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Our Hero Is Coming Home!



My Little Cruise Across the Pacific and Indian Oceans



By Michelle Lane

Hi Family! I know it's been a long time since I've written an article and I am long overdue. I've deployed 3 times in the past 24 months. In 2019 I left in June and returned in November onboard USNS COMFORT where we did some humanitarian work supporting Venezuelan migrants in neighboring countries that were overly burdening those medical systems. We primarily provided basic primary care and a substantial amount of preventive medicine educational series (which was my primary role). Then, as you are aware, shortly after that in 2020, COVID happened. So, about 3 months after getting home from my COMFORT deployment, in March of 2020 I deployed to Italy (Naples and Sigonella) to bring COVID testing capabilities and teach the lab officers and technicians how to perform that testing in the Naval hospitals there. I was there for about a month.

After that, I had a little bit of a break but I had been put onto a "Public Health-Medical Rapid Response Team". This was a blended team of Critical Care specialties (a Critical Care doc, an Anesthesiologist and a Respiratory Technician) plus a Preventive Medicine team (a Preventive Medicine doc, a Microbiologist, an Environmental Health Officer, a Laboratory Technician and 2 Preventive Medicine Technicians). And basically, we were on "PTDO-72" or "Prepare to Deploy 72" orders meaning we had to be ready to get out the door within 72 hours if we were needed somewhere to support COVID efforts out in the Fleet or the Marine Corps.

I was about to come off those PTDO orders when we got a request from the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) aka: "the TR" or "The Big Stick"- to support its 2021 deployment. Initially, they asked for volunteers. I did not volunteer. But then the decision was made to not use volunteers and instead use the Rapid Response Team that had already been identified, so that was that. The TR is homeported in San Diego, so you had probably seen all over the news that they had pulled into Guam in sort of an emergency sort of situation after getting a number of confirmed COVID cases onboard after a port visit to Vietnam. That deployment they had over 1,000 confirmed cases onboard and a Sailor had died. So, in this second-what they call "back-to-back"- deployment, they decided not to leave without the specialties required to contain an outbreak and provide advanced critical care. So off we went.



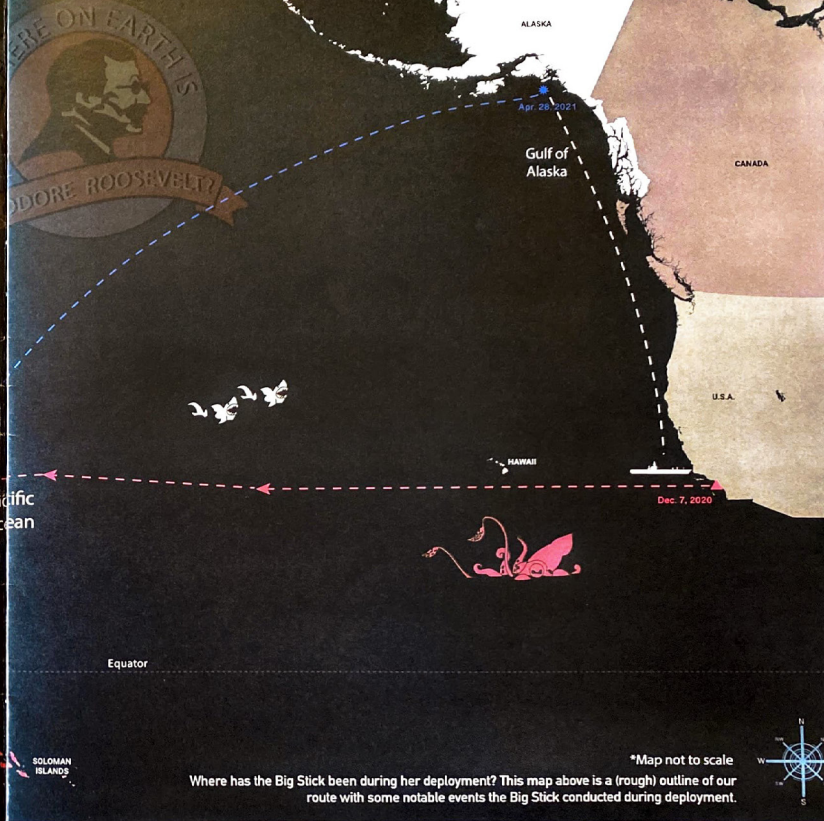
Christmas 5K on CVN 71 flight deck



**USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT
(CVN 71)
AKA: "the Big Stick"**



*By Bully the Moose.
Some Teddy Roosevelt History*



Jan. 15, 2021 - USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), USS Bunker Hill (CG 52) and USS John Finn (DDG 113), participated in a PHOTOEX with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) destroyers JS Asahi (DD 119) and JS Kongo (DDG 173), while underway in the Philippine Sea in the vicinity of Okidaitojima.

Jan. 31, 2021 - TR moored to Kilo Pier, Naval Base Guam, for a four-day port call.

Feb. 9, 2021 - The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group sailed with USS Nimitz (CVN 68), USS Princeton (CG 59), USS Sterett (DDG 104) and USS John S. McCain (DDG 56), to promote freedom of the seas in the South China Sea.

Feb. 28, 2021 - Sailed with USS Bunker Hill, and participated in a training exercise with JMSDF JS Yuguri (DD 153), JS Setoyuki (TV 35 18) and JS Hatakaze (TV 3520).

March 8, 2021 - Passed through the Celebes Sea, crossed the equator in the Makassar Strait at 0°, 119° E, and cleaned the ship of its pollywog slime.

March 10, 2021 - The Royal Australian Navy Anzac-class frigate HMAS Anzac (II) (FFH 150), transits alongside the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group after passing through the Lombok Strait.

March 28, 2021 - The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group conducts joint operations with the Indian Navy and Air Force.

March 31, 2021 - USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) and the Royal Australian Navy ship HMAS Sirius (O 266) conducted a replenishment-at-sea.

April 3, 2021 - The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group transits the Strait of Malacca.

April 7, 2021 - The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group conducted joint operations with the Malaysian Air Force

April 9, 2021 - The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group sailed with the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific South China Sea.

April 16, 2021 - TR moored to Kilo Pier, Naval Base Guam, for a one-day port call.

April 28, 2021 - The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group arrives in the Gulf of Alaska for Exercise Northern Edge 2021.

You can see on the map all the places we went to. We were in and out of the South China Sea a few times. Did some dual carrier operations with the USS NIMITZ and her Strike Group while we were there. We also did multinational operations with the Japanese, Australian and Indian Navies in addition to a huge exercise off the coast of Alaska with the Makin Island Marine Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and Air Force partners. I won't elaborate much on that since really, it all looked the same to me. We didn't have port visits except for one short 4-day visit to Guam. Where we picked up some COVID. Not kidding. I was there to execute COVID testing for all of Carrier Strike Group NINE. That included all of the air assets (those squadrons and their support crews are approximately 1,500 personnel), plus CVN 71 (about another 2,000 people), plus the destroyers and cruiser in the strike group which provide our anti-air and anti-submarine and anti-surface defense for the air craft carrier. I ended up doing a total of 8,825 COVID tests in the 6.5 months I was attached to the ship.



Me teaching about 20 Hospital Corpsman how to perform rapid antigen COVID tests



Me doing COVID PCR testing in the lab on-board. Part of a huge testing evolution where I tested the whole 5,000 person crew in a week



Serving Christmas dinner in the Chiefs Mess

We tested 10% of the crews of the ships in our Strike Group. Plus, some surveillance testing at the beginning of the deployment and after the port visit (which was how I identified that we had picked up COVID during that time. After finding positive cases onboard we executed what's called "bound and surveil" testing meaning we tested close contacts of the positive cases then concentrated surveillance testing in the cohorts that are "high risk" for exposure to COVID after that. We kept the total case count at 3 because we were able to execute that testing and isolation of the cases so quickly. In all of February, that's basically what I did. The Prev Med team was glad to be used and flex our muscles a bit. It's what we were there for and frankly made us feel like we weren't wasting our time "just floating".



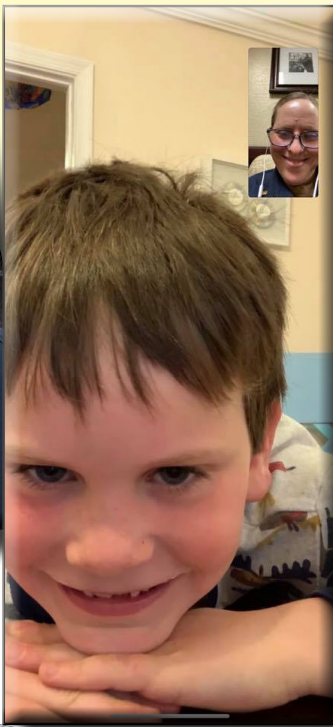
Me and my meal crew

In my free time, I completed the requirements for my Surface Warfare Medical Department Officer qualification. Since 2012, the requirement for this qualification is that you need 12 months of time attached to a ship to be eligible. Since Microbiologists do not get orders to ships, it's very unusual to qualify for this within my specialty. Lots of hard work with 6 qualifications to complete including Maintenance Material Management (3M), Officer of the Deck In-Port (requiring me to additionally qualify for rifle and pistol marksmanship), Damage Control, Division Officer Afloat and the CVN qualification and a Common Core (those last two are heavy in all of the engineering of the ship, how all




the different departments support the mission, weapons systems, how nuclear power works, driving the ship, launching aircraft, etc.). This took almost every minute of time that I wasn't testing, eating, sleeping or exercising! It was a lot!! Then I took an oral board demonstrating my knowledge of all of those things. It was intense but I did well on the board and passed. Between my time on the COMFORT and now the ROOSEVELT, I was only 18 days shy of the 12-month requirement. After my oral board I was able to get a waiver from the Pacific Force Surgeon for those 18 days and am now the first Microbiologist in Naval history to achieve this qualification on a war ship and the second to get it at all. Pretty cool, but it's also something that represents a level of knowledge and experience that I now contribute to Navy Medicine as a scientist. And that warfare device is now something I have a lot of pride in to have on my uniform. Bonus that it's shiny! All in all, it was a good experience. I missed my family but have a MUCH greater appreciation for what the "real" Navy does, not just my Navy Medicine bubble. I'm forever grateful that I had the opportunity to work alongside and support the warfighters. I made a lot of friends from all different backgrounds (I mostly hung out with Air Maintenance officers- green shirts) and learned a lot while providing essential support in a highly dynamic area of operation.

Oh, by the way, did I mention that I have been assigned to a base in San Diego??? I'll tell you all about it when we get there!!!!



Pacific Northwest Beckons Carol and Jeff

A photograph of a man and a woman standing on a wooden bridge overlooking a river in a forest. The man is wearing a grey t-shirt with a 'FINAL FOUR' logo and a hat. The woman is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and sunglasses. The background is a lush green forest with tall trees and a river flowing through it.

On July 4th, while most San Diegans were planning beach parties and BBQs, Carol and Jeff were off to the airport and a flight up to Seattle, Poulsbo, Salt Creek Park, and eventually, the uniquely beautiful Olympic National Park and rainforest. We arrived at SEA-TAC and took the light rail up to Seattle. (\$1.00 each for Seniors!) Walked through scenic Pioneer Square (think Tenderloin Dist.) down to the Bainbridge Ferry, and boated over to Bainbridge Island, just 20 minutes from my brother's vacation house in Poulsbo. The only issue was that finding a way to get there from the landing was problematic. The local bus wasn't running because of the holiday, and cab companies and Uber were playing hard to get. Finally, after many tries and failures, we secured an Uber driver who agreed to pick us up in 10 minutes. It turns out this particular driver was inexperienced, 75 years old, and blind. Other than that, she was great. We all had a good laugh about why she was driving at all (another story in itself) but suffice it to say she eventually planted us at my brother's house.

By Jeff Benesch

Pete and Teri were at Lake Washington near UW in a rental house with family, so their home in Poulsbo was ours for the night. Poulsbo is like Solvang, but on a lovely harbor with trees and seals and lots of boats. Fortunately for us, restaurants were open, and we ate a lovely dinner on the patio overlooking the bay and everyone was in a festive mood with fireworks (legal) coming up soon enough. The problem with Poulsbo, and the entire Northwest for that matter, is that darkness doesn't occur until well after 10 PM. Carol and I found an ice cream place with HUGE cones and walked the short distance to Pete and Teri's place, and then back down to the harbor later to catch the show. They had cancelled the regular town fireworks display due to Covid concerns, but the citizenry, in Poulsbo and elsewhere, did their amateur best to light up the sky and bay with home bought fireworks. For hours! Just not in any coordinated way. But some folks sitting not too far from us did their best to put up flairs, roman candles, and some big boomers too. We could see just over the ridge tops towards Seattle that there were community fireworks programs going on, but they were too far away to hear, and we probably were catching sight of the grand finales. A boat out in Puget Sound would have been the place to be on Sunday!



Monday AM, we had recovered enough to make our way back to town for breakfast and coffee, Carol went shopping, and I went back to Pete's to pack for our next trip segment. Pete and Teri arrived home in their vehicles, and we helped them unload and then took their pickup truck (on loan) to Safeway first for ice and groceries, and then on to Salt Creek Recreation Area, a scenic campground overlooking the Strait of Juan De Fuca which separates Vancouver Island from Washington State. We were pretty much across from Victoria, BC but a few miles to the West. Unfortunately, we couldn't go to Victoria if we wanted to, since the Canadians don't think we're a good risk yet. Every day was clear enough to see the island closely, and also the constant parade of ships coming through to deliver goods to ports in both Canada and Washington State.

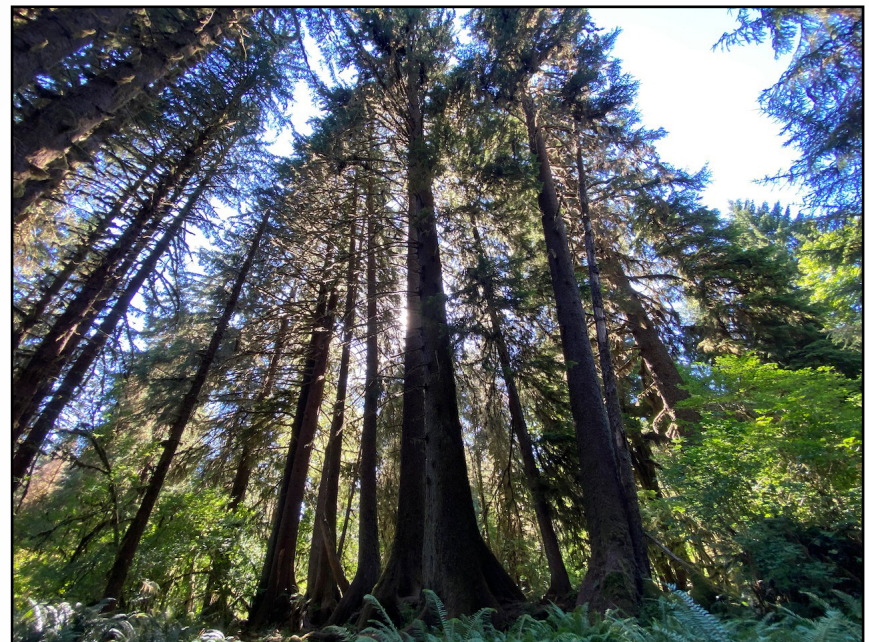
Upon finding the beautiful campground, who should be there but the Rios Family. We had tried to make it a surprise for the grandkids, but one of the parents let it slip that Grama and Grampa were going to visit. If you haven't been following their trip on FB (and shame on you if you haven't), Jessica and Miguel and kids, and Shelby the dog, have been traveling in their motorhome (Harvey, the RV) since mid-June on their way to San Diego. In Washington, they met up with dear friends Kerry and Colin Strong, their 2 daughters Lilli and Fiona, and Carrie's parents, the Dunn's, who were both traveling in their own RVs. The threesome of families will be heading to San Diego as a group after we leave, with stops in Southern Washington, the Oregon Coast, and California Redwood country.

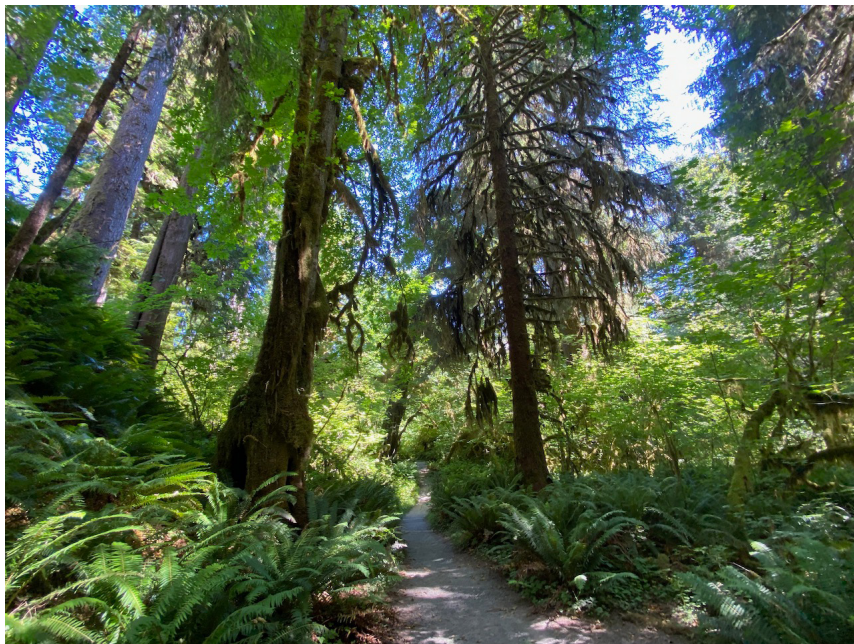


Carol got up early every morning to hike and explore tidepools and the surrounding area and was rewarded with views of Bald eagles catching fish, sea otter moms with pups, and other colorful and numerous starfish, anemones and sea grass. We all got to witness the daily invasions of very cute black tailed deer, along with fawns, who habituated the campground. The only distraction was mosquitoes, and we learned to bundle up and spray any exposed skin.



Since we had 3 pick-up trucks with back seats, we were able to caravan into the close by National Park, which turned out to be spectacular. The first day, we drove 2 hours to the Hoh River area of the Olympic Peninsula and stopped at the visitor's center. The kids are all Junior Rangers and got their passbooks stamped, badges and workbooks completed! We took a long hike through the rainforest, and the trees (many hundreds of years old and over 200 feet tall) which were simply amazing. The long moss, and great ferns and lush greenery were signs of the wetness of the place, though July is the "dry season". Ironically, we never got rained on in the rain forest.





We left driving back out past Crescent Lake, a large alpine lake which reminds one of Switzerland. Lots of lake, but very few boats. The vistas were fantastic.

Day two took us one hour into the forest to the Sol Duc River Park area, which included a one mile difficult uphill climb to an absolutely beautiful waterfall. This river, like the Hoh River the day before, still gets wild Pacific salmon and trout running up to their breeding areas upstream. We wondered, naturally, how

they manage to swim up and over these waterfalls. Where there's a will, there must be a way. Right down the road from the waterfall was a private park that had natural hot springs and 4 different pools of differing temperatures. We all had a good soak, and even better, a good shower! That evening, we went out to Port Angeles for pizza and pasta, went to a local park nearby and the kids had a blast on one of the largest modern play structures I've ever seen. I don't know where they get their energy but I'm tired even thinking of it. Since this was two days before Ben's 10th birthday, we all got together for cake, presents, favors and singing in the Rios RV to watch him blow out his candles. A good time was had by all.



Thursday the 8th, we packed up and started our drive back to Poulsbo with a stop at another of the Visitor's Center for Olympic National Park in Port Angeles. We learned the large park was established to protect and foster a threatened remaining herd of Roosevelt Elk. The elk were almost hunted to extinction, but fortunately the herd was

saved, and now number over 5000 individuals. It turns out that without the elk, the undergrowth (which they feed on) would cover large tracts of forest, preventing the new growth of the majestic trees which dominate this stunningly beautiful landscape. Save the elk, save the forest!



We made our way back to Poulsbo and another night in a comfy bed and a beautiful dinner with our hosts in a Garden Restaurant. Before dinner, we went out in Pete and Teri's boat and viewed the magnificent mansions, docks and yachts which cover Bainbridge Island. We were looking for bald eagles but started to return to Poulsbo without any sightings.

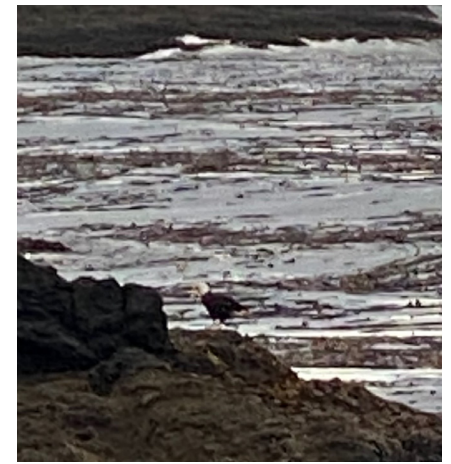
All of a sudden, as we are boating past the Poulsbo Yacht Club harbor (lots of tall masted sail-





boats), we look up and lo and behold, there's a BIG bald eagle, just sitting there atop the tallest mast. He was having some polite conversation with some pestering sea gulls, but he wasn't moving. We watched him for 15 minutes hoping he'd take flight, but no dice. So we got our bald eagle sighting, named him Liberty, and returned to port.

Friday AM, we reversed our journey back to the airport, (this time with Pete as our driver to the ferry landing) and flew home to San Diego to await the arrival of the Rios Clan. What a great and fortuitous 6 days in the Pacific Northwest!





Hawaii Here We Come!

By Listy Gillingham

It seems as though all the siblings decided it would be fun to travel to Hawaii and once we took a look at the rates, we couldn't think of a better way to spend our Birthdays now that the COVID restrictions were being lifted everywhere. Oahu was selected as our destination because it's an island I've never seen (Bob saw it over 50 years ago) and we were curious what it would be like to visit more of a big city Hawaii compared to Kauai and Maui. We loved it! We stayed on Waikiki Beach and spent every day on the beach reading after our hikes and sight-seeing adventures.

Highlights included:



Hiking from Waikiki to the top of Diamond Head (8 miles) because we got to really see the island from top to bottom.

Running every morning with Bob



Driving to the north side to see Pipeline

-hiking up to a pillbox that was used to protect the island

-sitting on beautiful beach on the east side

-walking along the coast

-checking out the shops in Waikiki

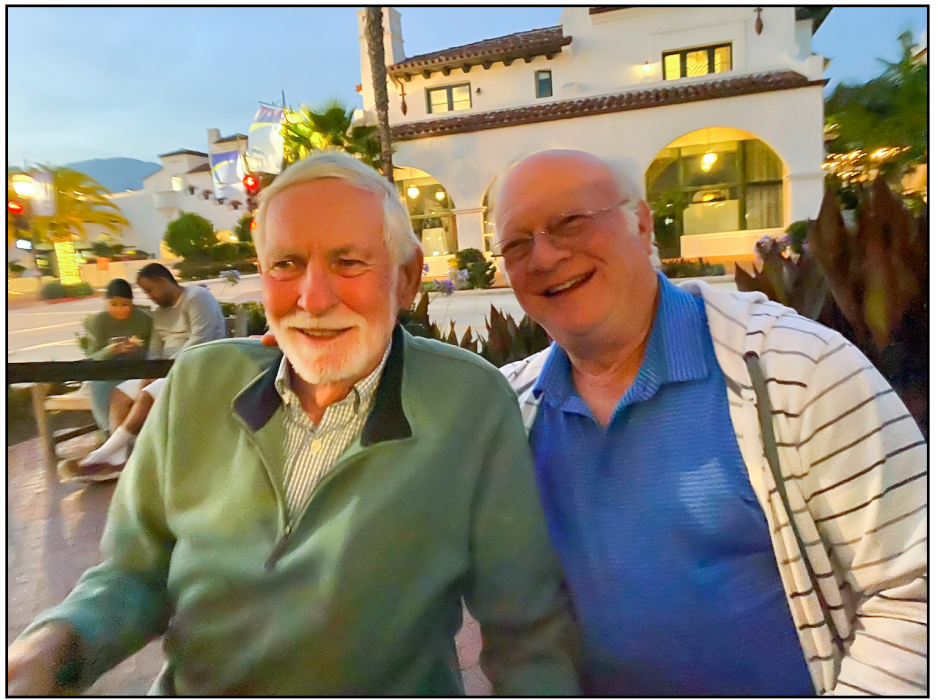
-golfing on the oldest country club in Oahu with a guy's whose family has lived in Hawaii for over 100 years among the sugar fields and inland hills

-visiting Pearl Harbor

-driving around the windward side and planting ourselves on a beautiful white sand beach

It has been over 30 years since we've traveled to the islands as a couple so that made this trip special in many ways. As we sat outside every morning sipping our coffee with the ocean view we reflected on how lucky we are to be healthy and happy after this crazy pandemic year. Can't wait to begin our wandering retirement life!





Bud, Margaret, Carol and Jeff make Santa Barbara Anniversary Get-away

By Jeff Benesch

Fresh off our wonderful Maui trip, the fearsome foursome of Bud, Margaret, Carol and Jeff took to the rails to spend 4 glorious days in beautiful Santa Barbara to celebrate our respective wedding anniversaries. Our trip featured card games, long walks, amazing dialogues on many subjects, shopping on State St., great food, bike rides, visits with old friends, many toasts, and, of course, pickleball!

We started off by joining Bud and Margaret on their train at Union Station, and then continuing for the next 3 hours up the coast. The trip was highlighted by our train getting stuck in the middle of an intersection in Simi Valley. Boy, the car drivers that were waiting for us to clear the intersection were terribly upset. Many of them sat and waited the ½ hour for the Amtrak folks to figure out what was wrong and finally get the train moving northward again. Not sure what was wrong, and what they did to fix it, but we were somewhat entertained by the antics of the cars making illegal U-turns to get out of the jam.





Soon we were off the train in Santa Barbara and checked into the Eagle Inn, a thoroughly delightful B and B located 2 blocks from the beach, and near the pier and boat harbor. The rooms were comfortable, the breakfasts decent, and the complimentary bikes a steal, but the best attribute was the location. The first night, we walked to a harborside restaurant for a delightful fish dinner. Much of the next day was taken up exploring the sights and stores on State St., the primary commercial center of Santa Barbara. We enjoyed another great dinner that night at a popular Pub which proved to be as good as the first night's meal. The third day, we borrowed 4 nice beach cruisers and rode out to the closest pickleball courts some 3 miles away. A couple hours of pickleball later, we made our way back to State Street for a lunch of coffee, fraps, pastries and acai bowls.



That evening, we had reservations at SB Fish House, still within walking distance of our B and B. Before taking off for the dinner, we were joined by 2 of Jeff's life-long friends and their wives. They were all in our wedding some 42 years before. So, it was a celebratory gathering on the patio across from the beach where the Fish House served up another great meal of seafood and libations. It was great to catch up with folks we don't get to see very often and promised to meet them again in the near future. After our last night at Eagle Inn, we trained back the next day to Solana Beach station, this time with no hiccups, and all agreed that Amtrak certainly beats driving through the Los Angeles traffic.



HAPPY

4th





of JULY



Jeff and Carol join family for rare get-together in Santa Clarita

On June 26th, Jeff and Carol took Amtrak to Santa Clarita to enjoy a meet up at Brother Pete's (and wife Teri's) beautiful home in Stevenson Ranch, with all of the Benesch siblings and 94 y.o. Mom, Audrey! Sister Liz came out from Maryland, Georganne and Dave drove down from Moraga (on Georganne's 65th birthday no less!), and Debby and Mom joined Liz in carpooling from Thousand Oaks. Pete's sons, Doogie and Casey, along with their wives Ally and Katy, and their little kids all came up for the day from LA. Pete and Teri's grandkids were too cute, and frankly stole the show, as kids tend to do. After a great BBQ dinner, a birthday cake for Georganne, and a lot of catching up, the Benesch clan made their way home.

Carol and Jeff stayed overnight at Pete and Teri's house, and all the siblings reconvened in the morning at Egg Plantation, a popular Newhall breakfast place (line out the door) for a last meal together. Pete dropped us off at the nearby Metrolink station and we trained down to Union Station to meet up with Margaret and Bud. All in all, a great start to a wonderful week.