

Diana and Tom Burton

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What to say? "Life is good" as Tom's favorite saying goes, and I agree. Maybe I've been away from New Jersey a little more than usual but actually, this year I was gone about the same number of days I was home. And for Tom, it was nearly as much. Which leads me to a big THANK YOU to our kind neighbors and friends who take care of us and pets, both feathered and wet, when we're away checking out the world. I'm next on my way soon to another self-centered solo Paris adventure (which Tom encourages me to do). Thankfully, I've just never been able to get enough of Paris.



Our 'children' are happy and hopefully also contented. Alayna's recent report is representative of her 'family' with her story about how "the dog was days away of being put down, and with all my emails to Animal Justice League of America I was able to save her life, days before my birthday. This is worthy of a Christmas letter and it shows my passion." Joseph communicated more than he has for years when the supposed lovely gal relationship I told you about last year came apart after he moved to Bentonville Arkansas for her. Such the good looking guy will soon find girls lining up at his door, and the 2017 Dodge Charger Tom bought him won't hurt. Marie remains at Kansas University (KU) in her junior year with music and medicine majors. We offer trips to all the 'kids' but only Marie seems interested and thus she had Rome and Florence early in this year, Santiago Chile and vicinity in August but now she's off with her other family on a Caribbean Cruise.



Joseph moved to Bentonville; Alayna's rescue; Joseph's gift; Elvis belongs to Alayna; Marie in Chile with us; Alayna still in Plattsburg.

Where did we go? Just back from Rome and Florence early January, then Tom and I hurried off to Kansas City and Columbia MO for some family time. Tom's big time favorite is the French Riviera so we gave ourselves 3-weeks in a waterfront suite at the famous Negresco Hotel in Nice on the Promenade des Anglais with a week's stop in Paris staying again in the Palais Royal but in a movie-set-type apartment that was pretty much beyond belief for us.

March took my sister Beverly and I to Milan for 2 weeks where we not only sat on our butts for far too long watching ice skating competition but also hired a wonderful tour guide I'd met on two previous Italian trips. April took me hiking to Utah's Arches and Canyonlands, a trip I'd tried to make a few years before, and had made in 2014 with a slightly different itinerary. I am amused when folks say "Oh, I've been there before, so why go again?" and I think "Well, surely it was good enough for a return?" For me, many places are worth a return.

A biggy! Do you know about the Camino de Santiago Pilgrims route in Spain? I did an 11-day walk into Santiago de Compostella and will return in October to do another 11-day section from the Pyrenes to Rioja and Bilbao with extra tourist days. My friend Sonya met up with me for a few days in Madrid prior. Then another biggy! I told you Tom had a favorite where we went in February? Well, another favorite is Grindelwald Switzerland and we had nearly 3-weeks then ending in Brugge Belgium staying at the Duke's Palace. It was a cruise from Basel to Amsterdam in between. Honest. If he keeps finding 'favorites' we may go broke!



I hiked Northern Ireland in July but only after a few days getting re-acquainted with Dublin. Then Belfast, the Eastern coast and up into Devils Causeway is worth still another trip if my legs will just hold up a bit longer. I told you about going to Chile with Marie? More repeats for me, more favorites, and I'd go there again too. We had ten days in another unique movie-set-type apartment. I hurried home to fly to St Louis for nephew Colin and Chelsea's wedding which included their wee-one-year-old Mallory. Kids sure do things different these days. Not that we didn't

More hiking, more repeats in August when I hiked Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks AGAIN. I failed getting up to Alta Peak AGAIN. October brought more hiking on Wisconsin's Ice Age Trail after a few days in Milwaukee, a super interesting city full of art and food tours. In between Tom and I had 2-weeks in the Alsace-Lorraine area staying in Strasbourg France in another old type 16th century place and eating AGAIN at a 3-star Michelin restaurant in nearby Illhausern where we'd been many years ago.

Beverly and I got to start the Grand Prix Skating Series in Everett, out of Seattle, and finished up the year with a 10-day trip to Vancouver Canada where the best-of-the-best skated the Grand Prix Finals. It's in Strasbourg next year and maybe

Onto cruises: River cruises we've enjoyed and they work for us. When Viking offered a small ocean ship, we took them up on an 11-day, 10-island West Indies/Caribbean tour out of San Juan Puerto Rico. The islands have NOT recovered from last year's hurricane and a lot of it is sad and disheartening but we go again for South America and Western Caribbean in February, then back to river cruises in March from Prague to Berlin.

Is there life other than travel? Some. I keep up exercise and manage 3-times a week with my trainer of about 20 years whenever I'm in NJ. Trips bring trip reports that I post at www.LibertyLadies.weebly.com. Tom keeps up cooking and loving food and fortunately cooks for Big Bird Pandora when I'm gone too. His www.TomsKoi.com sometimes gets new Photo Shows. I've more national park hikes planned but not enough so I need a new company since my foreign hiking company divorced me (they refused to let Tom come along as a non-participant again.) I have a few hikes booked for next year with www.ParksPlusHiking.com.

Life isn't always wonderful. In March we lost Beverly's eldest son Chad, my hiker buddy from summer 2017 Yosemite trip, and friend to many. The memorials to him continue as do the tears. Yet it's right to say that Chad had more impact and more friends in his less-than-40-years than many do in a lifetime. We've all gotta go at some time but its double sad when it's someone who had so much life in him. Guard your family and friends and be cautious when they are down.

We are oftentimes amazed that we are doing so well. For being near mid-70s and 80s, life really is good. I believe that if we get housebound that we can find plenty to do, but until then, somebody's got to do it and we've got to keep on keeping on.

Pictures from Tom (mostly) starting with Chris and Ouida who have (mostly) adopted us. My mid-Missouri family.



Santiago Chile, view from our apartment, plus surrounding areas.



Strasbourg France in the Alsace Lorraine region.





Our first Caribbean Cruise with another to follow soon.



Miscellaneous! And some enlarged repeats.

