

Lia Travels West into Snake Country

Lia's Corner

Part II
(Oct. 13-18)

My first few days of traveling west meant covering a lot of miles with very few adventures. I stayed in Monticello with Aunt Joy and Uncle John, then at a hotel in Baton Rouge. My next three nights were spent holed up in New Braunfels, Texas in the historic hotel, The Faust, waiting for the heavy rains from Canada to subside. And, that was where my adventure began...

New Braunfels, Texas

As I was waiting at the railroad track crossing on San Antonio Avenue in New Braunfels, Texas, a train was coming down the track.

It was dusk, barely dark, and I could see the lights coming toward me and hear the rumble and the noise of the train horn - a horn too loud to be called a whistle.

The ground shook and the red lights flashed, the gates came down and I remembered all the trains that passed me by in my life like a flash. As always, I raise my hand to wave and I smile at that hidden conductor hiding behind the dirty window. It would be bad manners not to wave, and a wasted opportunity to wish someone well on their journey: a sign given by one traveler to another.

Trains are special to me. It's probably in my blood.

My grandfather, who I never met, was an artist. He designed and painted the logos on the steam engines out of Virginia. One of his engines was displayed at the New York World's Fair.

He died from a tonsillectomy as a young man, barely 29 years old, leav-

ing my grandmother during the Depression with four daughters and another on the way. My grandmother was named Rose, and she named her fifth daughter Joy when she was born to remind her of what she had lost and what she had gained.

Seminole State Park, Comstock, Texas

From New Braunfels, I head east towards Del Rio, Texas. It was only about three hours, or less. My BMW Z3 got quite a few looks as I drove through the small towns on my way to my first night of camping in the desert.

In Del Rio, I headed to the Super Walmart to put ice in my cooler, and buy butter, Half-and-Half, cream cheese to go with my bagels, and a carton of eggs. The Seminole State Park is situated on a bluff overlooking a canyon. My space number was 15 - a great spot for star-watching and that certain peacefulness on the road that only comes with camping under the stars.

My tent is small and clever. Folded up it is smaller than a sofa oblong bolster, and opened up it can sleep two - per-



Bicyclists traveling cross-country to St. Augustine, Florida have a mapping meeting to discuss how to get to their next destination in Del Rio, Texas. I met them at a state campground in Comstock, Texas. I was going west. They are heading east.

fect for little ole me. I set up camp in 30 minutes, including setting out my Coleman stove, groceries, and all the other little things you need to survive one night in the desert.

Time before sunset to take a nice walk down the hill for exercise - I made a vow to myself to lose 20 pounds before I return to Sarasota - and proceed to walk at least an hour.

It was only 30 minutes later I peeked from under my base-

ball cap and saw a four-and-a-foot rattlesnake crossing the road right in front of me. It was not fear that propelled me backwards on my tip-toes. I didn't want to scare the snake. I turned and ran up the hill and a big black snake, which was going to slither across the road, changed its mind and slithered back into the bushes. But, not before I got a good look: it was very dark, but really not black and its diameter was at least two inches - maybe three.

About the same time as I began running up the hill again, there was another one slithering back in the bushes. Or, is it the same one chasing me. (Hey, this was

not in my exercise plan).

Later, I call my snake authority and ask him about the snakes.

"Are you near a river?"

"Yes, but what does that have to do with the snake?"

"I'm pretty sure it is a water moccasin..."

Beating me up the hill, a number of bicyclists passed me. They were a group of nine, who had traveled from San Diego, California in 29 days. They were burned, hot and tired and asked me if there was a Coke machine at the camp site.

They had ridden from Marathon, Texas. (At this minute, I am sitting in Marathon finishing up my column for this week at the Cottonwood Station restaurant. They have internet, so I can send everything to the newsroom from here).

They are led by Adventure Cycling.Org leader Andy MacIntyre, who said he lost 49 pounds when he began biking cross-country.

One of the bicyclists came from Hawaii, several from Europe, one from Mill Valley, California, and several from Virginia, who flew in to make the trip from San Diego. There was one woman in her mid-30s, and two men, who had never made a long journey on bicycle before. One of their wives signed up her husband and he said he's wondering if there is a secret message in there somewhere.

"I made the mistake of telling my wife I would like to go on an overnight bike ride," he said to me on Wednesday morning. "The next day she signed me up for this."

Next week, my on the road adventures will continue from Big Bend, Ft. Davis and City of Rocks, New Mexico.

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