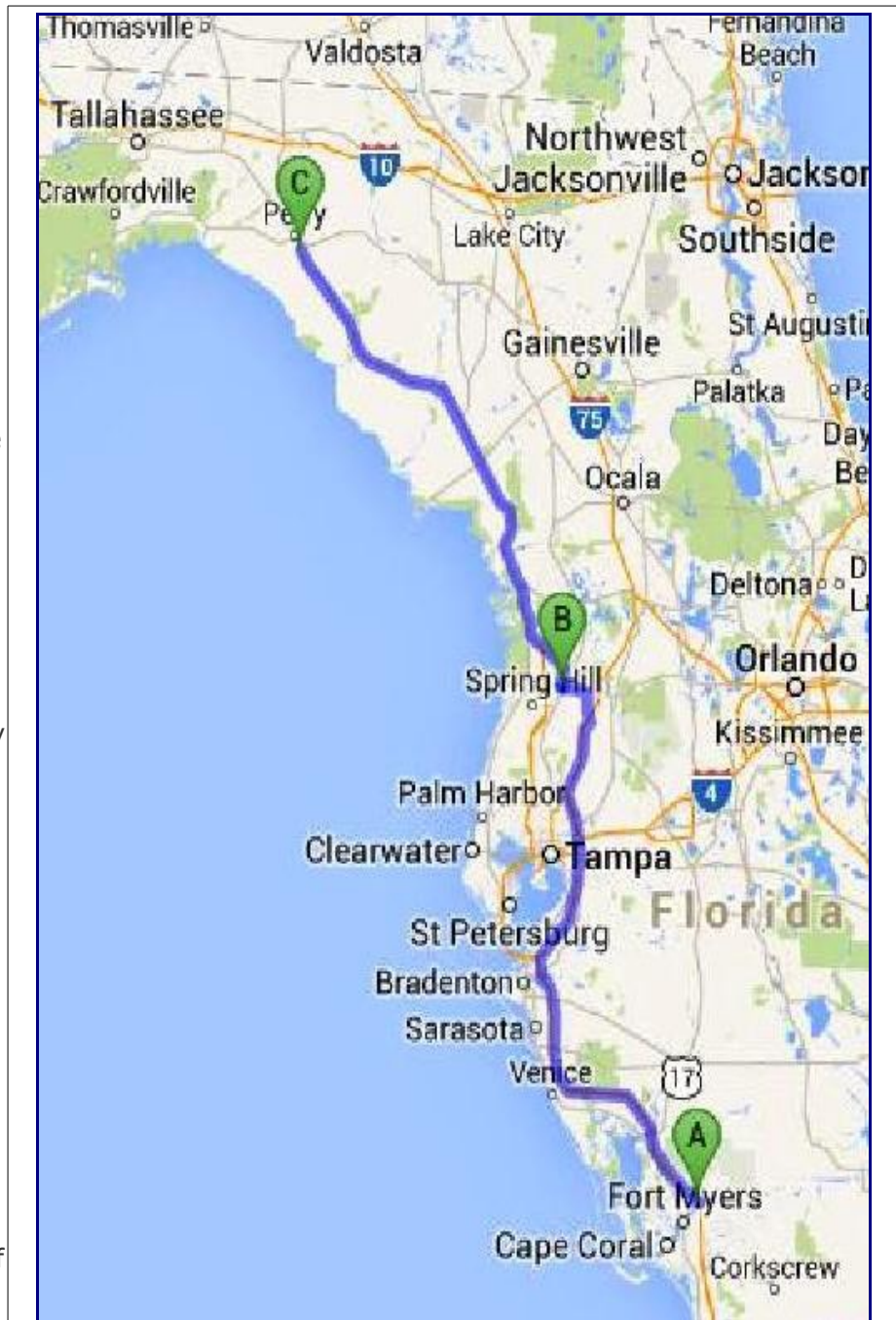
I was amused to see that the southbound traffic was also snagged for several miles due simply to oncoming

drivers slowing to see what was causing the big traffic jam northbound. Come on, drivers! Just keep moving! There is truly nothing to see here.

Due to the length of the trip we had to make a refueling stop, which I chose to do after just 166 miles, in an area that we had scoped out on our trip to Spring Hill in December. But the place I picked had just recently converted its diesel pumps into ethanol-free pumps (due, presumably to a larger profit margin). So we had to find another gas station. That wasn't too difficult, but getting back onto US 98 north required a little detour. Detours always make me nervous because I hadn't fully researched the route for low bridges and other impediments to big rigs. But this one wasn't too bad.

Once we got onto US 98 north we breezed along to Perry. I think this is my favorite road in the US: 4 lanes almost the entire way, very few traffic lights and very little traffic in general. Flat, smooth and empty. My kind of road. The fact that the speed limit was 60 or 65 (versus 70 on I-75) didn't matter to me as I cruise at 62 even on 70 mph interstates.

Our destination for the night was the [Perry KOA](#), a nice little campground just south of Perry. We were just there overnight and it was cool, so we didn't use many of the facilities, but the office was nice, the pool looked inviting and they had a free mini-golf course that looked like it would be a lot of fun. They also had a dog run that wasn't large but the dogs seemed to enjoy a lot.



QTN Hop 1, Day 1

I ran out and got dinner at [Mama's Family Italian Restaurant](#) while Jett napped. Unfortunately, I forgot the piece of paper that had her dinner selection on it, so I had to call and wake her to get it. Strike one. I also forgot our paltry pile of winning FL lottery tickets that I wanted to turn in while still in FL, so I had to go back and get them, disturbing her again. Strike two. Then when I was on the way back with the meals I realized that I had forgotten to ask for angel hair pasta with her chicken parm. They gave her ziti by default. Jett hates ziti. Strike three. The evening in Perry, which was already chilly, got even chillier when I returned to the RV.

My meal - lasagna - was ok, but had to be consumed in silence.



Patience in Perry



Pool



Playground

QTN Hop 1, Day 2: Perry FL to Biloxi MS

367 miles via I-10 and I-110.

This *felt* like our longest day ever, but I had to check. Yep, we bested(?) the previous longest day (Branson, MO, to Benton, IL, on the QTE) by 20 miles. It would have been a long day even in perfect weather, but the weather was far from perfect. We started the day knowing that nearly the entire I-10 segment would be traveled under a tornado watch and would very likely encounter some heavy rain.



QTN Hop 1, Day 2

Well, the weathermen were accurate in this instance. About 40 miles before our scheduled fuel stop we encountered a downpour. A real gully washer that overwhelmed our wipers. We got off the road and waited out the storm in a vacant parking lot. There was a lot of lightning and thunder and some gusty winds but, thankfully, not a single tornado. Still, Grace hated it. Rusty slept.

The storm delayed us by about half an hour. And we had to travel for several hours for heavy rain, making me very glad that we had done the underbelly repairs. Fortunately, Biloxi is in the central time zone, so we had an extra hour and arrived by 4:30pm - a trip of about 7 hours. Very long, very tiring. We were both asleep by 9pm.

Other than the storm, the trip was uneventful. I-10 in Florida, Alabama and Mississippi, is pretty flat, but does have some gently rolling hills, some long bridges and even a tunnel under downtown Mobile. We don't like tunnels, but this one was large, so no worries.

We did have one more case of the sewer hose working free, but were able to deal with that at a rest area rather than on the road.

Our destination was the [Cajun RV Park](#) on the beach in Biloxi. We will be here for 6 nights. I will report more fully on the park when we are closer to leaving. I will also report on how we do at Biloxi's 9 casinos.

Wish us luck.



Gully washer

Halfway

20 Mar 2014

With our first night in Biloxi we added another state to our map, raising the total to 24. There are 48 contiguous states. You do the math.



24 states

Biloxi

23 Mar 2014

[Biloxi, MS](#) is a small town (less than 45,000 residents) with a big profile. Whether it is Neil Simon's [Biloxi Blues](#) or its prominent place in headlines about [Hurricane Katrina](#) or the BP oil spill, everyone knows Biloxi. But I had never been there. Never been to Mississippi, in fact.

It turns out that, geographically, Biloxi is similar to South Beach - it is a city built on a barrier island. Almost every building in the city is within a half mile of the beach. And if you want some beachfront property, it looks like a lot is available, thanks to Katrina.

When we first arrived we were a little puzzled by the vacant land that was once occupied by large buildings - the foundations remained. It took about 3 days before I had that "light dawning over Marble Head" moment. No, these weren't properties that were abandoned; Katrina washed them away.

What else is prominent in Biloxi besides the vacant beachfront? Casinos. Nine of them in the city limits and several more nearby. It may have more casinos, per capita, than Vegas. We went to two: the [Grand Biloxi](#) (soon to become Harrah's Gulf Coast Casino) and [Treasure Bay](#). We had the BOGO buffet on Monday night at the Grand Biloxi - two all-you-can-eat meals for \$20! The photo on the right is one of the rarest photos in existence: a picture of Jett drinking instant coffee. In the 17 years we have been together, I have never witnessed instant coffee touching her lips. I wish I had gotten a picture of her face a few seconds later. Just look in the mirror and say "blechhh!" and you will know what I mean.

I had a variety of dishes that ranged from forgettable to very good. One of the most interesting was my choice for dessert: soft-serve vanilla with a Bananas Foster sauce. Delicious! I never had Bananas Foster over soft-serve before, but it works.



Biloxi beach

We lost \$80 gambling at the Grand. Treasure Bay, on the other hand, was generous enough to give us \$30 before we left town. This is entirely due to a unique offer: they will reimburse up to \$100 in losses for new members. We went Friday night and lost \$80 (just to match our losses at the Grand). But we came back at 8am Saturday morning, took our \$80 credit and turned it into \$110 in real money. Net: Plus \$30. It was probably our most productive 40 minutes at a casino ever.

We LOVE Treasure Bay. It is right up there with Seven Feathers as one of the best casinos in the US.

We considered doing the buffet at



Soft-serve Bananas Foster



Jett sampling the instant coffee

Treasure Bay, but (1) we weren't famished and (2) it wasn't BOGO so it would have been expensive. Instead we popped into the nearby [Raising Cane's](#) fast food joint. We had never heard of it before, but what the heck... how bad could the chicken fingers be? Well, we don't know how bad they can be, but now we know how good they can be. Those were the best chicken fingers ever! Big, fresh, breaded just right, served hot and with a sauce that was very tasty and unlike any dipping sauce I have ever had before. It looked like Russian dressing, but had a mixture of spices that was just right for the chicken. Their menu is very limited, but I have to say that they do chicken fingers right. Recommended!

We stayed at the [Cajun RV Park](#) that was right across the road from the beach - a great location if the weather is warm and you want to have a beach holiday. But the weather wasn't all that warm - 75 was as high as it got - and we weren't there to get a tan. We did, however, walk to the beach one day to give Grace an opportunity to romp in the surf. She loves the water! It is a beautiful beach with very fine white sand. And not an oil glob in sight.



The beach, looking downtown



Cajun RV Park



Patience at Cajun RV Park

The park itself was nice. But the sites were tight and the railroad line is nearby. The noise wasn't quite as bad as in San Jose, but only because the trains were less frequent. When they came by they blew their horns. Loudly. And repeatedly. I counted 8 freight trains in the hour between 6am and 7am Monday morning. I thought we might have to move. But there were fewer trains the rest of the week and it turned out to be tolerable.

Note to self: check for nearby train tracks before booking a site.

Cousins

23 Mar 2014

Once again I am playing catchup on my blog postings. This one should have been posted before I left Fort Myers because it was that last weekend before leaving that I traveled up to the Tampa Bay area - specifically, to Valrico, FL - to see my cousin Wayne and his wife, Patty. As an added attraction, another cousin, Keith, would be stopping by on his way back from a golf trip to Texas. This would be a mini-reunion with my closest cousins. I have other cousins, some older, some younger, but Wayne and Keith are the two who are closest to me in age. Wayne is the oldest, but is just four months older than me. Keith is the youngest, but is just four months younger than me. When my parents traveled to Ripon, WI, to see my father's family, I almost always got to spend time with Wayne and Keith. Some of my most vivid childhood memories involve Wayne and Keith and the time I spent visiting their dairy farms:

- feeding the chickens and collecting the eggs
- watching a chicken get slaughtered (and, yes, it does run around with its head cut off)
- milking the cows (usually by machine, but, a few times, just for fun, by hand)
- feeding the pigs

- playing in the hay mow (aka hayloft, but we always called it the hay mow)
- visiting a maple sugar operation in the woods
- baling hay (and lifting those heavy bales into place in the mow)
- riding on the tractor
- eating sweet peas fresh off the vine (I don't like cooked peas, but I love the fresh ones)
- spending days and some nights - in the deep Wisconsin winter - in farmhouses with no indoor plumbing
- taking a boat ride on Big Green Lake
- knocking over the refrigerator on New Year's Eve when the parents were out

Happy times.



Me, Keith and Wayne

I hadn't seen Wayne in 11 years, since my mother's 80th birthday celebration. And Keith... I can't remember the last time I saw him, but it was almost certainly over 25 years ago.

Wayne and Patty were quite the hosts, in their vacation house in Valrico (very nice!). Besides Wayne and me, my cousin Carol - Wayne's sister - and her husband were there and also another couple from Ripon that knew my parents. It was a long trip, but well worth it. Good food, too.

BTW, Patty looked fabulous. If she hadn't told me I would never have guessed that she is over 65. Whatever you are doing, Patty, it is working.

One of the big surprises, after trying to make contact with Wayne and/or Keith for months, was that Keith was living in Cape Coral, about 20 miles from the Seminole Campground. So for 4 months I had been a hop, skip and jump away and didn't know it.

To make up for lost time, Jett and I met Keith and his girlfriend Debbie (Debby?) at [Red's Fresh Seafood House](#)

in Cape Coral on the Thursday before our departure. Debbie (colloquially known as "Debbie 2" to distinguish her from Keith's similarly-named ex-wife) was charming. Jett, who frequently reminds me that she doesn't like people, liked Debbie a lot. We had a great time and Keith paid. Thanks, Keith.

Wayne and Patty are still uncertain whether they will be retiring to Valrico or how much time they will spend there each winter. Keith, however, loves Cape Coral and has no plans to go anywhere else. If Jett and I get back there for another winter, I hope we get to see all of them more frequently.

They are still my favorite cousins.

QTN Hop 2: Biloxi MS to Roebuck SC

27 Mar 2014

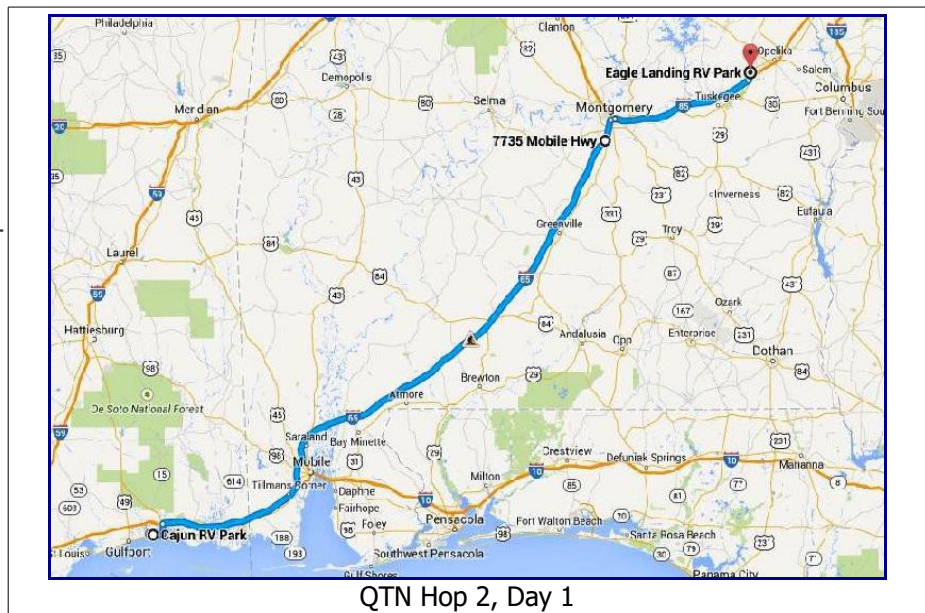
We had no particular reason to pick Roebuck, SC, for my work week other than it was on the shortest route between Biloxi and Alexandria. And it was in South Carolina, which added another state to our map. It is about 15 miles from Spartanburg which is larger and better known. We will likely get to Spartanburg sometime this week, but I haven't researched what, if anything, it has to offer. Mostly I am going to work and Jett is going to try to get acclimated to the chill. The forecast highs this week: in the 50's.

We are missing Fort Myers already.

QTN Hop 2, Day 1: Biloxi MS to Auburn AL

289 miles via I-110 (in Biloxi), I-10, I-65 and I-85.

The hardest portion of this trip was getting out of the Cajun RV Park in Biloxi. The exit onto Beach Blvd is one way, the wrong way, so we had to find a way to make the dreaded U-turn. I originally planned to go "around the block" - up a half mile to Pass Road, the other east/west road in Biloxi, but found that the roads to get there were narrow and the turns were tight. They also crossed those railroad tracks in a very uneven crossing that had the potential to bottom out the RV. So instead I opted to travel two miles east and turn around in a shopping center parking lot.



QTN Hop 2, Day 1

Once we got turned around and onto I-110, it was pretty clear sailing. The weather was nice - warmer than I expected, near 70 - and the roads were busy but fairly flat. We cruised along to our refueling stop in Hope Hull, AL, just south of Montgomery. And encountered a horde of college students returning from spring break.

When I first walked into the mini-mart to hand over my credit card (the usual process when filling up at a truck pump - there is no "pay at the pump" option), I had to stand in a line 12 people deep, all of them at least 40 years younger than me. I passed the time by admiring the tans on the lithe young bodies.

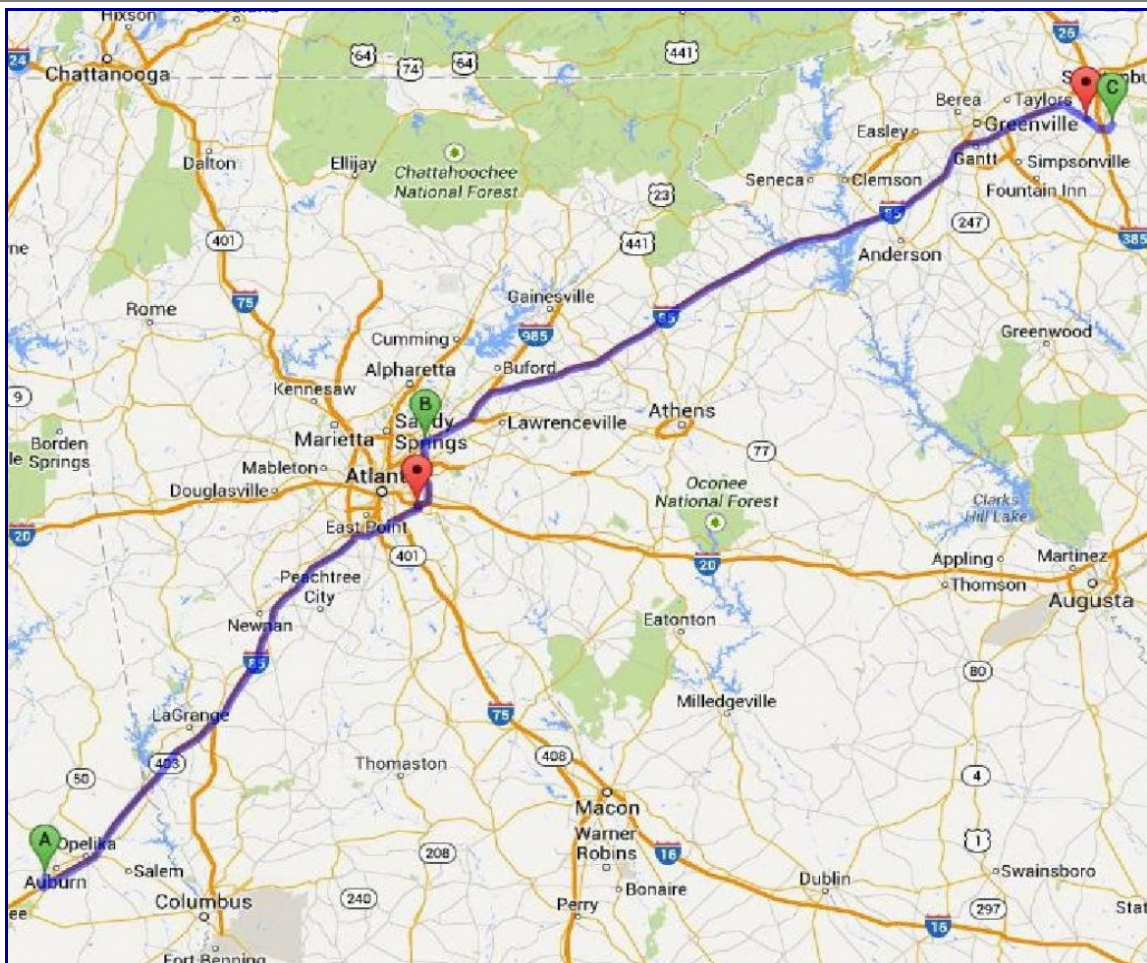
The time passed quickly.

The stop for the night was the Eagle Landing RV Park in Auburn, AL (which added another state to our map - number 25). We didn't even unhitch - just put out the slides, hooked up the water, electric and sewer. Then Jett sent me down to the street to see if there were any food joints within walking distance. No restaurants, but a Dollar General was directly opposite. I went over there - more because it advertised "discount tobacco" than with any real hope that it would have food. But it turned out to offer a lot of groceries, including dairy, deli meats and frozen foods. So I bought some hamburger, Klondike bars and Hostess cupcakes (please, no comments from dieticians). We ate, I walked the dogs (dodging the berry bushes that were buzzing with bees) and fell asleep in the bunkhouse. Another exciting day in the RV.



The rig at rest, still hitched up

QTN Hop 2, Day 2: Auburn AL to Roebuck SC



QTN Hop 2, Day 2

295 miles via I-85, SC 290 and US 221.

The hard parts of this trip were (1) getting ready to travel in a driving rain, (2) dealing with heavy traffic around Atlanta, (3) finding our way out of the refueling stop and (4) finding the RV park. The rain just required wearing a poncho and keeping the speed down to under 55 once on the road (hydroplaning when hauling 7 tons is not fun). The heavy traffic just required a bit of extra caution (and a little cursing). Finding our way out of the refueling stop - difficult because the exit was one-way the wrong way - was accomplished by, at Jett's suggestion, following an 18-wheeler. Finding the RV park required discarding the map (because it was taking me down a scary-looking road) and trusting (gulp!) the GPS. It got us there.

But the scariest part of all may have been the entrance to the RV park. The road was very narrow - narrower than the entrance to the park in NJ - filled with potholes and ended in a steep, curved climb to the office. We also passed some dwellings that had us thinking "Deliverance". Then we found that the office had closed at 4pm, 30 minutes before. But a single phone call got someone to show up to check us in and I was relieved to see that the office was clean and modern. I convinced Jett that it would be ok.

I hope I was right.

26 states and counting.

QTN Hop 3: Roebuck SC to Lorton VA

2 Apr 2014

Yes, back to Lorton and the [Pohick Bay Regional Park](#) for our fourth visit. This will be the shortest of the four - just four nights this time - because we are committed to getting the MD and DE stickers on our map. These little states are hard to get to - particularly Delaware. Who goes to Delaware in an RV? No one I know.

This hop turned had the misfortune to encounter some lousy travel weather. It rained both days. I believe that is now five straight travel days on the QTN that had at least some rain. Five out of six. Lucky us.

I guess I should say a few words about our stay at the [Pine Ridge Campground](#) in Roebuck, SC. This is a park that gets good reviews from other travelers (they claim to be one of the 300 best RV parks in America), but the charm was mostly lost on us. The access road was horrible - narrow with steep hills and lots of bumps - and the roads inside the park weren't much better. There is no cable, no trash pickup and no dog park. We had one of the 6 pull-through sites that are favored by short-term residents, so we had neighbors setting up and tearing down every day. The pool is small and unattractive and the WiFi is nearly useless.

And the weather sucked, which didn't improve our opinion of the place. It was cold all week, with temperatures dropping below freezing nearly every night and rain on three of the days. Cold, damp, gloomy. Not our kind of place.

The only positive is that the owner is a really nice guy - very helpful and informative.

Roebuck is near Spartanburg. I looked into what there is to do in Spartanburg. Not much. TripAdvisor lists the #1 and #2 attractions as city parks. The #3 attraction is the shopping mall. Such is Spartanburg.

On Saturday we had to do our tear-down in a driving, cold rain, with me kneeling in deep red mud. The most miserable tear-down ever.

Good riddance!

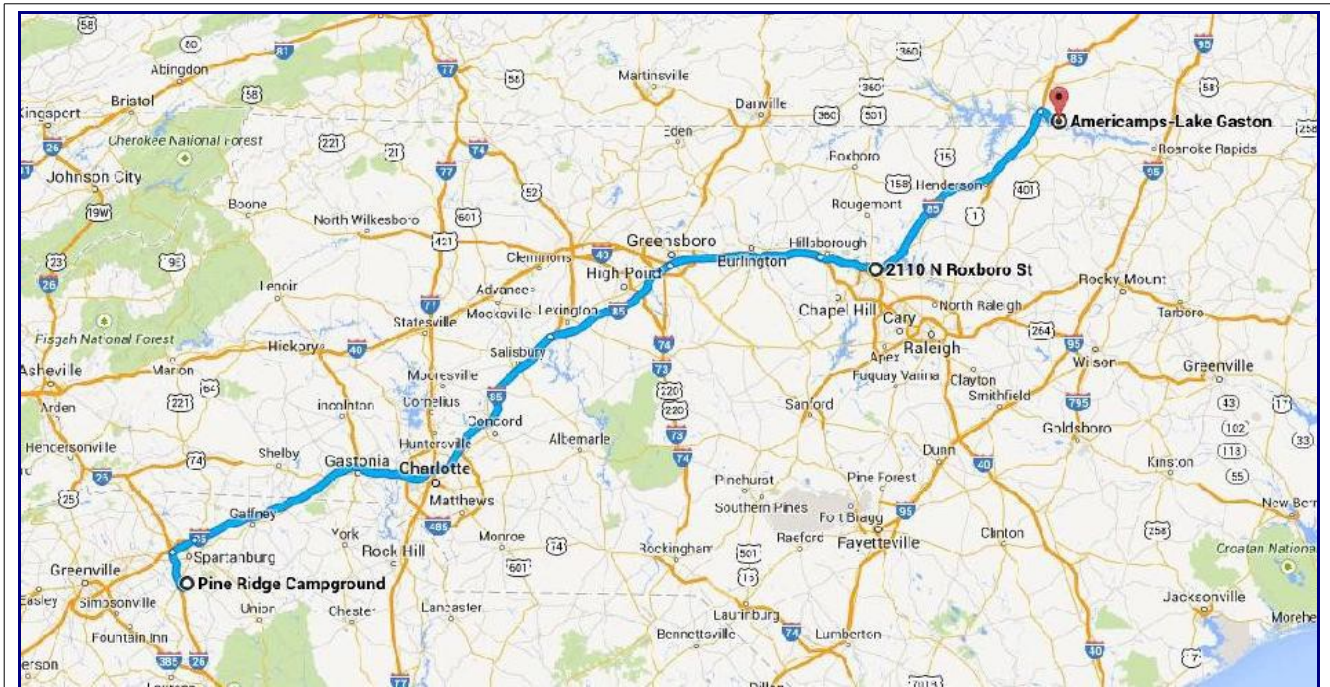
QTN Hop 3, Day 1: Roebuck SC to Bracey VA

292 miles via I-26 and I-85.

It was gloomy all day, but not particularly cold - in the 60s most of the day. The road was relatively flat. We stopped for gas in Mebane, NC, about 20 miles short of our planned refueling stop. I had made the mistake of filling the truck's tanks before going to Walmart for some supplies, forgetting how far Walmart was from the RV Park, so I had 15 miles on the odometer before we even hitched up. That made the planned stop a bit of a stretch.

The refueling stop was not a truck stop but was a large station with about a dozen pumps and plenty of room to maneuver. Or so I thought. Unfortunately, only 2 of those 12 pumps had diesel, so I had to wait until one became free (it was a busy place) and when I started to pull into the vacant space some idiot pulled in in front of me. I didn't shoot him, but I was pretty annoyed. I had to go around and come in from the other side, at an awkward angle. Jett just about had a coronary directing me out of there.

Note to self: use truck stops.

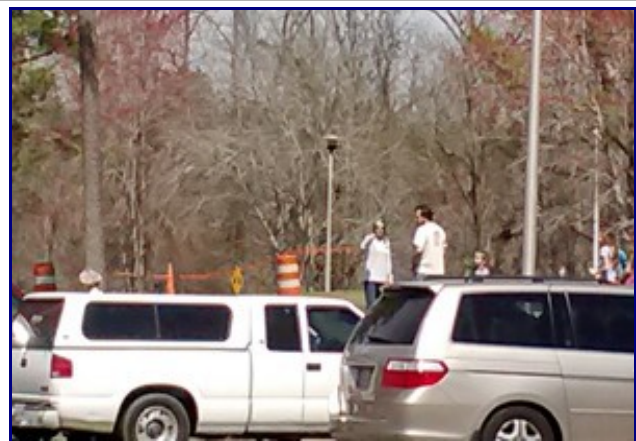


QTN Hop 3, Day 1

We had stopped earlier at a rest area where Jett observed a family of 8 - 2 parents and 6 children, all under 15. They were traveling in a pickup with a canopy (the white truck in the picture). Jett flashed back on her large family and decided to buy the kids some ice cream. The picture is of her speaking to the father and giving him \$10 for treats. The kids were thrilled.

And that's why I love her.

Our park for the night was the [Americamps-Lake Gaston](#) in Bracey, VA. This is a large park on a large lake which in nice weather is probably beautiful. But it was raining. Gloomy. We set up as quickly as possible, then I went out to get dinner and diesel.



Jett buying snacks for 6 kids

I thought the roads in the Pine Ridge Campground were bad, but the roads in Lake Gaston were worse. We had a pull-through but I determined that the only way out of the pull-through was to back out. Not much of a pull-

through. And when I took the garbage to the dumpsters (another park with no trash pickup), I just about buried the truck in red mud.

Again, good riddance.

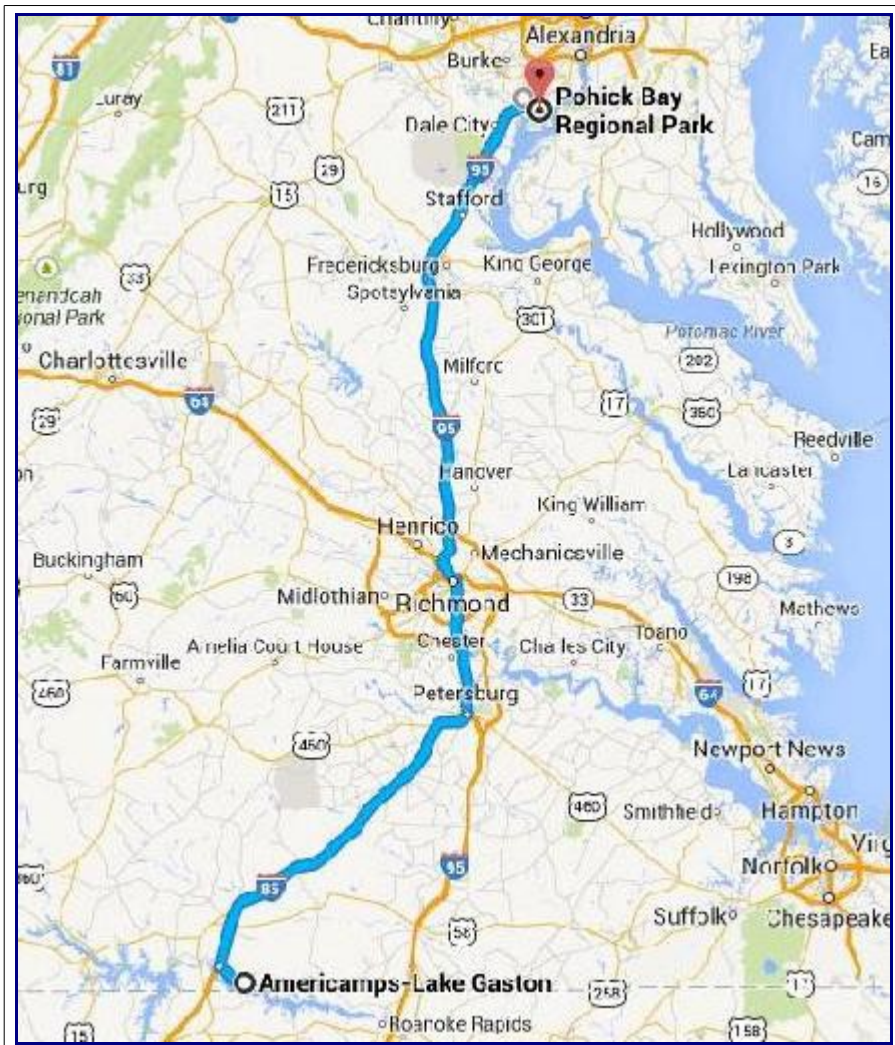
QTN Hop 3, Day 2: Bracey VA to Lorton VA

188 miles via I-85 and I-95.

The route to Lorton was simple - up I-85 until it merged with I-95, then up I-95 to Lorton. Simple route but lousy weather. Heavy rain almost the entire way. And the road was very rough. A very unpleasant travel day.

We had looked at the weather forecast for Lorton before we left and it was not encouraging: rainy with a high of 46. Normal high temp for the end of March is about 67, so that was 20 degrees below normal. But as we drove the temperature dropped and kept dropping. The temperature when we pulled into Pohick? 36 - a full **30 degrees below normal**. And **SNOWING**. Unbelievable!

Let's hope that spring shows up soon. We are using a lot of propane.



QTN Hop 3, Day 2



Snow in Pohick

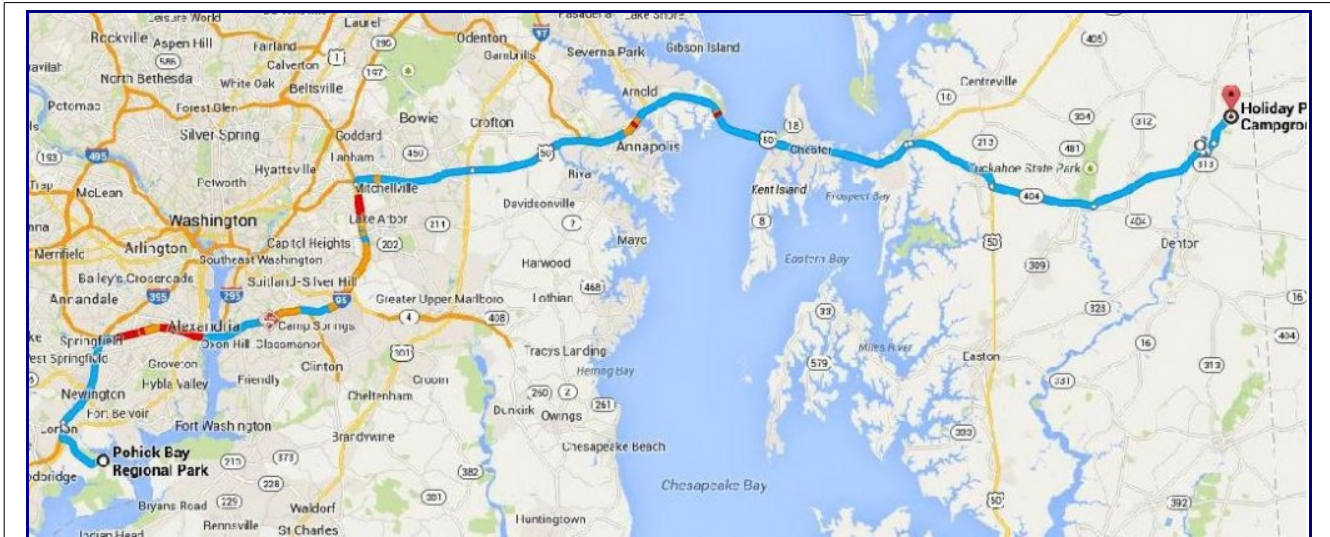
QTN Hop 4: Lorton VA to Foxboro MA

14 Apr 2014

This was a get-more-states-on-the-map hop. We stayed just four days at Pohick - and it warmed up after that icy start, fortunately - then did three quick trips to MD, DE and CT. It was an uneventful hop... until the end.

QTN Hop 4, Day 1: Lorton VA to Greensboro MD

105 miles via I-95, I-495 (the Beltway), US 50, MD 404, MD 480, MD 313 and MD 314,



QTN Hop 4, Day 1

Getting out of Pohick was no fun, due to the deep mud and the geometry of Site 75 (note to self: next time ask for Site 71 - it is MUCH more accessible) and then we had to deal with the traffic on I-95 and I-495 around DC which was also no fun. Once on US 50 the traffic lightened and the sun appeared, so I relaxed a bit, but things got more interesting after we left US 50. Traveling on MD 313 in downtown Greensboro, the GPS directed us down a road that had a "NO TRUCKS" sign prominently posted. We had to pull over to figure out a detour and to calm Jett's nerves. Fortunately it was pretty simple: just continue for another mile, then turn right. No real problem, but I still hate those moments when my planned route goes awry. Almost as much as Jett hates them.

Our home for the night was the [Holiday Park Campground](#) in Greensboro, MD. Because it was a simple overnight stop with a very short trip the following day, we didn't unhitch.

Holiday Park is an interesting campground. It is one of the most spacious places we have seen. The sites are HUGE. We were adjacent to a playground (which was mostly vacant in April) but the nearest RV site was probably over 50 feet away. We were near a river and were surrounded by trees. The site had a real "in the woods" feel to it.



At rest at Holiday Park



River at Holiday Park



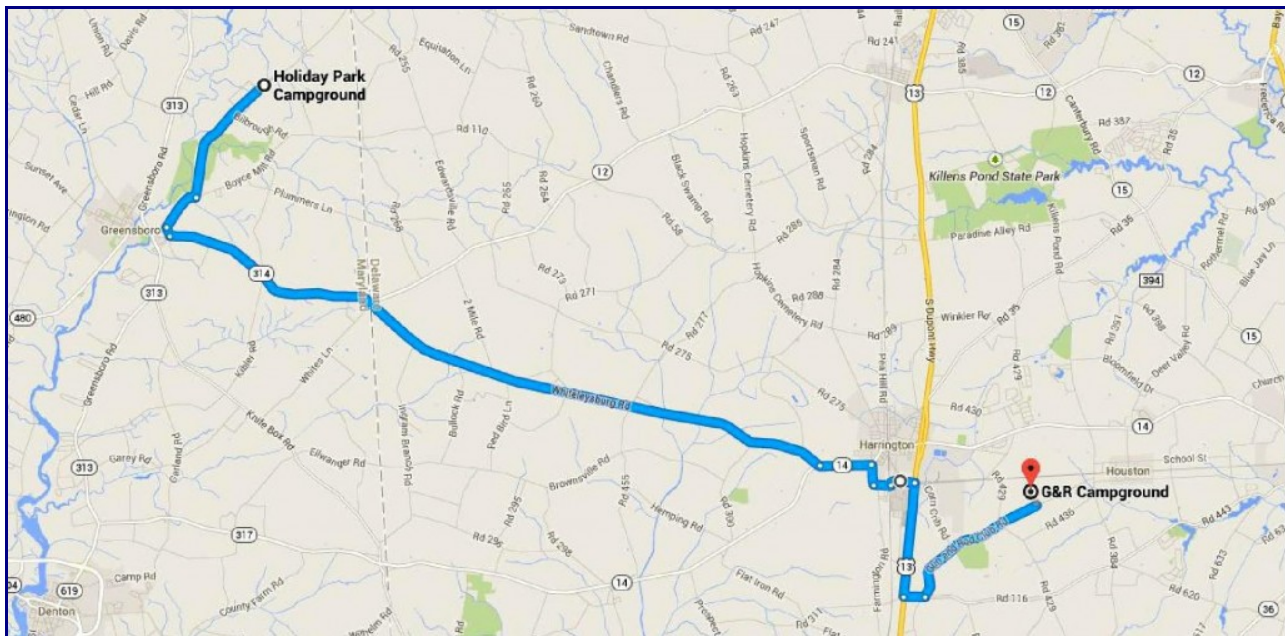
Lots of space

The park has no WiFi and, surprisingly, no septic. Long-term residents are serviced twice a week by a "honey pot" truck that empties their tanks. This would seem like an inconvenience, but we had the feeling that this would be a good place to hang out for a week with a large group. It was very restful.

The park has no WiFi and, surprisingly, no septic. Long-term residents are serviced twice a week by a "honey pot" truck that empties their tanks. This would seem like an inconvenience, but we had the feeling that this would be a good place to hang out for a week with a large group. It was very restful.

The park was pretty lightly populated with RVs, but even more lightly populated with people. I realized, when evening fell, that none of the RVs within sight had any lights! They must have all been used for weekend visits. So we had a very quiet (and slightly spooky) night. We locked our door.

QTN Hop 4, Day 2: Greensboro MD to Houston DE



QTN Hop 4, Day 2

21 miles via MD 314 and US 13.

That's right: 21 miles. Actually, it was supposed to be 20 but we got lost. Seriously. Our shortest day of travel ever and we got lost. Sad.

We didn't get totally lost; just a little lost. We ended up making a full loop around the Delaware State Fairgrounds. Not a big problem, but kind of embarrassing that we couldn't complete our shortest day of travel ever without screwing it up.

We stayed the night at the [G&R Campground](#) in Houston, DE. The "G&R" stand for "Gun and Rod" as the campground is on the grounds of a gun and rod club. It is a small campground which we selected simply because it was open in April, which makes it almost unique in the set of RV parks in Delaware - most are near beaches and open only when the water is warm enough to attract swimmers. It suited our needs for



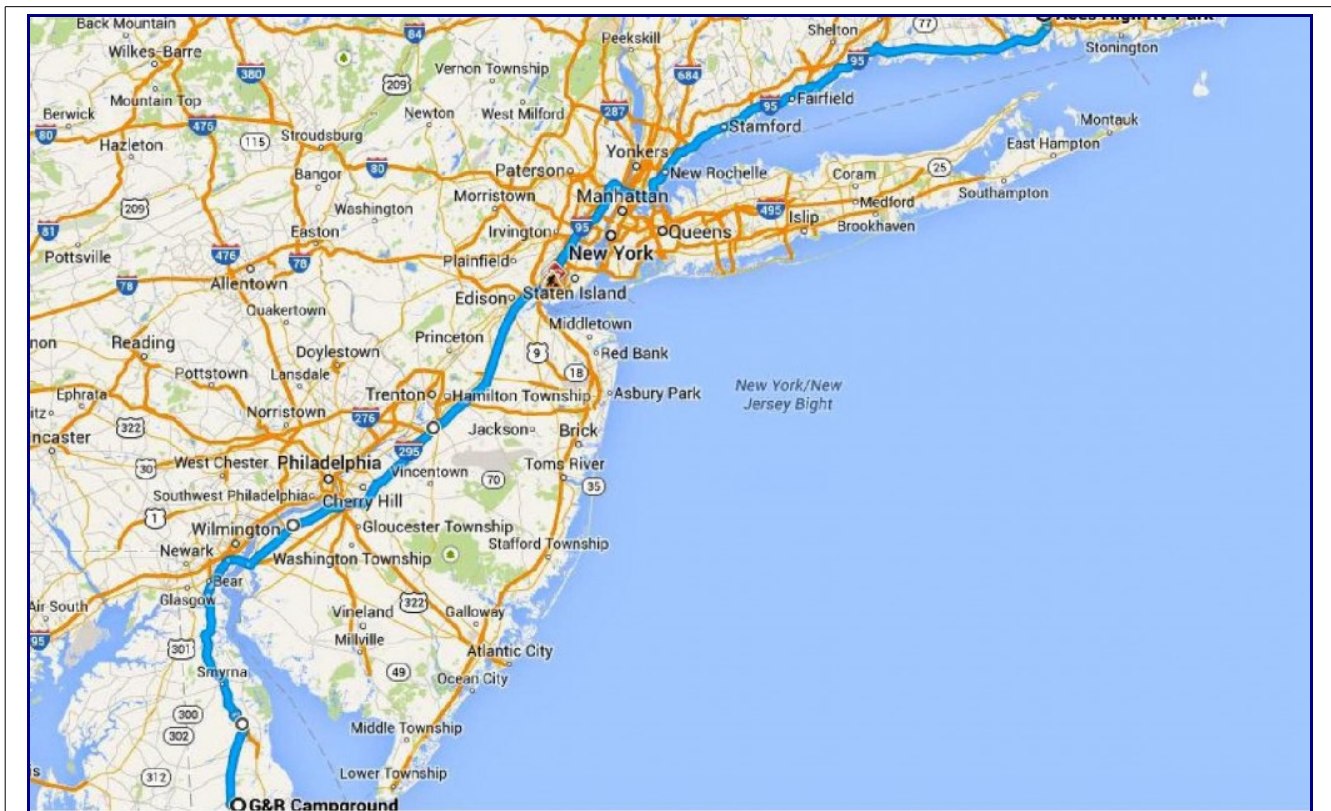
G&R Campground

another overnight stay, but isn't a place we would go back to again. Our impression was: trashy.

This was just an overnight stop, but the following day would be a long one. So we unhitched and refueled. We also got some Popeye's fried chicken for dinner. A fast food treat.

QTN Hop 4, Day 3: Houston DE to East Lyme CT

310 miles via US 13, DE 1, I-295 in NJ, I-95 and CT 161.



QTN Hop 4, Day 3

I wasn't looking forward to this day. It would be long and it would take us over a lot of expensive toll roads where we paid for the privilege of traveling some very bumpy, congested and poorly maintained roads - most notably I-95 in NY and CT. We took I-295 through NJ for about 30 miles which saved a few bucks of tolls on the

NJ Turnpike. But there was no way to avoid the George Washington Bridge and its **\$68** toll - \$5 more than the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Total tolls for the day exceeded \$100. Just to get CT on our map.

Never again. It was an unpleasant and very expensive day of travel. Note to self: stay FAR AWAY from New York City in the future.

The good news, if there is any, is that we didn't encounter any unexpected low bridges. I was also pleased to discover that diesel fuel could be obtained at a travel plaza on the NJ Turnpike for the relatively low price of \$3.86 per gallon.

We made it to our destination - the [Aces High RV Park](#) in East Lyme, CT, by 5:10pm - 10 minutes after the office closed. We had to pick a site, set up for the night and then settle up with the office in the morning.

Aces High is about 15 miles from the [Mohican Sun Casino](#) in Uncasville. I had been there just once before, shortly after it opened many years ago. I was still feeling flush from our slots success in Biloxi, so I decided to go and try my luck. I also had to get some fuel and thought I could get some relatively cheap diesel (which is VERY expensive in CT) near the casino. Turns out I was mistaken on both counts - my luck did not hold and the cheap diesel was only for employees of the casino.

I was surprised to find that Mohegan Sun had EXPLODED in the intervening years. I didn't recognize the place. It is HUGE - larger than some of the Vegas casinos. I went to one huge casino wing, but there was at least one other wing that I didn't even see. They must be profitable.

I got the fuel Sunday morning after settling up at the office.



Patience at Aces High



Aces High Campground

QTN Hop 4: Day 4: East Lyme CT to Foxboro MA

90 miles via CT 161, I-95, I-295 (around Providence) and US 1.

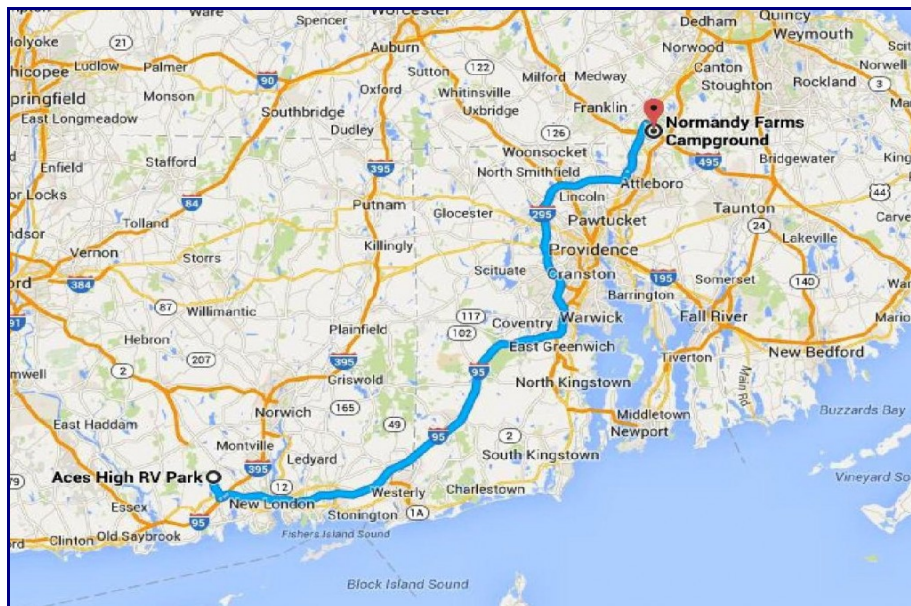
A 4th straight day of travel - a new record for us and one that I am not eager to break. Even though this was just 90 miles, the effort of tearing down and setting up caught up to me. I took a long nap once we got to Foxboro.

Our home for two weeks is the [Normandy Farms Family Camping Resort](#), a very nice campground in Foxboro, MA, just about 2 miles south of Gillette Stadium where the New England Patriots play. As usual, I will save the park review until we leave, but I can tell you up front that this is one of the best - and most expensive - places we have ever stayed. More on that later.

We still have to get up to Littleton for the summer, but that will be a series of very short trips over the next three weeks. We are in Massachusetts again and I am once again commuting to my office in Cambridge. We are

home.

Though, as we now tell people, we are always home because home is our RV.



QTN Hop 4, Day 4

Normandy Farms

3 May 2014

Sometimes you get what you pay for. And sometimes you REALLY pay for what you get. [Normandy Farms Family Camping Resort](#) illustrates both. Yes, it is really nice. Yes, it is REALLY expensive. I have to say that we really liked staying there for two weeks, but we couldn't afford to stay longer.

How expensive is it? We were there during "value season," which means that we paid \$413 per week, \$826 total. That is over \$1,600 a month! Almost \$60 per night - more than some hotels. During peak season the rate is \$483 per week. Ouch.



Patience at Normandy Farms

They have some cabins, too. They are, for cabins, very nice - a deck a screened-in porch, A/C and nice furniture and dishes. But it is still a cabin. Peak season rate: \$1,795 per week. \$7,000 to rent a cabin for a month? Wow.

For comparison purposes, we will be paying \$1,100 per month for our site at Minuteman Campground. While

Normandy has more amenities (and I will describe them shortly), I can't see how they would be worth an extra \$1,000, which is what Normandy Farms charges, in effect. Crazy.

So what does Normandy Farms have?

- security gate
- an incredible playground
- a baseball field
- a volleyball court
- a disc golf course
- a BMX course
- a HUGE dog park (more than an acre)
- an adults-only lounge and game room
- a restaurant
- three outdoor pools (Minuteman has one)
- an indoor pool
- an amazing social center

Yes, very nice. But ridiculously expensive.





Baseball field



BMX course



Adult lounge



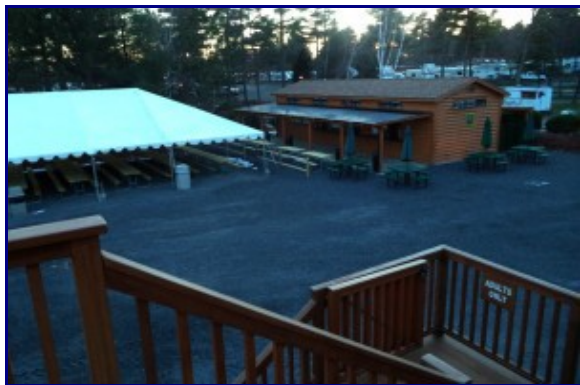
Adult game room



Kids game room



Outdoor pool and shuffleboard



Restaurant



Activity hall



Indoor pool



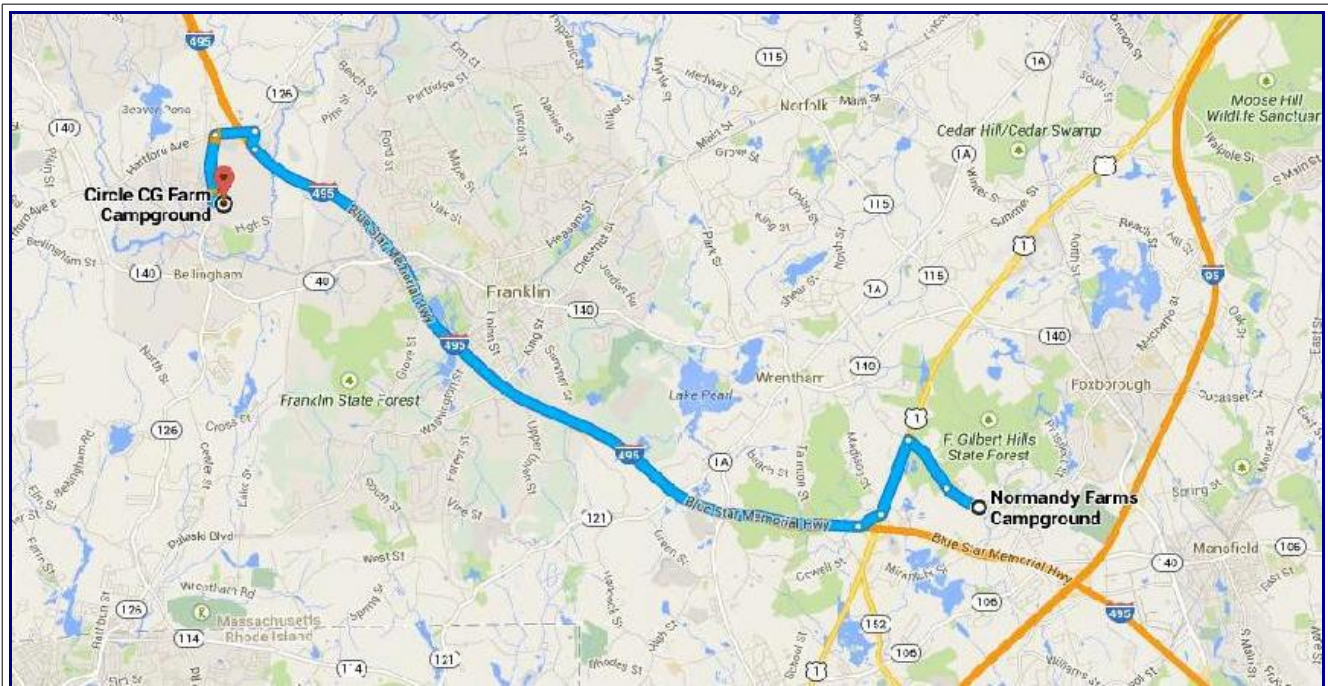
Poolside lounge

QTN Hop 5: Foxboro MA to Littleton MA

8 May 2014

This was the delayed ending to the QTN: two short travel days separated by a 2-week stay at [Circle Cg Campground](#).

QTN Hop 5, Day 1: Foxboro MA to Bellingham MA



QTN Hop 5, Day 1

14 miles via US 1, I-495 and MA 140.

This trip took about 20 minutes. Tearing down and setting up took much longer.

This was our second stay at Circle Cg (we spent several weeks here last fall at the start of the QTS). We didn't like it much then. This time we liked it a bit more - there were fewer campers this time, which gave it a more

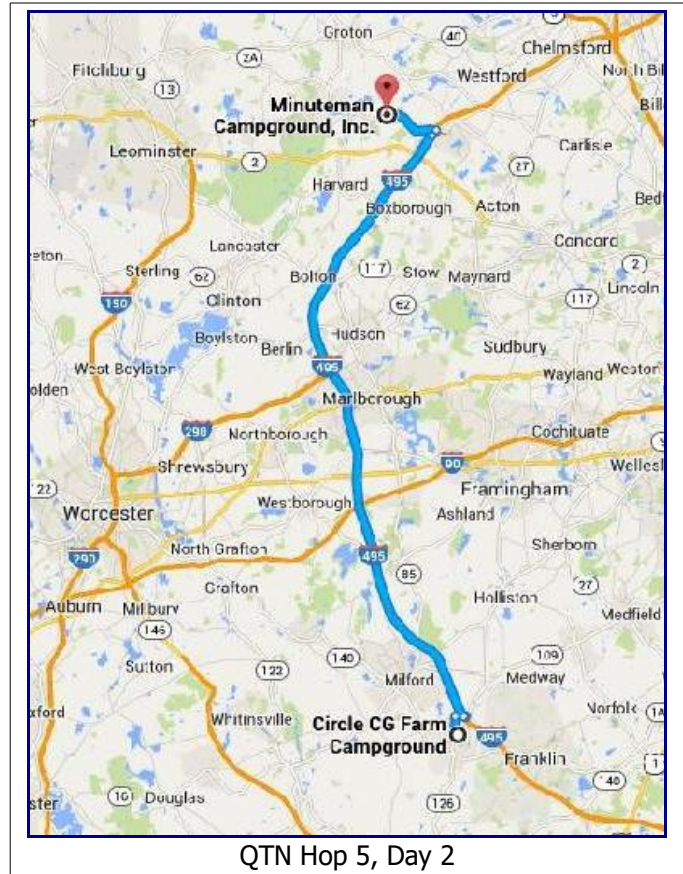
laid-back feel. But we were still happy to leave. It's not a bad campground, but it's not my cup of tea. Some campgrounds have high maintenance standards (e.g., Seminole, Normandy Farms) and some don't. Circle Cg is ragged around the edges. And their weak attempts at decorations (it tries for a cowboy/western feel) comes off as tacky.

QTN Hop 5, Day 2: Bellingham MA to Littleton MA

38 miles via MA 126, I-495 and MA 2A.

It was another easy trip - about an hour. The only difficulty was the construction on I-495 (which, it seems, is ALWAYS under construction). That delayed us maybe 10 minutes. No big deal. We got to the [Boston Minuteman Campground](#) around 1pm and got set up by 2pm. We felt like we were home. I treated the dogs to a walk to the dog park (a treat because Circle Cg doesn't have a dog park, so Rusty never got off the leash there and Grace had only limited opportunities to run free). There were exactly 9 other RVs in the park.

Our arrival at Minuteman marked the end of the Quick Trip North. Total: 2,316 miles over 5 weeks (6 weekends). The highlights? Biloxi and the Normandy Farms Campground. The lowlights? The crappy weather and the "Deliverance" campground in North Carolina. But we got 6 new stickers on our map, including the difficult-to-get Delaware and Maryland stickers. We passed on Rhode Island, which was included in our original QTN plan, but it won't be hard to get later. So, 29 states down, 19 to go.



The inverter

1 Jun 2014

Well, almost two years into the journey I continue to learn new things about our RV. In this case it is the inverter. I knew that we had an inverter and I knew its basic function - to convert 12V DC current into 120V AC current. However, I never quite figured out *when* it was used. I initially thought that ALL of the 120V outlets would be available when boondocking, but I almost immediately realized that the battery would last about a minute (and would probably explode) if was used to power the 3 TVs, the microwave, the coffee maker and the toaster oven. And it was obvious, when the AC power went out, that all we had left were the 12V lights. None of the outlets worked.

Or so I thought.

Three days ago the refrigerator suddenly and unexpectedly showed (via the idiot light on the front panel) that it was operating on propane rather than the 120V electricity. Yesterday I investigated and discovered that the outlet into which the refrigerator was plugged was dead. Later yesterday we discovered that the water heater

was also not functioning when using electricity - we had to switch that to propane, too.

So what was wrong? Clearly it was an electrical problem and likely one that affected both the refrigerator and the hot water heater. I checked the breaker box, but there was no breaker for either the refrigerator or the hot water heater (which in itself was pretty surprising and not something I had noticed before). So first thing this morning I got online and Googled "399BHS refrigerator power failure" and came across some interesting articles involving... wait for it...

THE INVERTER!

Turns out that the inverter is used to power the refrigerator and, on some RVs, the hot water heater. This is a good use of that particular kind of AC power because it is **on while traveling**. This makes a lot of sense. If the refrigerator didn't have electric power while traveling - and if you did the recommended thing and turned off the propane (to make an explosion in a collision less likely) - then your frozen food might not be so frozen when you arrived after a long day of travel. The hot water heater is less vital, but if you like to take a hot shower when you stop for the night, it might be nice to have the heater active while on the road.

The inverter has its own fuses, so anything that runs off of it would not be found in the breaker box, which explains why I didn't find the refrigerator or the water heater there.

I also learned that one of the kitchen outlets is on the inverter circuit used by the refrigerator, so there is, in fact, one 120V outlet that will continue to work while on the road or when the power goes out. I'm not sure how I will use that information, but I think it is valuable knowledge. For example, if we were boondocking (not likely) and I needed to recharge my laptop, I could use that outlet.

All of this newfound knowledge seemed to point the finger pretty squarely at either the inverter or the battery as the source of the refrigerator and water heater failures. I inspected both the inverter and the battery this morning and didn't see any obvious problem. But as the lifetime of a battery is about 5 years and since our RV was built in 2009, I am betting on a bad battery. I will replace it and see if that helps. If not, I will have to call in a repair guy and check out the inverter.

But in any case I now better understand the role of the inverter in the anatomy of an RV. And that makes me feel just a wee bit smarter.

Um... never mind

17 Jun 2014

So I finally got around to diagnosing my inverter problem, which involved pulling all of the boxes out of our "basement" and crawling inside so that I could get an up-close-and-personal look at the inverter. And there, right on the top of the box, was the label: CONverter. Not INverter. Instead of changing 12V DC to 120V AC it does the opposite - changes 120V AC to 12V DC. As my problem involves the 120V circuits, that box clearly could not be implicated.

So take a step back, take a deep breath and think. THINK, dammit!

Well, it seemed like the next thing to do would be to check out the breaker box and make double-darn sure that all of the breakers were functioning. So I got my trusty voltmeter (now over 40 years old, I think) and took the cover off of the breaker box. I made sure that all of the breakers were in the ON positions, then checked the voltage coming out of each one.

Well, well, well... the two breakers to the right of the main breaker had no voltage at all! So I removed one of the breakers and checked the voltage on the bus (the metal bar that provides the incoming current). Nothing! But the voltage to the other breakers - the ones to the left of the main breaker - was fine.

Light began to dawn. Seems that the 50A electric supply is provided with 2 120V feeds, just as in any normal 240V setup. And it seemed that we were getting power on just one of the two feeds.

Next step: check the voltage at the campground box. Both sides of the outlet were fine - 120V each.

This points the finger at my power cable. Maybe one of the wires is broken or loose. My guess is the male connector - which was held on with electrical tape when we bought the RV - has finally failed. I just got a replacement connector today and will install it soon. I will let you know.

All of this left me with a couple of questions:

1. What is on the two circuits on the dead side of the breaker box? Clearly the refrigerator and the hot water heater are both there, though not labeled. When this is all done and everything is functioning again I am going to have to spend some time correcting the labeling in the breaker box.
2. What is the actual impact of hooking up to a 30A service instead of a 50A service? I had thought that it was just a matter of the peak power available, but as the 30A service is (I think) a single 120V feed, I am wondering if the two breakers that are dead now are also dead in a 30A scenario. Another thing to investigate.

Electrical problem: the final chapter

24 Jun 2014

Just like the *Nightmare on Elm Street* our electrical problem went on and on. But I think we have finally arrived at the Final Chapter. To make a long story short, it seems that the problem is with the 50A socket on the campground's electric box. It wasn't that the socket was broken, just worn. Ted, our intrepid campground host, is going to try to fix it tomorrow.

In the meantime we are running off of the 30A socket. Both the refrigerator and the water heater are happily running on electricity again.

Catching up: Memorial Day

6 Jul 2014

Yes, it is July 6th and I am just now blogging about Memorial Day. Well,... I've been busy. And it is oh-so-hard getting those photos downloaded from the camera.

But first, just because you were wondering: yes, the repairs on the site's electrical box were successful. We now, once again, have full 50A service. End of the refrigerator/water heater/inverter/converter saga.

Memorial Day.

As I have in the previous two years, I traveled to Tillamook, OR, on Memorial Day this year to see my ailing mother and my sister and her wonderful family. I left Friday night and returned Tuesday night, taking Tuesday as a vacation day. That is still a lot of miles for a 3-day visit and I was pretty tired both when I arrived in Oregon and when I returned to Massachusetts. The flight out was non-stop from Boston to Portland, but the flight back had me changing planes in Dallas - a very long trip to get back. But all the flights were on time and relatively smooth, so I have no real complaints.

The adventure began when I arrived in Portland. The city had discovered E-coli in its water supply and had slapped a "boil order" on the entire city. But the Days Inn did not have time to deal with the emergency so when

I checked in I was told to not drink the water - or even brush my teeth. I had bought a large bottle of water at the airport, so I was ok, but had to leave the city in the morning to get breakfast.

The purpose of the trip was to visit Mom. She is 90 and failing. She is now on oxygen 24/7 and has frequent panic attacks because she feels she can't breathe. And she falls - she fell once while I was in town and had fallen twice in the days before my arrival. Fortunately, she has not broken any bones but she has banged her head. Obviously, any fall at her age is very worrisome.

And she doesn't eat much. Her daily diet now consists of jello, bananas and Ensure.

It was painful to watch, especially since she had been doing so well just a year ago.

She had moments when she was calm and (sort of) happy, but for the most part she is pretty miserable. Sad.

Anyway, here is a photo I took of her and my sister:



Mom and Sis

I got to meet her doctor, thanks to a visit to the ER on Sunday morning. Nice guy. I am convinced that she is getting excellent care. I also had a nice trip to the [Chinook Winds Casino](#) where I won \$79 (that is two winning trips to a casino in a row - a new personal best!) and the [Salishan Golf Resort](#) where I played a round of golf on a beautiful course on a beautiful day for \$79. Net: even. And I got to swing the clubs a lot for that one, fixed price. Very economical.

It's a good thing that I can write computer software because I will never make a living on the Senior Golf Tour.

Many thanks to my brother-in-law Chris for accompanying me on that golf/gaming trip. It was a very good time and a nice relief from the sadness that characterized the rest of the trip to Tillamook.

I got home at 2:30am and was back in the office by 10am Wednesday morning.



Salishan

Old friends

14 Jul 2014

How many friends have you had for over 45 years? I have at least 14 - thirteen from college and one from high school. I feel I am very lucky. I will tell you about the high school friend some other time; this post is about my thirteen college friends.

To be fair, I actually have more old friends from college than the 13 I am claiming here, but these 13 are special in that they were in my pledge class - we pledged the same fraternity - Lambda Chi Alpha - in the same year - 1967. Some of you might think *Animal House* when you think "fraternity" and I can't deny that there were some experiences that involved too much alcohol, but this was M.I.T. and we were very intelligent drunks. We had a lot of fun. We created memories that are even now vivid. We really enjoyed being together.

After graduation we kept in touch. Periodically we would get together - maybe not all of us because we followed our careers all over the globe and, being busy, we couldn't all make it every time. But more than half made it back every time a mini-reunion of the pledge class was arranged.

The most recent one was in late June, held at Charlie Snell's lakeside cottage in New Hampshire and 9 of the 14 made it, which is pretty remarkable some 43 years after graduation. We talked, we reminisced, we laughed. And, yes, we drank, but not so much as in days of yore. And, most remarkably, we read poems that we had written. Not me as I only had limericks to offer, but quite a few of the others had written some couplets to mark the affair.



Chatting on the beach

Copyright laws and the rules of good taste prevent me from including them here.



Roger and Nancy



Charlie, John, Joan, Bob and Dan

Screen houses

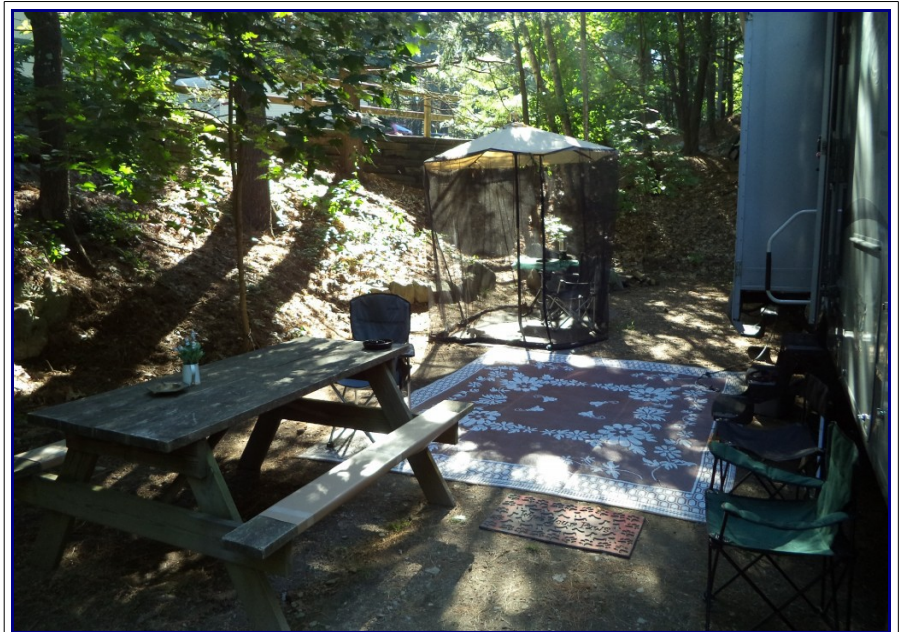
27 Jul 2014

It may just be that we have a screen house this summer, but I have been noticing how many RVers have them. I suppose in places with few insects (yes, there are some - the desert, for example) they really aren't needed. But we are in New England where there are, after a good, soaking rain, enough mosquitoes to carry you away. Avoiding the annoyance buzzing bugs alone justifies the cost. But when someone is allergic (yes, that would be Jett), the cost should be deductible as a medical necessity.

Ours is, technically speaking, not so much a screen house as a screen umbrella. It is a net that drapes over a large patio umbrella. Lacking stakes - or any support other than the center pole - I was concerned that the

whole thing would blow away in the first stiff breeze. That concern, coupled with the realization that the net didn't quite reach the ground, led to a solution: bury the base about 4" in the soil. That gave the whole shebang additional stability and closed those annoying gaps around the base. No breeze has, to date, blown it away.

Steve and Elaine, our friendly neighbors, liked their screen house so much last summer that this year they have *two*. They seem to use one for socializing and one for playing cards. But it Jett and I had two they would probably become his-and-her spaces. I need a man-cave.



Our screen "house"

A walk around the park revealed a wide variety of screen houses. Here is one of the more interesting ones - a tent-style one that is actually larger than the tent in which the occupants sleep.



Tent-style screen house



One of Steve and Elaine's screen houses



Rusty enjoying his net cage

Water, water everywhere

2 Aug 2014

We have had an average amount of rain this summer, but have had a much-greater-than-normal amount of water inside the RV.

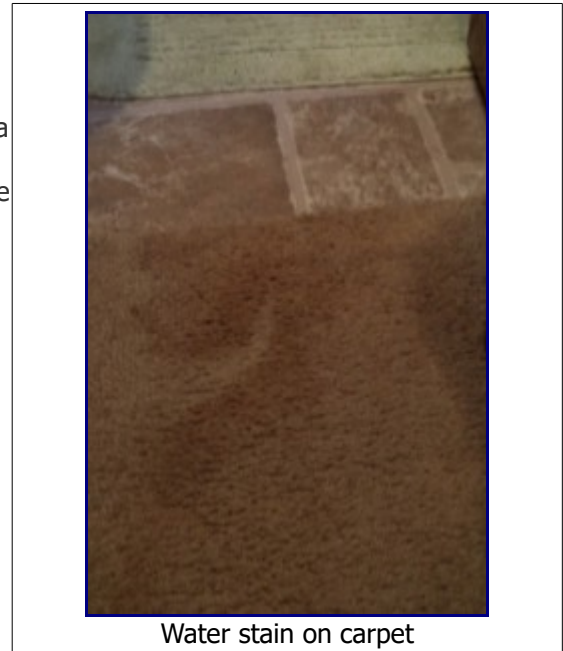
First, one of the bunkhouse slides sprung a leak. Beginning with a heavy rain in May, we found a large, very wet spot in the bunkhouse due to water seeping in - somehow - through the slide seals. We have experimented with putting duct tape over seams and seals on the slide, without success. There is no water on the ceiling or the walls - it seems to be entering from UNDER the slide. We have discovered that bringing the slide in about 8" during a heavy rain stops the leak, which gives us a way to deal with it, but I still have no clue as to what is leaking. Very puzzling. And damaging - it has left a nasty stain on the bunkhouse carpet.

Then we found that the other bunkhouse slide was also leaking, albeit in a different way. This leak presents as a wet spot in the corner behind the bunk. It is not nearly as severe as the other leak and it different as it appears above the bunk floor rather than below. But it is still very annoying.

The third leak was discovered in the bedroom closet. At least this one was easy to diagnose - an inspection of the roof revealed an open seam above the closet area. I patched it with roof cement and that one seems to be fixed.

Just so it wouldn't be left behind, the sink also sprung a leak. Looks like the seal around the drain has opened a bit, which causes water to drip under the sink if we fill it with water. I think I can fix this by applying a clear waterproof sealant around the seam. But I haven't done it yet.

Owning an RV seems a lot like owning a house.



Water stain on carpet

A lazy Saturday

15 Aug 2014

Being a working stiff, Saturdays are usually filled with chores unless we have a family event to attend or some other scheduled activity that occupies most of the day. It is a rare Saturday that we just lounge around. And an even rarer Saturday when we get out of the house and spend the afternoon meandering.

Such was July 12, 2014. We had plans, of a sort. The idea was to attend Littleton's Town Picnic, part of the series of events marking Littleton's tercentennial - its 300th birthday party. Our initial plans called for us getting granddaughter Liliani for the day, but due to my softball schedule (which meant I would not get home until 1pm) and Lili's softball schedule (and end-of-season pool party), we were without child.

We went anyway. The event turned out to be - surprise - a town picnic. Nothing



Scarecrow

more. Lots of people sitting around on blankets eating homemade sandwiches. Nary a food vendor in sight. Unless we wanted to join in the wheelbarrow races (Jett declined), there was really nothing for us there.

We did enjoy the scarecrows. I don't know what significance scarecrows have in Littleton's history, but they were everywhere. Who made them and why? Dunno. But there were some nice ones.

So after spending just 30 minutes at the picnic we were left in the unexpected position of having an afternoon free and nothing to do. We needed lunch, but it was a beautiful day, so we started heading east on MA 119 with the idea of finding a cafe along the way. Or ending up in Concord which we knew had some good dining spots.

We didn't see anything interesting on 119 and so ended up on downtown Concord and found a parking spot right in the middle of the historic downtown area.

[Concord](#) is a small town, so "downtown" comprises a city block, with a few shops down a couple of side streets. The "historic" comes from its association with

some pretty famous 19th century authors (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Louisa May Alcott - you couldn't write in Concord unless you had 3 names) and an attempt by those pesky Redcoats to capture some arms stored there at the start of the Revolutionary War. Now it is a quintessential upscale New England town, complete with a town common surrounding by white churches. And lots of little shops selling upscale items to upscale visitors.

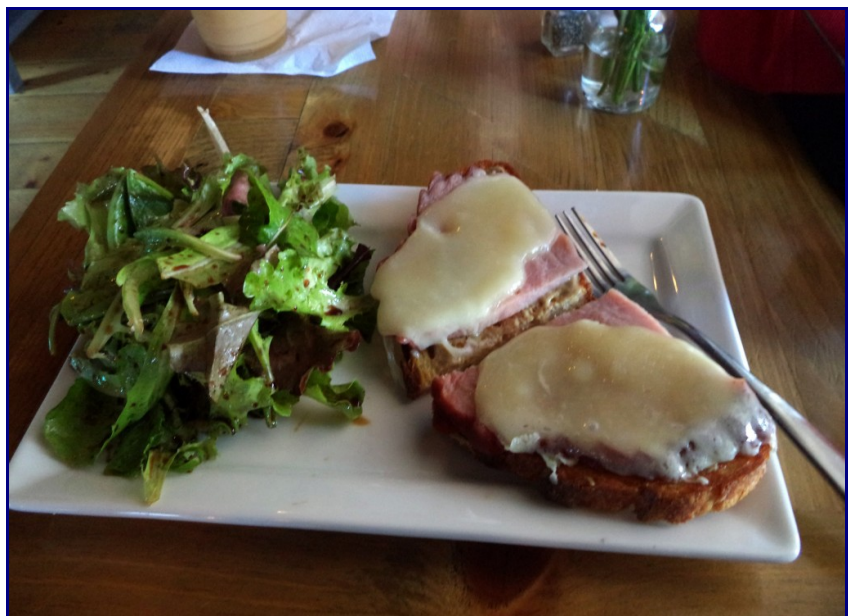
The only upscale items we bought were miniature porcelain figurines of a monkey and a dolphin (don't ask). We then found a coffee place - [Haute Coffee](#) (get it?) that also served some very interesting sandwiches. I had one made with imported ham, imported cheese and homemade bread that was outstanding. It tasted as good as it looked. And we dined in a room that was straight out of the 17th century, with hand-hewn beams and a stone fireplace. The place was WAY more interesting than the Starbucks that we passed to get there.



Church in Concord



Jett window shopping



Yum!

Not well, apparently. While Concord was bustling on a beautiful Saturday afternoon, the streets of Maynard were nearly deserted. Most shops were closed, which I found shocking. Very sad.

We meandered up MA 27 to Acton, then back to Littleton. I had thought of visiting Ayer, but Jett was tired, so we called it a day.

A very nice day.

The big 3-0

18 Aug 2014

My 30th birthday is so far back that I can't even see it in the rearview mirror. But Jett and I did celebrate another big 3-0 this weekend: our 30th state, Maine. We attended our first Escapees rally this weekend in Hermon, Maine, just outside Bangor. I will describe that event separately, but with our first night at the rally we have now stayed in the RV overnight in 30 different states.

30 down and 18 to go.

Unfortunately, it now appears that we will be off the road and back in our house in Medford for the winter of 2014-2015. We made the



The map at 30

decision very reluctantly and it was a bit of a reversal as we had already booked a spot in Florida. But as we discussed options for renting/selling the house it became painfully obvious that (1) selling the house in the spring would be much more feasible than selling it now and (2) selling the house in the spring would not be possible if we rented it now. Also, the house needs some cosmetic work that we could do ourselves if we were in residence. Staying in the house through the winter was the obvious, albeit painful, choice.

So if we are to achieve our "48 states in 48 months" we will have to sell the house in the spring, then embark on the Second Trip West.

The rally was an Escapees Chapter 3 (New England) rally, held at [Pumpkin Patch RV Resort](#) in Bangor ME. This is a very nice campground with facilities that were perfect for the rally. The main event was a fantastic lobster boil on the last night of the rally. The lobsters were available at wholesale prices, so Jett did not feel at all guilty about getting two. A real New England treat!



At Pumpkin Patch



Boiling lobsters



Jett in lobster heaven

Liliani

29 Aug 2014

My older son Tony has a daughter named Liliani. I don't know where the name came from, but I like it. She is "Lili" for short. She is going on 9 years old and is just about the best granddaughter a guy could have.

She may not be so sweet when she becomes a teenager - hormones have a way of killing sweetness - so I will enjoy it while it lasts.

She came to the RV for an overnight visit a few weeks ago. Jett, who hadn't really gotten to know her previously, was enchanted. That is no mean feat - Jett is not easily enchanted. Lili loves to read, is very curious, easily engaged in any activity, swims well, played on a championship Little League baseball

team and love s'mores. The perfect kid.

Well, at least she was perfect for that visit.

After the visit Jett called Lili's mom, Krystle, to tell her that she was doing a wonderful job raising her daughter. That's the kind of call you love to make.



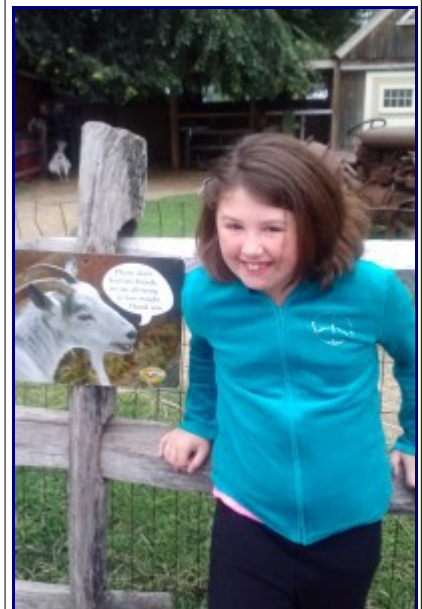
Lili in the RV



At home with Mom



Swimming with Grampie



At Kimball Farms

Commuting – the lost opportunity

26 Sep 2014

I have been commuting to work via commuter rail - 90 minutes each way - since we arrived back in Massachusetts in March. It is now the end of September and I am about to take my last ride and it now, belatedly, occurs to me that I have wasted those 3 hours each workday. Sure, I have done a lot of reading and

there have even been occasions when I used the spotty WiFi service provided by the train to do some work. But I didn't use the time to best advantage.

I should have been blogging.

This blog has become moribund. It is not because I don't have anything interesting to say or can't find the words. No, I simply haven't been able to find the time. Those 3 hours spend commuting every day take their toll on a guy who wishes he was retired. When I get home at 7pm, then walk the dogs, eat dinner and catch up on the daily chores like paying bills - and, of course, keeping my fantasy baseball teams running smoothly - I am exhausted and usually fall asleep in the bunkhouse before 9pm. No time to blog.

But the train... No, my laptop doesn't have a long battery life. But it should last at least 40 minutes. Long enough to blog. The spotty WiFi would not hinder the task - I would need it only to post. Instead I spent the time reading. Yes, I caught up on some good mysteries. But I neglected the blog.

So I have no excuses, dear readers - if any remain. I have missed my opportunity this summer. Sorry.

Coming off the road

15 Oct 2014

Sad, but true - we are out of the RV and back in our house in Medford, MA. We put the house up for sale in early September and agreed that if it didn't sell by the end of October we would reside there over the winter (ugh!), fix the place up a bit and get it back on the market in the spring. Well, we didn't get any serious offers so we made the move and put the RV in storage. The photo on the right is Patience, looking sad and forlorn next to a rusted-out Bounder. We will get an RV cover for it before the end of November.

So this was the first time that I had to "winterize" the RV, which really meant getting the water out of the lines. I chose the "blow air" through the lines method

rather than the "fill the lines with antifreeze" method, but relied on my strong lungs to empty the lines. That has worked in the past with the lawn sprinklers at the house, but I don't have a lot of confidence that I did it well enough. I will try again when we put the cover on it.

Being back in the house is weird. We are now used to living in 400 sq ft, so suddenly having 2200 sq ft available seems excessive. I love having the yard - no more early morning dog walks - but dread getting the heating bills. And since we don't have much furniture, the place looks empty. We are resisting doing anything that has a permanent feel to it - like getting cable TV or a sofa - and are trying very hard to not acquire anything that won't fit in the RV. We had to cancel our FL campground reservations, but left the deposit with them. We still have a faint hope that the house will sell before spring and we will be able to dig Patience out of the snow and escape. It is unlikely, but we can dream.

The other thing I am enjoying about the house is the commute. I can now get to work in under 45 minutes - half the time it took to get there from Littleton. That is an extra 90 minutes each day that I can use for things like... blogging.

If you know of anyone who would like a nice 4-bedroom 1.5-bath house in Medford, MA, please send them our way.



Patience in storage



House for sale

Winterization

10 Nov 2014

Well, we waited as long as we could. We were hoping against hope that the house would sell before the end of October and we could escape to Ft. Myers for the winter. Didn't happen. So we are going to let the listing expire, enjoy(?) our (hopefully) last New England winter and re-list in the spring.

So with all hope of a warm winter dashed, we had to winterize the RV. That meant (1) putting anti-freeze in the water lines and (2) covering the entire RV to protect against the elements.

So I bought an RV cover (\$425 on sale) and 3 gallons of RV anti-freeze (\$17) and headed out yesterday (11/9) to perform the sad chores. I was a bit fearful that we had waited just a day too long as the temperatures dropped below freezing on Saturday morning. But I had



Covered for winter

done my best at blowing out the lines before putting Patience into storage and 29 doesn't really qualify as a "hard" freeze, so I didn't think there would be any freeze damage. I was actually more worried about vandalism. The RV is stored in a pretty remote spot and might be a tempting target for burglars or squatters.

But it looked fine when I arrived. Whew! Later I discovered some evidence of some animal (field mouse?) being inside, but we can deal with that.

First I hitched up and pulled the RV forward about 3 feet, leveling it in the process. Then I started work on the anti-freeze. I was doing a bit of guessing here as I had only watched one video on how to do it and the valve configuration wasn't quite the same. Still, once I got the pump activated and the first gallon set up, the anti-freeze was sucked out of the jug very rapidly. Then I remembered that I had left the faucets open inside (to relieve any pressure generated by a freeze, so the antifreeze had worked its way through the lines and had been spitting out the faucets. The shower had a lot of pink on the walls and floor. Which proved, I guess, that I was doing it mostly correctly. But I ran into trouble trying to get the hot water lines filled. I had to fiddle with the valves and eventually found a combo that worked. I used every ounce of the 3 gallons I had, but I think I got all the lines filled.

Then I drained the hot water tank one last time and moved on to the cover.

The trick with the cover was getting it onto the roof. It was too heavy to carry with me as I climbed the ladder, so after a moment of cursing myself for not bringing some rope, I scrounged for a solution. I decided that two bungees, hooked together, would work. And I was right: I took the end of the bungee with me up the ladder, then hauled up the cover.

Getting it unfolded and properly positioned was a heavy chore. In spite of the 50-degree temp, I was sweating profusely. But after a lot of tugging and crawling around the roof, I got it correctly (more or less) positioned and dropped the fabric over the front, the sides and, finally, the back as I headed down the ladder. Then it was just a matter of figuring out the straps. But I got it all done. The result was not perfect - there was more fabric on the north side than the south - but everything was covered and secure. I will try to return in a month or so and see how the straps are holding up.

Leaving Patience there felt a bit like leaving my child on the steps of the church, but we will use it again next year. So don't despair, Patience - we will be back.

Senior softball

29 Nov 2014

Now that we have had our first snowfall of the winter (ah, Florida, how I miss you!), it might be a good time to reflect on my softball season. Yes, at age 65 I continue to play softball. Specifically, I play in an over-55 league organized by the [EMASS Senior Softball](#) organization. That organization has a membership of over 400 men (and a few women), runs about half a dozen leagues and sponsors traveling teams of various age ranges. This year, for the first time, I played in an over-65 tournament that included several EMASS teams, along with over-65 teams from all over New England. I am sorry to report that my introductory tournament experience was disappointing as I played in only 3 of the 5 games and got a single hit in 6 official at-bats. But it was an interesting experience.

My summer league was the EMASS "National" division which is kind of the "B" league in the organization - a notch down, ostensibly, from the "American" division (MLB, take note). But, despite being the "lesser" league (though not so lesser as the Metro or Atlantic



Trophy

divisions), the quality of the play is quite high. There are surprisingly few errors considering the bad backs and

knees in the field. And the hitting is surprisingly good. I guess after 50 years of batting practice a lot of guys have figured out how to place the ball.

I play outfield, mostly. I enjoy the position and am (usually) pretty good at it. But the simple fact is that I play outfield because I can still run. The guys who can't run are relegated to infield.

Some of the best players in the league are over 70. A few are over 80, including two of the better pitchers in the league. The fact that some guys can still play after 80 is, to me, inspirational. I am amazed by the fact that this year, for the first time, EMASS was able to field a traveling team of over-80 players. Yes, they found 15 men in the organization who were over 80 and were interested in traveling around New England to play other teams of over-80s. Amazing.

I am happy to say that my team, though it came in second during the season (by one game), won the post-season tournament. To do so we had to win 4 straight games on a single day. We did it, then collapsed from exhaustion.

For all our efforts we got a dinky little trophy. But we aren't playing for trophies; we are playing to retain (what little is left of) our youth. And I feel that, to a considerable extent, we have been successful.



Tournament champions

A good time to travel

29 Dec 2014

I just filled the truck's tank: 26.5 gallons at \$2.90/gallon. It would be a great time to be traveling. Which we aren't of course. No, we were traveling when the price of diesel was hovering around \$4.00/gallon. Just more bad timing on our part.

We may be ruining the environment of North Dakota for future generations by fracking the oil out of the ground. But it is a boon for today's Rvers.



Liliani at Kimball Farms

