



Blog Post #8: ARIZONA

Greetings from the Grand Canyon State!

New Horizons. This afternoon finds us in Kingman, where we're catching our proverbial breath, and making final preparations for the coastal push. I'm taking a break from sorting out the accumulated oddments that have joined the journey since it's beginning in Chicago (e.g. postcards, magnets, caps, pens, coasters, stickers, pins...) Most of the items were of-the-moment purchases by TJ – somewhere between here and the Santa Monica Pier we'll get them boxed and delivered to his loft. He's incommunicado just now – and while not unusual, he's likely overseas and embroiled in corporate and creative work. This collection of curios leaves me with the thought that our great adventure has become somewhat of a relay race. Seagram and I are running the last leg, "taking it home". Just now my dutiful friend and relay runner is at large. His plan was to stop in at the local branch of the Mojave County Library to catch up on work (writing, schedules, research), and then see to the resolution of a few minor car issues. (Likely he'll find his way to one of the local Starbucks, if history does indeed repeat itself!) When we set out from Albuquerque, I was concerned that Seagram's level of enthusiasm might not be sustained for the fullness of our 640+ mile drive. However, for someone who's spent the last 10 years exploring exotic locales worldwide – and has become accustomed to car services and subways when he's home – he's taken nicely to the both the Mustang and the more mundane aspects of our daily mileage. He admitted sotto voce that the "cool factor" the car imparted to him was "priceless".

As we drove from Gallup into eastern Arizona, an olio of trading posts and "travel centers" of various vintages and states of repair (or disrepair?) met us. At first we were flush with amusement and nostalgia to encounter these outposts. But upon leaving the red rock bluffs beyond the state line, we entered into a more desolate landscape and a distinctly somber state of mind. It was clear that the trip had become somewhat of a vision quest for Seagram. He commented with regularity how needed this diversion was – what serendipity that have met up at this particular time – and that he'd been living fast and hard, but to what end? With poignancy he revealed that "I spent most of my young life cultivating the hipster burn-out persona, but it's feeling like the real deal now – not just youthful affectation fueled by *endlessly* amping The Ramones and lighting up Camels..." That said, Seagram observed that he viewed the car as our conveyance, rather than our focus. It was energizing for him to step outside of his usual world of deadlines, production logistics and schedules – to just step on the gas, see where the road would take us.

"Runnin' Down the Road..." Our first Arizona meander was Petrified Forest National Park, with an orientation stop at the Painted Desert Visitors Center. We were both

impressed that the surrounding landscape was home to one of the “world’s largest concentrations of petrified wood, historic structures” and “archaeological sites”. Seagram was particularly intrigued by the park’s artists in residence program, and loved the idea of geocaching among the rock formations and petrified wood findings. We followed the Park’s list of suggested activities for a one-hour visit, which afforded us a 28-mile drive throughout the site, a stop at Kachina Point, a bit of exploring down Blue Mesa Road, and a stop at Rainbow Forest Museum. We added in Painted Desert Inn (today a museum and bookstore only), where Harvey Girls served diners and travelers when the Fred Harvey Company took over management of the Inn. As it turned out, one of Seagram’s favorite (and more adventurous) aunts was a Harvey Girl. As we left the park, factoids tumbled out rapidly from Seagram. Quoting from a guide, he asked if I knew that “Petrified Forest National Park is almost solid quartz, weighing in at 168 pounds per cubic foot?” He further read that “it’s so hard, you can only cut it with a diamond tipped saw!” Petrified wood, fossils, petroglyphs, wildlife – the park is indeed quite an assemblage natural elements.

In need of food and gasoline after our Petrified Forest excursion, we next exited the highway at Holbrook. Unable to resist the temptation of the central business district and its main street, we followed an historic walk that began at the Navajo County Courthouse. Holbrook’s twist on the usual array of historical oddments – old signs, buildings, tourist sites – added nicely to our ongoing inventory of roadside impressions. Interestingly, the Little Colorado River runs past Holbrook on its way to join the Colorado River at the Grand Canyon.

Before speeding on full bore to Flagstaff, we stopped for the night at Winslow – and carved out the better part of the next day to discover it’s hidden charms. First on our list was a visit to the La Posada – formerly a Fred Harvey Hotel. Built in 1929 for AT&T railroad and designed by Mary Colter, we admired the impressive restoration that’s underway. A must see point of interest was the “Standin’ on the Corner” Park and Mural, located at 2nd & Campbell. Of course, we burst into song – remembering what we could of the Eagles hit song commemorated by the site. While downtown, we also walked the 1st Street Pathway from the Hubbell Trading Post (said to soon be new visitor center) and back to La Posada Hotel – and unexpectedly enjoyable 6-block long landscaped pathway. We were sure not to miss the Peter Toth monument– a hand-carved totem pole– and also dropped in on the Old Trails Historical Museum. Repurposed from an older bank building in the business district, we saw all manner of local, cultural, Native American and Route 66 artifacts. Seagram insisted that we finished our time in Winslow by driving out to McHood Park (5 miles south of Winslow), and have lunch at in the deep rock canyon area of Clear Creek.

Flagged Down by Flagstaff. We ended up taking a pass on Meteor Crater, but on our approach to Flagstaff found the San Francisco Peaks to be other-worldly in their subtle might and beauty. As we drove into town on Route 66 (the main east-west artery), it was obvious to us both that “Flag” was worth a few days of rest and investigation. Passing an assortment of old motor courts and numerous contemporary motels, we

made our way to the Visitors Center downtown. The Center shares space with Amtrak in the old train depot, and has a gift shop chock full of Route 66 souvenirs. Seagram was transfixed by the selection, but opted to “think about” the various babbles that caught his eye. We left car there, and walked down S. Beaver to the NAU campus (passing through a funky neighborhood of restaurants and houses), then returned and crossed over into downtown. Heritage Square– on Aspen Ave between Leroux and San Francisco Streets– presents a wonderful continuum of ageless buildings and outlets that contribute to the thriving business district. We’d hoped to stay at the historic Hotel Monte Vista, but we unable to get rooms at the last minute. Plan B diverted us to Little America– which turned out to be more in the spirit of our odyssey. The two-level low-slung brick hotel makes a subtle, unassuming impression amidst stands of Ponderosas – and reminded me of the glamour and élan attached to Albuquerque’s fabled Western Skies. The Mustang fit right in. You could all but feel and taste the era when barge-like sedans would roll in off the highway into the parking lot, and road-weary guests would check into outsized, finely appointed rooms. Naturally we wanted to visit the Grand Canyon, but time was again not on our side. Seagram was getting close enough to home that responsibility and commitments were beginning to weigh on him. We opted to take full advantage of Flagstaff’s rich array of sights, including Lowell Observatory, a quick jaunt to the entrance of Oak Creek Canyon (featuring a generous vendors space and spectacular look-out) and the Museum of Northern Arizona. We became semi-regulars at Little America’s Western Gold Restaurant; even though Seagram makes a good living with his sophisticated palate and culinary skills, he cannot resist a buffet! We finally broke with routine to enjoy a dinner at the Galaxy Diner on West Route 66—a great convergence of retro chrome siding and neon that says 50s. Suddenly we were transported back to the diner fare that had sustained TJ and me over many miles of asphalt and concrete.

Onward Anew. A morning in Williams allowed us to discover the town’s frontier and railroad roots. We especially enjoyed the funky / touristy shops and eateries along the main street, and relished our stop at the Grand Canyon Railway Depot. Built by the ATSF railroad, the depot had been home to The Fray Marcos Hotel and a Harvey House. After settling in to Kingman for the remainder of the day, we are again assembling road sign “refrigerator magnets” to arrange as a poetic epic. Driving through Route 66 points of interest such as Ash Fork, Seligman, Truxton, Valentine, Kingman – and with Goldroad, Oatman, Topock left to go – we’re beginning to see how the story of this journey will write itself. I’m starting to feel excitement at the prospect of reaching our destination. Travel is a force of personal change and transformation. I can’t wait to see who we are when we arrive at the Pier, and inhale the elixir of Pacific Ocean air.