



## May 26-June 4, 2011 ~ Las Vegas & Sedona Trip

**Thursday, May 26, 2011** ~ Up at 4:00am. Eddie dropped me off at the airport and then I had an easy 2 flights to Houston and then onto Las Vegas. I arrived at 10:30am (1:30pm my time) in Vegas and Cathy & Carol picked me up. We drove to the condo, the Grandview, which was very nice. After a quick look, we started out on our afternoon adventures. I only have a day and a half in Vegas and lots to see and do.



**South Point Casino** is right next door to our condo, relatively new and very nice. No smoky smell at all. I tried my hand at The Wizard of Oz machine and won \$0.40! Not bad!!! We had lunch there @ Café Coronado, which was great.

**Bellagio Hotel & Casino** was the next stop and was fabulous! It had a beautiful Chihuly ceiling, beautiful courtyard with Liberty Bell, flowers, birds, all made out of flowers.



**Caesar's Palace** was next. It is the largest complex and is really, really huge! Statues were everywhere and it had a fabulous aquarium with fish that I have never seen before. Cathy was disappointed that the water show Atlantis was not working but I loved just seeing the place. We got gelato at a cute area. Then we walked outside onto the street to see the water show in front of the Bellagio

at 4pm. Next we went across the street to **Paris**. This complex is very pretty inside and is just like

walking through French streets with lots of little storefronts, patisseries, etc. The bathroom sinks in the ladies room were beautiful.

We walked thru to **Bally's**, an older casino but still nice. It is famous for the showgirls like you used to see in the movies. We walked back to Bellagio's to get our car. Next we

drove over to the **Stratosphere**, which is a huge needle-like building. We had Happy Hour with cosmos @ **107** which is on the 107<sup>th</sup> floor with amazingly dizzying views. It took me a little while to catch my breath. The elevator up to here goes so high so fast that your ears pop. There was nice entertainment with a jazz singer. Then we went down

one floor to a fabulous dinner @ **Top of the World** on the 106<sup>th</sup> floor. The restaurant turns slowly with a full rotation every 80 minutes so that you can see all of Las Vegas from every angle. I am fascinated by the mountains which surround the city. Sadly, a lot of places have closed or gone out of business. The Sahara, a huge older building was to have been the Fontainebleau. The owners put \$2 billion into the building and got it 70% finished and then stopped construction 2 years ago. The building just sold for \$100 million and nothing has been done with it. Our meals were delicious, but very large, so we had doggie bags to take home. We shared a dessert "Trio" which was very nice. The Stratosphere has several rides/attractions at the top. "Sky Jump" let people jump off the top of the building on a bungee cord and fly by you while you were eating dinner. There was a sort of swing-like ride that takes people out over the top of the building and swings them around, all of this over 1,000 feet up in the air! There was also a ride that zooms you up and down the needle-like structure at the very top of the



building above us. I don't even want to think about how high that was! And perhaps the scariest thing I have ever seen in my life...a sort of bullet-like ride that plummets you down at a 45degree angle and stops with the front riders' seats completely out in the air over the end of the track...then it plummets you backwards the same way. My heart is still pounding just thinking about this. We were up on the 108<sup>th</sup> floor observation deck watching this.

After the slow drive to Downtown Las Vegas, we went to **Fremont Street** to catch the 9:00pm laser light show. The whole street is closed to traffic and is covered by a big roof for a laser show each hour. We arrived just as "Bye Bye Miss American Pie" started. There is a fabulous street fare atmosphere with 3 or 4 bands performing, every type of impersonator you could imagine...Elvis, Marilyn, Michael Jackson, Spiderman, etc. along with mostly naked Roman Gladiators, showgirls, Vampires, Pirates, and "ladies" with monster boobs hanging out. We hung around and enjoyed the show. And, what would a place like this be without the usual crowd of "Jesus Freaks" with signs and flyers telling us we're all going to hell? The spectacle of crazy people and all the lights and music was so much fun. There was even a big zip line. We'll have to do that next time. Then we left and drove back down "The Strip" towards home. To see all the buildings lit up at night was spectacular. There was tons of traffic so it took us about 45 minutes to get home. Cathy does a fabulous job of driving...she knows where everything is! We got to bed about 11:00pm (2:00am my time). It has been a 22 hour day for me, but lots of fun!



**Friday, May 27, 2011** ~ we woke up at 7:00am to a beautiful day. After a nice breakfast, we started out. We went next door the South Point to see if we had won the free car...no such luck! Then we headed up "The Strip". First stop was at the famous "**Welcome to Las Vegas**" sign for a photo op. Our next stop was



**Luxor**. This is very impressive from the outside, but not too much to see on the inside.



It is pretty dark, but I guess that is the mystic. We walked next door to **Mandalay Bay**, which has a sort of Oriental theme to the décor. We took the tram ride to **Excalibur**, which is very pretty from the outside, like a medieval castle. It looks like a castle on the inside too. All of these complexes have their own casinos and we stopped at several of them to try out the penny slots. We walked across the street on the overhead walkway to **New York, New York** which is a fabulous place that looks just like New York's skyline. There is the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, and a huge roller coaster, but we didn't take the ride.



Inside of the huge building, you feel like you are in the old neighborhoods of NYC...all pretty authentic looking! We crossed the street to see **MGM Grand**. We had lunch at



**Rainforest Café**, which was a delicious cheese quesadilla and a delicious salad that we three shared. We saw the lions in their habitat and did a few slot machines. So far my favorite slot is Wizard of Oz. We walked across to the **Tropicana**, checked it out and then we went back on the tram to Luxor to get the car.



A note about transportation in Vegas...they have really figured it out in this town! Valet parking is free; you just pay a \$5.00 tip. There are free trams between several of the hotel/casinos. And there are escalators everywhere and over-street walkways so you can easily go from place to place without having to cross in traffic. Many hotels/casinos are connected by their huge shopping areas. The shops are all fabulous! Each area has its own theme and décor.



We picked up the car and drove to **The Venetian** to park. This complex is so beautiful, just like Venice, Italy, so I am told...There is the Grand Canal with gondolas and gondoliers dressed up and singing. The whole huge area is covered



over to look like a beautiful sky. St. Mark's Square is quite lovely, with its Living Statue, Opera singers, little kiosks selling gelato and beautiful jewelry. We enjoyed some yummy gelato while we took in the sights. From here we walked thru to **Palazzo**,



which is decorated with a huge American flag, gardens in red, white, and blue, and a wall of water. It was so lovely! We continued our walk through to **The Wynn**, which was absolutely gorgeous! There are magnificent gardens with trees wrapped in small white lights and beautiful mosaic tile floors throughout. This place was perhaps my favorite



area...so serene, like a spa. There is an "Upper Parasol" bar and a "Lower Parasol" bar. It is so beautiful...I just hope my pictures do it justice! The story is that Steve Wynn built this grand casino complex, and then lost it in his divorce to his wife, so he built another one right next door to be even more elegant...**Encore**. Its theme, which is carried out through the



carpets, mosaic tile floors, and chandeliers is butterflies and the color red. The casinos have beautiful red chandeliers throughout. There are very upscale shops. After browsing a while, we worked our way back to the Venetian for our car and then drove down to **The Flamingo**. This is an older hotel/casino and there is a huge garden with flamingos and other water birds...even a black swan pair. There was a huge pool complex with water slides which was very nice. We did some gambling...I still like the Wizard



of Oz best! I also played Lord of the Rings and Big Cats. Tonight we went to the **"Donny & Marie Show"** at the Flamingo. The show was fabulous, much better than I ever expected. Cathy said that she liked it better than Celine's show. They both look and sound great. The show was funny, inspirational, emotional, and it was really a "walk down memory lane". Marie sang "A Time for Us" from West Side Story in full soprano! Wonderful!! We shared a pizza at the **Burger Joint** with some wine for dinner. Then we went for a "big walk" outside to the Bellagio to catch the 10:30pm water/laser light show and then up to **Treasure Island** to see the Pirate Battle show, but it didn't start until 11:30pm and we didn't want to wait that long, so we walked back to **Mirage** and just caught the end of the Volcano Explosion show. Then we walked back to the Flamingo to get our car.



At this hour, around 11:30pm, there must have been several thousand people on the street! It was a mob scene. The police are out in full force and there are hundreds of people on the street everywhere trying to give you business cards for the prostitutes. Is prostitution legal here??? I must find out.

Cathy is amazing...she knows everything about Vegas and knows shortcuts and back streets to get us everywhere!



**Saturday, May 28, 2011** ~ We checked out of the Grandview at 10:00am and started our trip to **Sedona**. First big stop was the **Hoover Dam**, which was awesome. We walked across the dam to see the sights. Lake Mead is down probably 30-50 feet from its normal level. From the dam, we had a



great view of the new bridge, which is an engineering marvel and pretty scary looking! It was so long and high that I just knew I would pass out when we drove across it, but actually you couldn't see anything when you were crossing it, so it was sort of anti-climatic. We did a very long drive through the mountains and it was a very pretty ride. It was pretty windy in areas. We stopped in Kingman at a Wendy's for lunch. Then we drove on to Flagstaff and to the pretty, but harrowing, drive down to Sedona. The road was



very narrow and curved through the mountains with many switchbacks and steep drop-offs. Having lived in Marco for so long, I am not used to these heights! We checked into our time share at **Arroyo Roble Resort**. The resort is very pretty with rustic-looking, comfortable units with fireplaces,



beautifully landscaped grounds, and views of both Oak Creek and the red rock formations of Sedona. "Snoopy Rock" can be seen just outside our front door. The resort is right in the middle of Uptown Sedona, so we can walk



to the shops and restaurants. We had dinner at the **Cowboy Club**

**Restaurant**. We had great cosmos and Buffalo Cheeseburgers. After a leisurely walk back home, we went to bed.



**Sunday, May 29, 2011** ~ Cathy and I went to an orientation breakfast at 9:00am while Carol slept in. Cathy and Carol then went to Church while I





walked around and communed with nature in the beautiful surroundings. I walked the shops of Uptown and took many pictures of the beautiful scenery of the red rocks and the many sculptures along the street. There are many colorful sculptures of Javelinas, (Sedona pigs) sort of like the Marco Island dolphins. Then we all went to the Sedona Art Center, shopped the many fun stores, and had ice cream. There are lots of beautiful art galleries in this town. We drove over to visit Fred Shinn, Cathy's friend who used to live in Marco Island, at his lovely home and had wine and cheese with him. His home is so amazing-like a museum/gallery/gift shop with so many beautiful collections, such fine art, and two beautiful waterfalls in his back yard that he built for his late wife Joy. Then we took Fred out to dinner at **El Rincon**, a nice Mexican restaurant in **Tlaquepaque**. After a great dinner we went back home to relax by the fire before bed. This has been a great day with beautiful sunny, but breezy weather.



**Monday, May 30, 2011** ~ We awake to another beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky. There is absolutely no humidity out here at all! Today we are in search of vortexes. A vortex is an area where the energy of the earth, the chi, escapes. First we went to see the **Chapel of the Holy Cross** which is built into the beautiful red rocks. It was very impressive. Next we went to **Bell Rock** and hiked in a long way. The view was spectacular. Finally we came upon a group of young ladies sitting in a circle. They were meditating, chanting, etc., so we decided that



this must be where the vortex was located. We stayed here a while, quietly sitting, but I didn't really feel anything. According to the books, this area is supposed to have electrical/masculine energy. Maybe that is why we didn't feel



anything! From here we went to **Exposure's International Gallery**, a fabulous place with a huge selection of bronze sculptures and amazing artwork...all very, very expensive. Next stop was **Tlaquepaque** for lunch at **Oak Creek Brewery**. Lunch was delicious and we even tried some of their home brewed beer. Then we drove over to **Red Rock Crossing**, a very beautiful park with Oak Creek flowing through it. There were lots of

people there swimming, sunning, and communing with nature. The view is of **Cathedral Rock** with the Man/Woman rocks in the middle. This is an area where there are supposed to be lots of vortexes and there are lots of cairns or totems that people have left along the trail. We hiked to the end of the trail and each of us built a totem, then we started hiking back.



Eddie called and we had a nice chat. We stopped at Buddha Beach and put our feet in the water. It was very cool and refreshing. Then I built my totem at Buddha Beach at the site of the vortex. I hope this means that a part of my spirit will remain here and I will come back many times. We went home to change clothes and rest and then off to the Airport to watch the sunset. Views were great from up here, but the rocks didn't lighten up as I expected. The sunset was sort of a bust. We went down the mountain to Picazzo's for a delicious salad and pizza dinner.



**Tuesday, May 31, 2011** ~ This morning was a beautiful crystal clear day for our trip up to the Grand Canyon. What can I say...it is mind-blowing, spectacular!! Once again the park is very well run with natural gas-powered buses to take you everywhere. We did some of the "Yellow Route", then the "Blue Route" over to the "Red Route" on the South Rim. We stopped at every lookout spot and the views were breathtaking. We were at 7,000' above sea level also! At the end of the route, Hermit's Rest, we got Klondike Bars, which were so yummy! Then we went back to El Tovar for our delicious early dinner. The two hour drive back home was lovely. Going through the mountains and past Snow Mass ski area, we were up to 8,000' and as we came down I-17, we saw a spectacular sunset. We later learned that there was a big wild fire burning, but it was northeast of where we were and we didn't get any of the effects.



**Wednesday, June 1, 2011** ~ We slept in late this morning. After a nice breakfast, we drove down to Out of Africa, a wildlife park. We purchased the "Unimog Pass" and it was certainly worth it! We were up close and personal with the animals in the "Serengeti". There



were only 4 passengers in an open jeep with our guide as she took us to see the animals. Zebras came right up to us. One male really wanted his cookies. Our guide had told us that we could not feed the zebras as they have huge teeth and they might bite. He came up, stuck his head into the driver's



area with his mouth wide open for her to throw in the cookies...so cute. He was the father of a one year old male and he didn't like having him around with the females. The mother zebra stayed right by her son's side and protected him from the father. We tried to feed the giraffe, but he had an injured right eye and wouldn't eat. Our guide said that the vet was going to see him tomorrow. We





were so close we could have touched him. Instead a beautiful male eland came over and we hand fed him lots of cookies and petted him. He was so very gentle as he took the cookies right out of my hand. Then, Humphrey, the camel came over and we gave him lots of cookies and he really liked taking them from your lips, so Carol and I kissed a camel! Cathy didn't want to get near him, so she gave me all her cookies to feed him. The female ostrich also was quite hungry and she came around to the front passenger side where the bucket of cookies was located and she stuck her head inside and stole her cookies. We saw Boom Boom, the rhino from a distance. He wanted to stay in his mud hole. We learned about Lazarus, the big male lion. His mother was in the very next area. There were 4 cubs born and 3 were stillborn. He was not breathing and he was given mouth to mouth for 30 minutes before he came to life, so he was named Lazarus. Before we went into the Serengeti, we saw the "Tiger Splash" show, which was very entertaining. The main trainer, Dean Harrison, who talked during the show, is the founder of the park with his wife and I



purchased his book, Return to Eden. It makes excellent reading. After the Serengeti trip, we got to see the feeding of the carnivores. We rode the tram or walked next to it behind the truck with the caretakers, who would stop at each area and throw the food over the fences to the carnivores. It was fun to watch them catch their food and eat it. Many of the large lions got whole chickens each. Lazarus lunged at the fence growling when the caretaker came near. He is very protective of his food and none of the caretakers seem to be able to get anywhere



near him. He was such a beautiful creature with the most amazing golden eyes. All in all, this was an excellent adventure. I told Carol and Cathy that I could easily see myself working here with the animals. I definitely would like to come back again.

Next we drove to Alcantara Winery for a very relaxing wine tasting right before they closed for the day. On our way back to Sedona, we stopped at the Cliff Castle Casino. This casino is owned by the Indians here and was a little smoky for my taste. Besides, I lost all my money here pretty quickly. However, we did enjoy a very good, huge dinner at the Casino and we brought home half of it.

**Thursday, June 2, 2011** ~ We awoke to another crystal clear morning. Carol and I sat outside by the fountains while Cathy checked her emails. We then drove down to Jerome, a really cool, "Ghost Town" high up in the mountains. Jerome was originally a mining town (silver and copper mining), then it became a ghost town, then a hippie town, and finally, an artist colony. It was just chock full of many charming little shops. We drove up the extremely narrow steep drive up to The Asylum for lunch. There were great views and the food and drinks were delicious. We did more shopping, ice cream, and then drove



back to Sedona. Tonight we enjoyed a very beautiful sunset at The Airport. Back home at the condo we enjoyed a great meal of all of our leftovers.



**Friday, June 3, 2011** ~ Our last full day in Sedona was another beautiful crystal clear one. Today we went up to **Boynton Canyon** and toured around **Enchantment Resort**. This is a very exclusive, beautiful, classy resort with a great spa. We then hiked into **Boynton Canyon**. We did a little of Deadman's Pass and then Carol and I hiked to the top of **Kachina Woman**. At the top, I made my totem and sat under my meditation tree, as did Carol. It was incredibly peaceful and the wind swirled around me as I sat. I guess this was the vortex. At the site of a vortex the trunks of the trees are spiral shaped. This was certainly true at Kachina Woman. Carol and I stayed here for a long time, but we both agreed that we could have stayed here all day. We went back down and met up with Cathy who had hiked to a different area below Kachina Woman where she had been before with a guide. Next we drove back to the Airport road area, a famous vortex area. Carol and I hiked up to **Courthouse Butte** and part of **Airport Loop Trail**. Cathy went part way up too. The views



here were magnificent, but I didn't feel as much of a sensation as I did at Kachina Woman. On our way back into Sedona, we stopped at The Hike Shop to see Fred Shinn's daughter, Debbie. Then Carol and Cathy went back home and dropped me off on the main street of Uptown to do some last minute shopping. We all got cleaned up and went to **Tlaquepaque** and toured around the shops and galleries. I met the artist Honshin and bought some stuff from him. His work is truly amazing. We had a delicious dinner at **Cucina Rustica Restaurant**. Then it is home to bed.



**Saturday, June 4, 2011** ~ After our last breakfast in our cozy little home, we drove the two hour trip down to Phoenix to catch our planes home. My trip was uneventful. Carol & Cathy had a rougher trip home. They almost missed their connection, but did finally make it back to Ft. Myers and I met them for our limo ride back to beautiful Marco. It has been a wonderful adventure, one that I will always remember.