

It's near the end of February, and my four-year old daughter is thinking about her birthday when she turns five in April. She rolls over in her bed while I am tucking her in and asks me "Dad, can we go back to Philmont this year?" When I turn five years old, I am no longer a small fry, but a bandit! She suggests I take the day off from work in the morning, and we drive out together that next day to Philmont. Fortunately, I share the same desire to go back to Philmont, and will be co-teaching a Scouting Alumni and Friends course at the Training Center in June. So I tell her "absolutely sweetpea, we will go to Philmont this summer"!

Knowing I will take my other kids with me, to Philmont as well, we plan a family road-trip to the National Parks in Utah and Arizona and other sites en-route while traveling to Cimarron, New Mexico. We make some reservations for the challenging to book tours without long term planning, but not over-scheduled so we can adapt.

Saturday, the day before our trip, it's the weekend of the completion of the Easter Season, the Pentecost: so we attend Saturday mass together after we spent the day packing and doing other last minute preparations (while also sneaking in a pool party, and some babysitting, and a visit from a Godparent from Sacramento for the weekend). We are packed, ready to go early in the morning on Sunday.

Oh, did I mention, my son Will insists we look for the Galilean moons of Jupiter on Saturday, as it's so close to the earth now. So I unpack my camera gear from the van, and we set it up and capture a stunning photo of Jupiter and the four largest moons – on the night I should be resting getting ready for the drive. But it's epic, and worth the unpacking of the camera gear to capture this image.



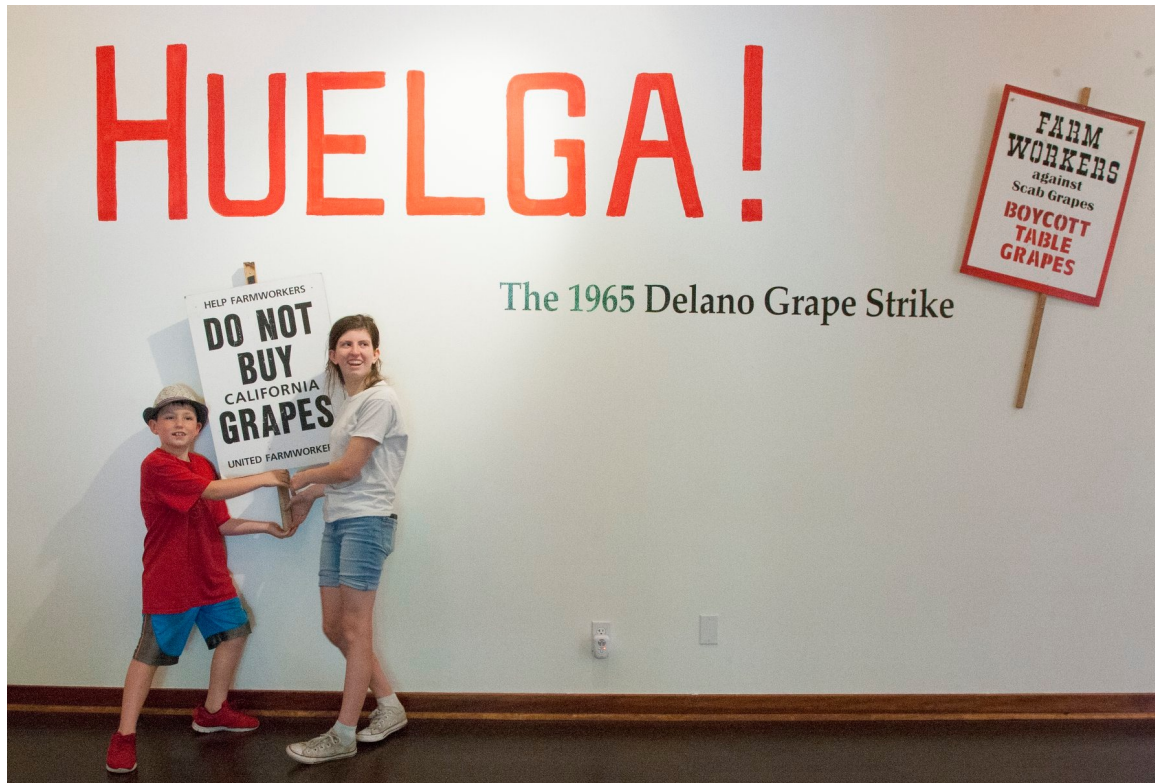
We climb in the van and head out – we are staying the night near Big Bear Lake in Southern California, near the Pacific Crest Trail, so we have at least seven hours of driving ahead on some long stretches of highway we have all seen before: so we want to move quickly to get to some new territories to explore together.



Two decades ago, I helped start a train days celebration at the local history museum – and built a few model layouts while the kids were younger. I had learned about the Tehachapi Loop from those days. It's an engineering marvel, when the train completes a full loop and passes over itself: enabling a grade change in a small footprint. As we turn off the road to go see the Tehachapi Loop, we pass the museum for Cesar Chavez: at his final home: Nuestra Senora Reina de La Paz. It's the Pentecost, and we attend Our Lady of Peace Parish in Santa Clara? How can I miss a place that's called Our Lady Queen of Peace for a visit?



We visit a though provoking museum that shares the history of the farm worker strikes in California and how Cesar Chavez rallies support and from his efforts and passion he changes the working conditions for workers in California and beyond. It was touching to see how my children responded to the monochrome photos of that era and topic: and they realized how hard the work was, and how much they had when they saw a mockup of a home of a farm worker. We re-enact the grape boycott from 1965 together, and pick up some Spanish vocabulary at the same time.



After the museum visit, we continue to the Tehachapie Loop. We wait fifteen minutes hoping to see a train loop over itself, and today we just didn't see it happen. This is what I had hoped to see from our vantage point (in this photo below).



Usually weekends are busy with trains, but we didn't see one, and after twenty minutes of waiting, we continued to our lodging up the road in Big Bear Lake.

As we enter town, it was approaching dusk, and we head out to watch the sunset over Big Bear Lake near the home we rented for the night. It's off ski season, the town is quiet, and we have the park to ourselves to enjoy sunset's crepuscular light.



We had pic-nic'ed on pre-made sandwiches during the day; and it's dinnertime – and we had pre-cooked taco meat and kept it in the cooler for the trip (properly tied down with carabiners and climbing strapping). We pull together a wonderful dinner in our rental home, and call it a night.

We rise early and get started on Monday to visit Godparents in Las Vegas. We had planned a visit to Godparents who had moved from the Silicon Valley to Las Vegas two years ago. As my daughter has just turned sixteen, but had not taken the written test to get a permit – we thought, let's stop at the DMV in Barstow to take the test there. The lines are shorter, and she can practice driving on the long

stretches of highway we have been traveling. We drop into the DMV, and she registers, and we nearly complete the process – but we didn't have proof of California residency with us, so we didn't complete the learner's permit... and head back out onto the road again.

We make it to the Godparents in the early afternoon. They had settled in a nice community with a lake, and we had both missed getting together over the last two years. We enjoyed kayaking and riding a boat in the lake, and then enjoyed hand tossed and custom pizza at their home overlooking the lake. During the visit we caught up on so many details, while the kids swam, played table tennis, and also enjoyed the pizza. I had known the couple for nearly twenty years, and they were such great supporters of my family when I needed a close friend for support.

My phone had been started flaking out since we left home, and I had been doing my best to get it back functional: cause, I couldn't imagine being without a working phone for two weeks and all the travel we had planned. I had little choice but to use Tuesday morning the next day, while in Vegas, to get a new phone: so we had a late start heading to our next stop: the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. I had been to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon in my teens, my twenties, and my thirties: and yet, I had never seen it. Each time the weather was so bad, there was no visibility beyond ten feet. This time I was determined, independent of delays with fixing a bad phone, that I was to see the Canyon. On a lark, I took a chance that the Grand Canyon Lodge dining room would have a table for a party so large on short notice – and made a call at 3pm asking. They could fit us in fifteen minutes after sunset! Perfect!!

We arrive in plenty of time to go to the lodge and enjoy the trails near the lodge.





I had hoped to see the Colorado River from the Rim of the Canyon, but from the North Rim there is only one place to see the river – and that’s Angel’s Window. It’s a drive to a turn-around, and then a short hike: and you see the river through a “window” in a major outcropping in the canyon. Sadly, the road to the turnout was washed out from the snow over the winter, and seeing the window and river would take a full day hike. We hike the trails near the lodge to see the Canyon. Afterwards we head back prior to sunset and dinner, and find rocking chairs on the stone porches that overlook the canyon. We hang out watching the colors change, enjoyed blowing bubbles, playing chess, and meeting others.







It's a good day when she's tired at the end of the day!





Lower Antelope Canyon
on the Navajo Reservation
near Page, Arizona

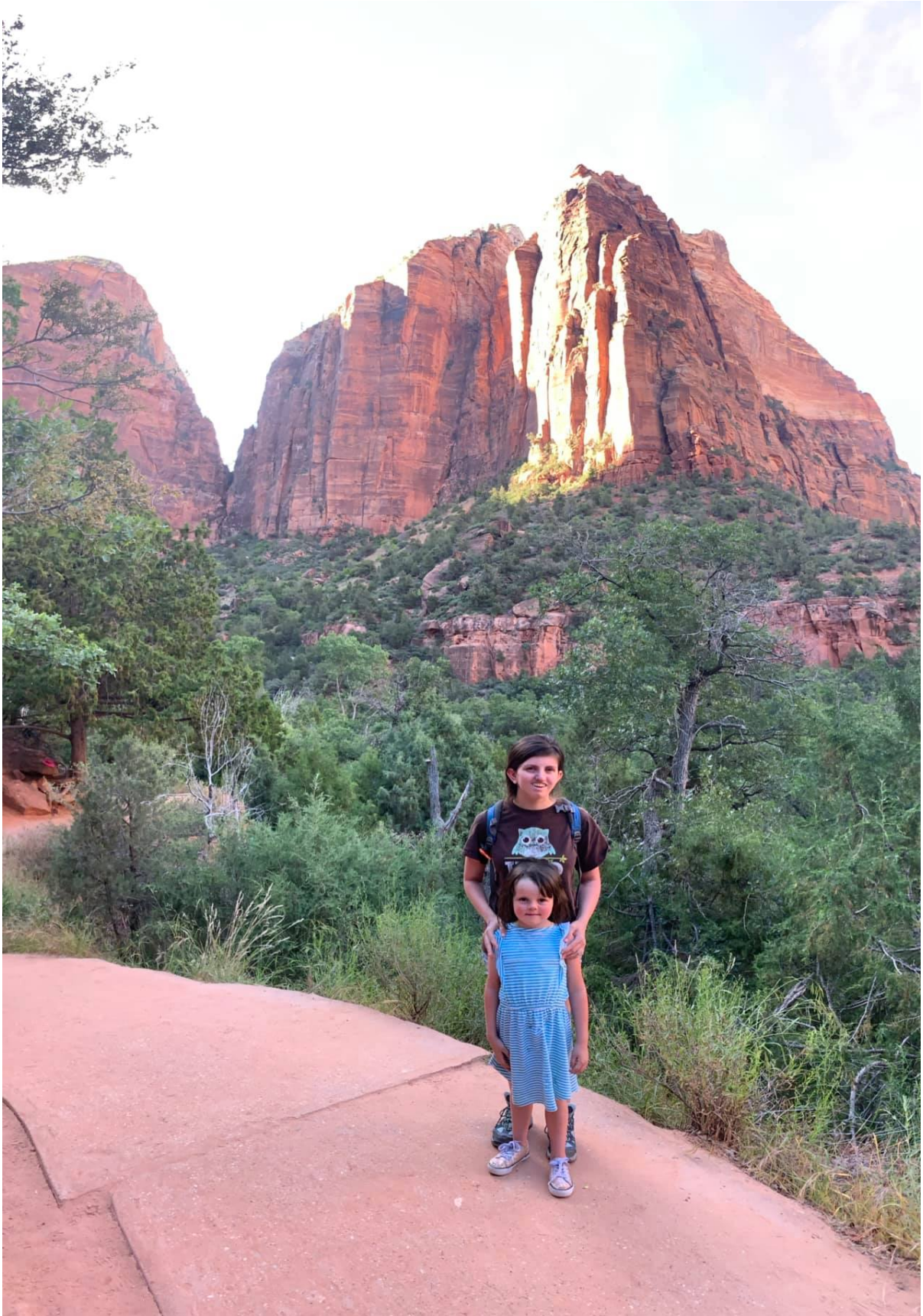




Zion National Park
Utah

We walked to the lower emerald ponds and also walked to the start of the narrows. On the way back to the bus from the narrows, Ellie got tired of the hike – so Will and I played “1-2-3 jump” with Ellie, and we had fun on the hike back to the bus.





Bryce Canyon Horse Back Riding





While Olivia, Will, Henry, and Mark went horseback riding, Ellie and I went to the overlooks and enjoyed seeing the Hoodoos in Bryce Canyon.

BBQ at IDK Barbeque after the afternoon at Bryce Canyon.

Monument Valley: Below Will runs through the monument gap made famous in the Forest Gump Movie; then later running in the valley with the monuments.





Four Corners on Flag Day 2019





Touring the Plaza of Sante Fe together.

Mass at the Cathedral in Sante Fe on Father's Day Eve



Father's Day – started in Sante Fe, and ending that night at Philmont, New Mexico





Mark and Ellie working on the Junior Philmont Ranger badge together.

Ellie touring the officer barracks in the town of Rayado, New Mexico on the Philmont Scout Ranch. This was a major military base protecting travelers on the Sante Fe Trail in the 1850s. Ewell (a General in the Civil War) was stationed here.





Celebrating Mark's Birthday at the St. James in Cimarron, while Henry had an overnight in the backcountry in Philmont. Olivia and Will flew home for their choir activities while we four were in Philmont, as they had a choir trip to Costa Rica soon.





Spent the birthday Thursday in the Philmont Craft center after dinner. Ellie and Mark made leather items, and also Sand Art together. Henry was still in the backcountry for his overnight at the Crater Lake staff camp.



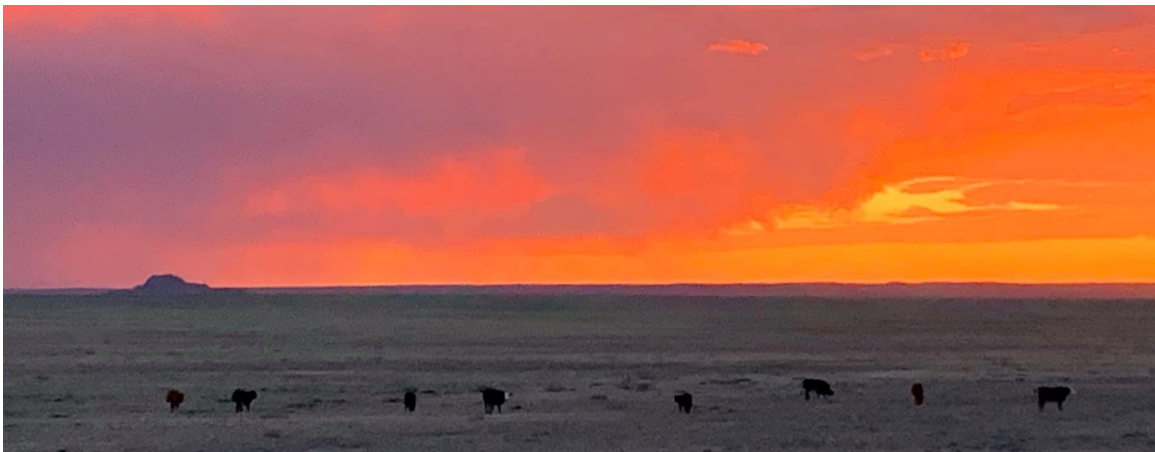
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Painted Desert and Petrified Forest, Arizona

We had a long day to get home from Philmont in Cimarron, New Mexico to San Jose, California – but on the way, on the same day we left Philmont, we drove through the Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest. It was near the end of the day, and quite windy – but we enjoyed the park immensely. Fortunately, as we got to the petrified forest, the wind subsided – and we played on the logs.







Driving home, and passed the historic route 66. We stopped in Boron, California – the location of the largest Borax plant in the world. Note the trucks used, and Ellie in front of the front tire.

