

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (II)
Georgia O'Keefe Country, San Juan Mountains in Colorado, Green River in
Utah, Nevada and Water, Deer Collision, Goat Guests at a Motel**

Traveling America (II)

Report One: Georgia O’Keeffe Country and Other Sights

November 28, 2005

This week, with Reporterette and dog Milli, Your on the Street Reporter made his way from New Mexico to Idaho to spend the winter. In contrast to many warm-blooded humans who migrate south when their days and nights become chilly, we went did a reverse snowbird routine.

During the winter months, thousands of Americans living north drive their three bedroom RVs to warm parts of the country. I have never understood their wish to spend months on the arid landscapes of Arizona and southern California nestled among hundreds of other RVs and trailers.

A vehicle sits a few feet from another vagabond, whose inhabitants entertain the neighborhood with midnight Karaoke performances. No green trees or grass, a few flowers, but mostly mesquite bushes and sage brush. Brown is the theme. UPS trucks keep their headlights on 24/7 to avoid being mistaken for the landscape. To each their own, but I am headed north to green landscapes, mountains, and trees.

Chama and Georgia O’Keeffe country

We left Santa Fe today (November 28), with the expectation of arriving in Coeur d’ Alene, Idaho by December 1. It would be a fast journey to be at our northern home in time for Holly’s birthday on December 2.

Traveling north on Route 84, we passed Espanola, a small city where many Santa Fe artisans live because of the high rents in the City Different (Santa Fe). Some people do not like this part of the Southwest because of its lack of greenery. I had one foot in this camp until I found myself in a terrain of colorful mesas. Several photographs and paintings I have seen of this land appear contrived because they depict hills with orange and red hues; even light purple. Yet, as we drove through this area, we encountered mesas that took on these colors, depending on the light, the time of day, and the direction of our perspective. As well, the sky was often tinted by the sun, rendering pink clouds.

Figure 1 is an example of some of these unusual landscapes. I snapped this photo from the car, and inserted it into this report without any color editing. It looks like a painting, yet it is an accurate depiction of a Chama landscape.

You have likely seen O’Keeffe’s work: paintings of desert flowers and plants, sun-bleached animal skulls, and the New Mexico landscapes I just mentioned. Last week, I visited the Georgia O’Keeffe museum in Santa Fe, accompanied by my brother Ed. My older brother---wiser than I from his experiences in life---has evolved into a binary type human. Like/dislike, yes/no, hate/love. Maybes and somewhats seldom appear in his vocabulary.

In no uncertain terms he informed me O’Keeffe’s pictures were...let’s use the term, “below average.” As for myself, I like some of her work, such as her landscapes, but I am not fond of her animal skulls.



Figure 2. Examples of O'Keeffe's work.

O'Keeffe became known to the public for posing in the nude for her well known photographer husband, Alfred Stieglitz. Later she became famous because of her paintings of both simple and complex representations of a variety of high-desert subjects, such as landscapes and flowers. Figure 2 shows two of her works that are displayed at the museum, located at 217 Johnson Street in Santa Fe. Several art critics claim some of her flower pictures are abstract renditions of various parts of a female's anatomy. A sensual Rorschach Ink Blot, but in color.

If you have an opportunity, take Route 84 up to Chama, stop at the Elk Horn Café and order an egg sandwich with a cup of coffee. Doesn't matter if it isn't breakfast time, order the egg sandwich on sourdough toast. Best I've ever had.

By the way, the Elk Horn Café's parking lot was packed with pickups---and one sedan. The sedan belonged to us. Unlike most pickups we see in cities, these pickups actually had useful stuff in their beds, such as shovels, ropes, and snow chains.

Plan for the Trip

Prior to our departure from Santa Fe, we watched the Weather Channel and had become wary of the snow and ice around Northeastern Nevada and Southern Idaho. Consequently, unless conditions changed in the next couple days, instead of taking a direct route to Northern Idaho, we decided to drive west to stay south of the storms...looking for a window of opportunity to "sprint" North during a lull.¹ Figure 3 is a map of the Western United States. The blue line from Santa Fe to Coeur d' Alene represents the fair weather route. The red line indicates the route we took to avoid snow storms.

¹ Thus, we stayed on 84 to Pagosa Springs, Colorado; then to 160 to Durango; next north on 110 to Montrose, where we planned to catch Interstate 70 at Grand Junction and again head west to duck under the bad weather.

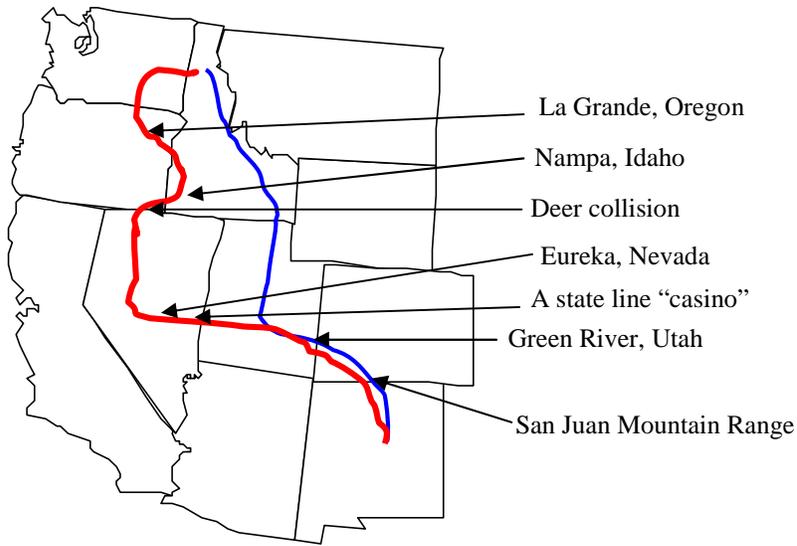


Figure 3. Route for Traveling America II.

In the next report, we manage to skid down the Red Mountain Pass in Colorado to then run across (unfortunately, not over) an obnoxious teenager.

Traveling America (II) **Report Two: San Juan Mountains**

November 28, 2005

Your on the Street Reporter and company entered the San Juan Mountains to continue the journey north to spend the winter in Idaho. This mountain range is in southwest Colorado.

San Juan Mountains and Red Mountain Pass

The drive from Durango, Colorado to Montrose, Colorado was one of the most spectacular I have taken in the United States. It reminded me of the terrain around northern Italy and southern Switzerland. Winter in the San Juan Mountains is not only breathtakingly beautiful, it is breathtakingly scary. At a Durango service station, an attendant told us the road through this area was “fine.” Not quite. To illustrate, the signs on the curves often read, “15 MPH”----in good weather. Given that the road was icy and snow-packed, “15 MPH” became “2-5 MPH” for our drive. Figure 4 shows scenes from this area, which is often called “Little Switzerland.”



Figure 4. San Juan Mountains.

Reporterette was at the wheel navigating these mountains. I was sitting on the edge of the passenger seat trying to act cool, and wondering why I trusted the sagacity of a Durango service station attendant who did not know how open our car hood to check the oil level.

After successfully traversing this road, we took a much needed break in Ouray, Colorado, the first town north of Red Mountain Pass. Still shaking from the drive, I looked for a bar, but we found only a small alcohol-free café featuring forgettable red beans and rice---rinsed down with a Pepsi. Concerned about the poor weather, and eager to waste no time, I asked the waitress how long it would take to reach Montrose. She replied, “About 50 minutes, give or take some time for the weather.”

We left the café, and drove a few blocks to a service station, where I encountered a sign on the gas pump proclaiming, “No gas unless we see you first. Get our attention, and we’ll turn on the pump. Sorry. People drive away.”

The service station shed featured small, opaque windows. I could not see anyone inside the shed, but following the directions of the sign, I made gestures toward the windows, hoping to

get someone's attention: (a) A hello gesture; (b) a pointing to the pump gesture; (c) a putting the pump in my tank gesture; (d) a smile gesture.

The pump's register remained mute and undemonstrative. Behind the windows, Big Brother might have been watching and had decided to deny me my petrol ration. So, I tried: (e) a shrug gesture; (f) a "What the muck is going on?" gesture. Nothing, no response from the windows or the gas pump.

Why did I not just walk into the shed and look for the person in charge of the pumps? I don't know the answer. Perhaps it's because I am easily persuaded by signs. For example, when I see a sign attesting to, "Spanish spoken here," I believe it to be true. As well, when I enter a mainstream department store in our fair country and read a sign stating, "Hablan Ingles Aqui," I am sure English is spoken in this American emporium.

Sitting behind the counter inside the shed was...I should have known....a teenager. He was paying no attention to the distant gas pumps. MTV video sound bites had captured his fancy. In spite of my disdain toward his chronological constitution, I attempted a dialogue:

- "Interesting sign out there on your pumps. Looks like I was unsuccessful in getting your attention."
- Teenager...silence, as he continued to stare at a TV rock artist who was repetitively shouting three chords of cacophony.
- Reporter, "Will you turn on the pump?"
- Teenager, "Just did."
- Reporter, *You insolent young man.* (Thoughts are abridged for a mixed readership.) "OK. Say, how long will it take to reach Montrose?"
- Teenager, who had somehow recovered from his lethargic trance into the tube, answered, "A few."
- Reporter, "A few what?"
- Teenager, "A few hours."
- Reporter, "A few hours!? The café waitress told me 50 minutes or so."
- Teenager, "If you already knew, why did you ask in the first place?"
- *Clint Eastwood, give me a hand!* "I wanted to see if you were capable of speech."

Thanks Clint...Even if the dolt had no idea what I was saying, I felt fulfilled as I filled my tank. And off we went. First to Montrose; then to Grand Junction, Colorado; on to Green River, Utah---hoping to stay west and south of some nasty weather.

Traveling America (II) **Report Three: Green River, Utah**

November 28, 2005

We continued the trek to Coeur d' Alene, Idaho, where my mother-in-law awaited her favorite (and only) son-in-law. It was still November 28 and we decided to stop for the night at Green River, Utah. Our (unsuccessful) intention was to stay on Interstate 70 and then take Interstate 15 for a dash up this route past Salt Lake City while the relatively good weather lasted.

- The clerk at Green River motel, like the gas station non-attendant encountered earlier in the day, was engrossed in a television show. It was Dr. Phil, whose guests flout the fact that humans are a dominant species on earth. But she was at least attentive to her job: "Hello, do you have a reservation?"
- Reporter, "No, I need a room for two adults and one small dog. Do you take pets?"
- Clerk, "Yes. Ten dollars extra, not refundable."
- Reporter, "Fine. By the way, I was wondering how the city of Green River got its name?"
- Clerk, "I've no idea sir."
- Reporter, "Is there a river nearby?"
- Clerk, "Eh, I think so."
- Reporter, "Do you know the name of the river?"
- Clerk, "Oh! It's called Green River."
- "Is the river green?"
- "Wouldn't know. Never really looked at it," as she turned her attention back to Dr. Phil and his own version of the show, "Jeopardy."

Later, we went to dinner at a diner across the street from the motel. As we walked to the place, we discovered the café was situated along the banks of a river. Amazing. How did the motel clerk miss this body of water on her way to work? She looked like a teenager; that would explain it.

Talk English H'oss...eh, Hostess

Entering the diner, we were met by the hostess. Reporter, "Can we have a table next to a window facing the river?"

The hostess made several gestures: (a) A helpless smile gesture; (b) A shrug gesture; topped off with, "No hablo Ingles."

I am not a cultural or linguistic chauvinist. I am in favor of immigration, especially given the fact that many businesses in America can no longer find folks born in the USA who are willing to work for, say, six or seven dollars an hour. We have become so affluent we are too rich to work for minimum wage. We cannot afford ourselves.

By the way, those fences on the border between America and Mexico are as about effective as male mammary glands. If businesses in America want *cheap* Latino labor, they are going to get it. I understand their dilemma and I am sympathetic to their predicament. I had the same problem during my working years when I unsuccessfully attempted to recruit software engineers from the workers standing in front of the local 7/11 store.

I'll ease up on serious matters with one more thought, which I have addressed in other reports. I believe our country *must insist* on its citizens knowing English. America must provide positive and aggressive language and cultural assimilation programs for legal and illegal immigrants.² My experiences in other countries have led me to believe this issue is a key to maintaining a cohesive societal fabric for our country.

I am not saying Mexicans should be denied speaking Spanish or Texans their own version of English. But as I have stated in these reports, Mexicans and Texans should also speak English, at least in business situations.

A *hostess* at a restaurant in English-speaking America who does not speak English. Am I being unreasonable? I would like your opinion. Send to the linguistically neutral website: People_in_America_should_speak_English.com.

How' You Going to Keep'em Down in the 'Burbs after they've seen Parea?

I have not dissed the French lately. It's time. Let's discuss the recent riots in Paris, France. That is, the suburbs of Paris, France, but not Paris proper, as the rioters cannot afford the rents and other expenses of downtown Paris. So, they hangout in the 'burbs.

How could these riots happen in a country noted for its tolerance of different cultures, races, and languages? After all, folks such as Josephine Baker preferred to live in France because of its lack of racial bigotry, and she said, "I like Frenchmen very much, because even when they insult you, they do so nicely."³

France and America are having problems assimilating immigrants; France with Muslims from North and West Africa; America with Mexicans, and Central and South Americans. What's the difference? Why the absence of riots in America at this time?

The answers are simple. America is far less stratified in its class structures than France. America is not saddled with the rigid unions that exist in France, in which many jobs are guaranteed and entry into a job market is denied to all except a closed network of people. The economic and financial milieu of America *encourages* assimilation with easy purchases of homes (maybe too easy), easy creation of new companies, and easy entries into both union and nonunion jobs.

During the times I was operating a communications consulting firm, I had some run-ins with government bureaucracies in several European and Asian countries. If you think America's local, state, and national governments revolve around rules and paperwork, try getting a business license (even through a foreign agent) in another country. My foreign partners told me it was easier to file a welfare claim in their country than to open a new business.

My point about France is that economic opportunity for a person spurs assimilation into and acceptance of that person's society. I venture to say that most folks with car loans or home mortgages do not riot, or burn cars and houses.

OK. Problem solved. I'll be sending France my consultant's bill.

In the next report, we come across another example of the Nevada water problem first covered in my report on Las Vegas. We also meet some interesting characters at a state line gambling casino.

² I read recently that some people in Congress and in the administration propose to send the illegal immigrants back to their homes and build a 2,000 mile long fence along our southern border. Forget deportation, forget fences. Wal-Mart needs clerks. McDonald's needs hamburger flippers. The Donald needs maids.

³ From Microsoft's Encarta Encyclopaedia. Enter "Josephine Baker" in the search window.

Traveling America (II) Report Four: Nevada and Water

November 29, 2005

Hello again. Around noon, Holly, Milli and I crossed the state line into Nevada. At this demarcation---perhaps a foot or so inside the border---we encountered the first gambling parlor. The casino was a modest establishment with a few slot machines, a bar, service station, and a café. But, true to the spirit of Nevada, it was also a gambling place. Figure 5 shows two signs; the official Nevada sign and the private establishment sign.



Figure 5. Nevada state line.

Only a few customers came into the casino during the time we were there. Reporterette and I talked about playing the slots and ordering lunch to give the workers something to do and a tip. But we wanted to put some blacktop behind us before sunset and decided to hit the road.

Lack of Water in Nevada...Again

Earlier, I had noticed a large bucket in front of the Border Inn, as seen in Figure 6. Before leaving, I approached three men at the bar. Two appeared to be associated with the business. One was wiping glasses, the other was overseeing the wiping. Another was drinking a beer, so he may have been a customer.

- Reporter, "Couldn't help but notice the bucket out front. What's going on?"
- First person, hereafter labeled as Belligerent, "You saw the signs; can't you read?"
- *No wonder the place was almost empty: Unfriendly help.* "Eh, yes. By the way, do you mind if I take notes?"
- Belligerent, "What for?"
- Reporter, "I'm a reporter. It appears you have a story to tell."



....and another sign:

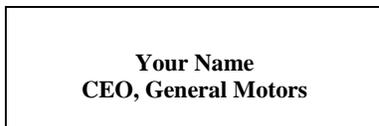


Figure 6. A protest.

- Belligerent, "Got any ID?"
- As I took out my notepad, I responded with my business card, "Sure, here are my credentials."
- Belligerent, "Your on the street reporter? What the hell is that?"
- Second person, hereafter labeled as Conciliator, "It's OK. He's got a business card."
- Belligerent, "...Humph... What d'ya wanna know?"

A pause from this seminal interview: Just consider that a business card is often sufficient to assure the authenticity of the card bearer. How many times have you presented your business card to a stranger, who upon reading it, assumed you were indeed the person---with the associated glories---represented by the card? Most likely, hundreds of times.

Go to Kinkos and have a card printed-up, as I did with mine. Present it to a stranger. Look at his or her reaction. An example:



Don't show this card to a UAW member or a General Motors stockholder. Instead, show:

Your Name
Next CEO, General Motors

Good strategy. In this manner---when you actually take over---you will be granted the obligatory one second honeymoon to fix a problem of capitalistic hubris that took over half a century to create a nearly bankrupt company. And you will be assured your future failure will be rewarded with millions of dollars in golden parachutes. If this milieu is not systemically sick I don't know what is. But again, your reporter is speaking from a podium of ignorance and I would welcome your views on this matter.

Isn't this fun! Before moving back to the Border Inn interview, let's do one more business card:

Your Name
Policy Maker of
Unilateralism for Bush's vision of
world peace

It turns out that international unilateralism did not work. So, the Neocon "We're going it alone!" guys have moved out of the Pentagon, State Department, and White House to lucrative jobs on K Street, the World Bank, and the U.N., while Condi Rice and her associates try to patch-up the damage.

- Back to the big bucket: Reporter, "I gather Las Vegas is tapping into your water table?"
- Belligerent, "All the way from Las Vegas! A pipeline into our water."
- Conciliator, "Not yet. But the plan is on the drawing board."
- Reporter, "Is it your water? Do you own the water table?"
- Belligerent, "Hell yes! Just like mineral rights. What's under my land, I own, unless I sell it."
- Conciliator, "The Governor says the people own the water table."
- Reporter, "OK, but most of the people living in Nevada are residents of Las Vegas. What do they care about a water table way out here?"
- Belligerent, "They don't care! That's the problem.".....Conciliator, "Yep."
- Third person, who is hereafter labeled the Drinker, "No problem."
- Us, "Eh?"
- Drinker, "Global warming is the answer. It leads to a lot of rain."
- Reporter, "I passed by Lake Mead near Las Vegas last year. Its water level is at an all-time low."
- Belligerent, "Those sons-a-bitches. And we're next!"
- Drinker, "No problem. Just wait a while. Global warming is the answer."
- Reporter, "So long gentlemen. Good luck. Thanks for the interview."

As I exited the Border Inn, the Drinker and the Belligerent had entered into a heated discussion about global warming, rain, and proprietary water tables.

I'm making light of this light encounter, but the subject is not funny. A few years down the road, this obscure watering hole in Nevada will cease to exist because it will have no water.

Traveling America (II)

Report Five: America's Eating Habits (II)

November 29, 2005

Your on the Street Reporter continues reporting on a winter trip across the American Southwest. After crossing the Utah/Nevada state line we were forced to continue west to avoid the snow storms in northern Utah and Nevada. Even with this precaution, we encountered heavy snow during this part of our journey. Nonetheless, we stayed south of the major weather troubles and ended up spending the night in Eureka, Nevada. We were tempted to try to make it to Fallon, but dark comes early this time of the year and the roads would soon be icy.

More American Cuisine

Down the street from our motel was the Owl Club, a local bar and café. After a difficult day of driving a modern sedan over four lane highways, we were hungry. The Owl Club featured a T-bone steak as its special for the day. Protein, fat, and carbs. Just what we desired, if not needed.

After we finished-off a fine salad, the waitress brought us two huge steaks, probably 16 ounces apiece.

- Reporter, "I can't wait. Here goes," as I cut-off a piece of meat and took it into my mouth."...Chewing, tasting. "Ugh. This is awful."
- Reporterette concurred and the waitress was summoned. Reporter, "Ma'am, something is wrong with the steak. It tastes as if the cook put meat tenderizer on it."
- Waitress, "Oh no sir. That's just Worcestershire Sauce. We put it on all our steaks."
- Reporter, "Really? I can't understand why anyone would put Worcestershire Sauce on a prime cut of meat. I..."
- Waitress, "I'll bring you the A-1. Some of our customers prefer it."

The waitress left our table to fetch yet another steak sauce. We had eaten enough of the stuff, so we cut-off the bones from the steaks as a present to Milli. We then cut-out of the Owl Club and shortly thereafter, gorged ourselves on a Slim Fast in our hotel room.

- Later, Reporterette admitted, "I use Worcestershire Sauce in my meatloaf and hamburgers. But a T-bone?"
- Reporter, "Could have been worse. The cook might have preferred Tabasco."
- Milli had no complaints.

Traveling America (II) **Report Six: Deer Hunted**

November 30, 2005

Your on the Street Reporter is still reporting from Eureka, Nevada. The next morning, nothing in town was open for breakfast except the Owl Club, site of last night's Worcestershire Sauce feast. With another hard day's journey ahead of us, we decided to stoke-up on yet more carbs, fat, and protein.

It is difficult to grasp the tenacity and toughness of the pioneers who traveled this same territory less than two hundred years ago. I have read stories of the Lewis and Clark expedition, a trip north of our travels, in which the explorers were well equipped. But for most of these long treks the travelers had little more than a horse, a wagon, and sometimes neither a horse nor wagon. Some walked over two thousand miles to find their home. Our forefathers came from tough stock. Gold's Gyms were not needed in those days.

Anyway, we returned to the Owl Club for breakfast, where the same waitress of the night before was tending tables. She had worked a double shift because the poor weather discouraged other Owl Club workers from working.

- We started the meal with, "A small glass of orange juice."
- Small, as in a 16 oz. glass. A full glass, no less, and all for 75 cents. Upon seeing the huge glass of juice in the waitresses' hand I asked, "What if I had ordered a large glass of orange juice?"
- Waitress, "Honey, we serve the same for all. Small, medium, large."
- Reporter, "If you were in New York, a small orange juice of 4 ounces and would cost about two dollars, maybe more."
- Waitress, "Get 'atta here!" She then lowered her voice, as if to keep the conversation and our possible origins a secret, "Eh, are you folks from New York?"
- We admitted to our Virginia roots and ordered breakfast, "I'll have scrambled eggs and pork chops. Hold the Worcestershire Sauce please."
- The waitress paused for a brief time and without missing a beat responded with, "No problem. We do A-1 on pork."

Touché. And on to Idaho!

A Close Encounter....too Close

We were finally making good time. Driving up Route 95 through Nevada and into southern Oregon, we had managed to avoid the worst of the snow storms. But I had given up plans for Holly's birthday party. Her brother and sisters were scheduled to celebrate the event on December 2nd. We were still far away from the party site, Coeur d' Alene.

I usually avoid driving at night. My depth perception, never great, is even poorer in the dark. For this trip, the added burden of snow and ice had kept us off the roads after 5 PM. The one exception to my rule occurred today. We decided to drive an additional 100 miles to place ourselves in front of another cold front coming into Utah. Thus, we continued up Route 95 toward Ontario and Boise, Idaho. The sun had gone down. We had just passed a 16-wheeler on the two-lane road.

A fraction of a second is not a long time: the tick of a tick, tock. Yet, a specific fraction of a second on Route 95 is fixed into my memory as if it were a still-image, frozen in time. Frozen in my mind with an everlasting image.

The deer came from the right. He was a huge buck, with a large set of antlers. I did not see him until he collided with the front of the car. At that instant, I saw his head, which was turned toward me. His left eye, wide-open with surprise, looked in my direction, surely startled that he had suddenly encountered a faster-moving interloper onto his trail.

For that moment, it appeared he was looking directly at me, that he could see me behind the steering wheel. Of course, he could not...or could he? Later, I wondered what he was thinking. We are told animals cannot think, at least not like us humans. How do we know?

The hard but muted “bump” of the deer against our car occurred in the same fraction of a second that I saw him in front of us. Luckily, the deer did not come through the window. We hit him almost square with the front of the car, so our momentum kept the vehicle going straight down the highway.

The deer was so big the bumper missed his body and the air bags did not deploy. We were unharmed, but the car was badly damaged. I guided it to the side of the highway. Once I turned-off the engine, it would not start again.

So What? What’s a car anyway? Inert material. Metal. Plastic. Leather. Wood. Paint. Cloth. It did not matter. I was sorry about the deer, but I was thankful we were safe. Vehicular collisions with deer result in hundreds of human fatalities each year.

The 16-wheeler we had passed stopped to offer help. He took Holly and Milli to the next town (Jordan Valley) to fetch a tow truck. I stayed behind to keep watch on the car and our belongings.

For a while, I sat in the car. It was now dark. In the couple hours I was there, not one vehicle come from either direction. Perhaps any potential passersby were wiser than I, and had avoided driving at sunset, the time when deer move about.

The air was still and cold. The landscape of sagebrush and hills formed silhouettes against a cloudless sky that seemed to suspend the nearly full moon above the landscape. I began to wonder about the deer. Was he still alive? Was he lying down, unable to move? I left the car to look for him. I carried a flashlight and a .22 pistol; not for protection for myself, but to kill the deer if he were still alive.

The bright night provided an illuminant stage, offering high desert tableaux of stillness and quietude. I walked up and down the highway looking for the deer, examining ditches, even the other side of a barbed-wire fence. No deer. The flashlight revealed no blood anywhere around the area where the deer had been hit. Nothing.

For the better part of two hours I searched for the deer. Walking back to what was left of the car, I said to myself, *Jesus, what a deer*, then laughed at my reference to Jesus. It appeared Jesus had no exclusive lock on rising from the dead.

Traveling America (II) Report Seven: Hotel Goat Guests

December 1, 2005

We spent the night in a motel in Jordon Valley, Oregon. The place was owned by the tow truck service, who also owned a small coffee shop that was attached to the motel building, as well as the service station next door. From the moment our car was towed into town, the owner and his crew took good care of us; even to the next day, when the car was towed to a Nampa, Idaho repair shop. If you happen to pass through Jordon Valley, stop at Jim Zatixa's Shell/Chevron Station, Motel, and Coffee Shop. Buy some gas and say hello to Jim, Jake, and John.

By mid-day Jim had deposited the car and us at a repair shop in Nampa. Just across the street was the Desert Inn Hotel---not exactly on a par with the Las Vegas Desert Inn, but a convenient place to stay while we waited for our insurance company to check-out the car.

Yes, a convenient place, assuming the hotel accepted pets. But I need not have been concerned, because the party checking in behind us was traveling with a mini-zoo. A woman "registered" two dogs, one cat, three goats, one husband, and herself.

Six animals and two humans, all sequestered in a small motel room. I love writing these reports. I have no need to make up the stories. They simply unfold before me, as I'm sure they do for anyone who takes the time to look around and observe the behavior of our fellow humans.

No questions were asked at the front desk...such as, "OK, will that be one room for the humans and one room for the other animals?" After all, a sign at the desk said, "We accept pets." It did not hedge with, "We accept pets, with the exception of goats." Nowadays, one can't



Figure 7. Two of the goat guests.

discriminate, because it could lead to law suits. "Your honor, the Desert Inn rented a room to a poodle, but denied my goats the same service."

I snapped the photos in Figure 7 of two of the goat guests. The top picture is the owner of the goats sitting outside their room with one of her pals. The bottom shot is of another goat guest. As you can see from this photo, the goats did not order room service. I said to myself as I watched this interesting scene, *The Desert Inn in Las Vegas was never like this.*

The Desert Inn of Nampa, Idaho once enjoyed fame. On the walls behind the check-in counter were pictures of famous, semi-famous, and wannabe-famous people who had stayed at this place (Figure 8).

- The clerk filled in my Nampa history gaps, “Our annual rodeo, The Stampede, brought in movie stars and singers. Lots of them stayed here.”
- Reporter, “ ‘Stayed?’ They no longer stay here?”
- Clerk, “Nope. The rodeo decided to divert the money to bigger purses for the performers. The Desert Inn used to be a big draw in this part of town. Not much here to attract folks now.”



Figure 8. The famous persons wall.

- Reporter, “Yeah, I see your point. There’s a picture of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. That was a long time ago.”...*You have a very liberal pet policy. Did Trigger stay here?*
- “And there’s the funny guy from ‘Gunsmoke.’ (Ken Curtis) His autograph is dated 1978. Look’s like the Desert Inn has fallen on hard times....I...”
- Clerk, “We still offer a fine service!”
- Reporter, “No offence intended. But you have to consider that Roger Rogers used to be a guest, now you cater to goats (*and me*). Just an observation,” as the clerk turned her attention to other matters.

Goodbye Car

The car did not appear to be damaged to the extent of its being declared “totaled.” Figure 9 shows the front end of the vehicle. Buckled hood aside, the car looked reasonably intact. But the insurance assessor said the damage under the hood was extensive. Electrical components, the oil system, and parts of the cooling plant would have had to be replaced. Plus, the front fenders had been pushed into the front doors. The car was declared totaled. Just as well, my experience with rebuilt cars had not been a good one. Thus, we continued our trip in a rental car, hoping to reach Coeur d’ Alene before springtime.

I kept thinking about the deer we hit, or the deer that hit us. I thought about my searching for his body for nearly an hour. What a magnificent animal. He totaled a car but kept on running. I hoped he survived. If not, I hope he died quickly.



Figure 9. Damage that can't be seen.

Traveling America (II) **Report Eight: Snowbound Next to Denny's**

December 2 and 3, 2005

Your on the Street Reporter found himself and his companions snow bound in La Grande, Oregon. We barely made it into the city over an ice-covered Interstate 84, and by the time we were ready to pull-out and continue our journey, it had become dark. The roads north of La Grande were closed to all vehicles without snow chains.

Only one motel in town accepted dogs, as the Howard Johnson Inn clerk informed me:

- "Yes sir, we accept pets. A fifteen dollar charge is added to your bill."
- Reporter, "Fine. Eh, just curious. You say you accept pets...what is your policy about goats?"
- Clerk, "Goats! You have goats?"
- Reporter, "Just wondering what your policy is."
- The clerk responded with, "I suppose we might accept goats, but they eat everything in sight. I better check with our manager." She ducked behind a wall to talk with her boss.
- Shortly, the manager emerged from behind the wall. Appearing resolute and irritated, she stared at an admittedly seedy-looking traveler, "What's this about goats? You have goats traveling with you? We don't accept goats."
- Reporter, "Even if the goat's a pet?"
- Manager, "There is a limit sir! Dogs, cats, birds. Our policy is toward those sorts of pets."
- Reporter, "No problem. I'm traveling with a five pound mutt. I was just curious about your 'definition' of pets."
- The manager took me in for a second or two, then came up with a Clint Eastwood retort, "If you brought in your pet elephant, doesn't necessarily mean I would rent you a room."

Well spoken. And off we went to a Denny's, located about 100 feet from our motel, the only café open in this part of snow-laden La Grande.

Snow Bound, Next to a Denny's

In the report of my visit to San Francisco, I mentioned how beguiling the Denny's menus are. Done in splashy colors, each photo of food suggests a feast is in store for the eater. What is more, butter, cooking oil, white flour, and sugar are vital ingredients in many of Denny's dishes. And I admit I love Denny's food. I was weaned on meat and potatoes, which were laden with mom's generous use of butter and Crisco.

We were destined to stay in La Grande for over two days, which meant we dined frequently at Denny's. After the five previous days of fast food fare, I had put on some weight. How could I possibly hope to take off these pounds when the only eatery nearby was a Denny's? Answer: resolution, fortitude, perseverance---if it tasted good, spit it out!

Determined to reduce my recent deposits of adipose tissue, the first breakfast at Denny's was the "Veggie Omelet." The menu claimed the meal to be only 360 calories of: egg whites, tomatoes,

mushrooms, and bell peppers. Fine. Toss some Worcestershire or A-1 on it, and I could fool myself that I was eating meat.

The waitress brought my order. It was on a platter approximately a foot long---and completely covered with a huge omelet, thick toast, and the equivalent of three orders of hash browns. Fantastic! A closet glutton, such as I, must believe in Denny's packaging. If the menu declares a plate of food to be 360 calories, who am I to question Denny's' nutrition experts? Dig in!

Still, after eating most of the food, and unable to avoid the taste of butter on the toast and cooking oil in the potatoes, I posed a question to the waitress, who had been sharing tales with me of La Grande's infamous reputation as a snow-bound town:

- "I don't see how this meal could contain only 360 calories."
- Waitress, "That's only the omelet. The toast and potatoes are extra."
- Reporter, "Why doesn't the menu say so?"
- Waitress, "It does. Read it again." Sure enough, the menu declared, "Veggie Omelet. 360 calories." No mention of toast and potatoes.

I had several opportunities to eat Denny's food and watch other patrons eat Denny's food. In so doing, I made a discovery: With a few exceptions, part of the dress code for male customers consisted of a baseball cap, always worn while the person was eating.

Furthermore, I saw no one with a cap on backwards. My headwear met the code: A forward-worn baseball cap. The difference was my cap's lettering, which contained the word, "Canada." It had nothing to do with motor oil or stock car drivers. To redress my lack of proper dress, at our next stop for gas, I upgraded my cap attire with a new hat and a more appropriate icon: Dale Earhardt.

Coeur d' Alene

Finally, the mountain pass out of La Grande was clear enough for us to leave. At the gas station just mentioned, Holly bought a cache of California quarters from the cashier. She collects the new quarters that commemorate each state. She told me quarters had been issued for about thirty to forty of the states. Future plans are to mint quarters of the other states. As well as semi-states such as Israel, Taiwan, South Korea, and soon-to-be states, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sonora, and Chihuahua.

Traveling up snow-free Route 395, we were nearing our destination. Just outside of Connel, Washington, we spotted a road sign that warned, "Farm Equipment Access: Next 10 Miles."

I couldn't resist, "Hey, look out for some John Deeres!"

Holly and Milli remained silent.

Your on the Street Reporter, finally in Coeur d' Alene---getting ready to reschedule Holly's birthday party---and signing off on this report.