

Trip to the Southwest with Connor and Austin

In the Summer of 1996, Ruth and I took Dan (13) and Andrew (11) to MN, WI, SD, WY, MT and ND (No story as this was before I had a web site!), and ever since that time Ruth has been talking about taking Connor (15) and Austin (13) to some of the Western states as a part of their education...in addition to creating some wonderful memories for them and us.

We decided to try a new route, one that would also be partially new to Ruth. The plan was to fly to Denver (saving two days of driving) and then driving to: Moab, UT for the Arches and Canyonlands National Parks; Cortez, CO for Mesa Verde; Taos, NM for some Indian lore and art; Santa Fe, NM for Western art and shopping; and, Albuquerque for an aerial tram ride and the return flight to Ohio (saving three days of driving). Of course, all hotels had to have swimming pools, a sure winner when traveling with teenagers!

Day 1. Ohio to Utah. The boys stayed overnight with us so we could depart at 4:15am for our 6:30am flight to Denver. An uneventful flight of three hours and a two-hour time change made our arrival in Denver an early 7:30am! We rented a Malibu and headed for Utah. The first day was a long six hour drive...we wanted to fly to Grand Junction, CO, but the additional \$800 fare increase helped us decide to fly to Denver and make a longer drive. That longer drive turned out good, as we were able to drive through the lower Rocky Mountains on our way to Utah. We stopped in Vail for lunch, a location so trendy that we nearly spent our food allowance

for the day there for lunch! The drive was beautiful, paralleling the Colorado River, weaving between and over mountains on our way to our first night's stay at the Red Cliff Lodge, a dude ranch near Moab, UT. Prior to arriving at the resort, we visited Arches National Park...an awesome place to visit. We saw the Three Gossips (three very large stone figures appearing to be whispering to one another), Balance Rock (a massive rock balancing on top of a spire and a series of arches (arches carved into stone by millions of years of wind, water and sand) and North Window Arch (One of the largest arches).

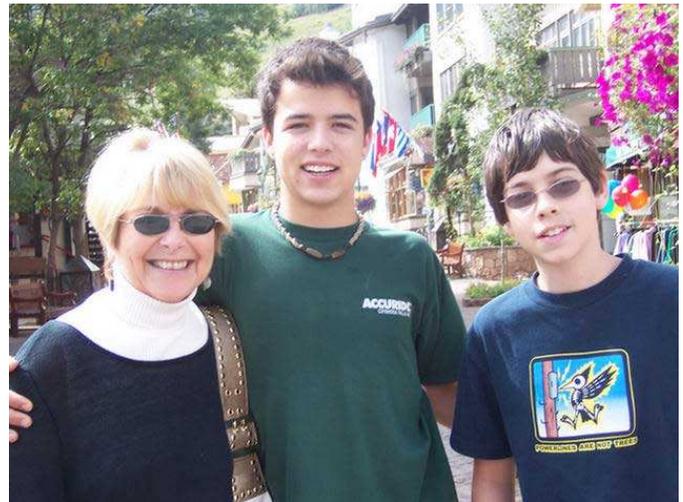
The boys climbed up to almost all of them (Who says three hundred and fifty miles of driving tires one out?). After several hours in the park, we headed for our lodge. Red Cliff Lodge is a sight to behold...located on the Colorado River at the base of a massive cliff. The boys and I swam and then we had dinner overlooking the river and the cliff. Connor and Austin were impressed, and that alone made for a great first day!

Quote of the day was by Austin: "Stay right there!" This was said to Ruth and me as we got off of the shuttle tram taking us from the satellite terminal to the main terminal. Austin was recounting what had happened three years earlier in a subway ride in Washington, D. C. We were on a subway from the center of D.C. to our hotel and were about to disembark from the subway at an interim station when the problem started. Connor and Austin jumped off of the subway, and Ruth started to help a disabled person debark. It took so long that the subway doors closed and off we

went...leaving the twelve and ten year-old boys behind. I looked out the window and shouted, "Stay right there!" We rode to the next station, with fellow riders giving us advice as to what to do to find our grandchildren. The whole carload of riders seemed to be genuinely concerned for our grandchildren...and us. We rode to the next station, took the bridge over the tracks to the returning car, returned to the last station, climbed over another bridge...only to see our grandsons standing there laughing and shouting, "Stay right there!" Everyone was happy, and although they were full of bravado, I am sure they were as relieved to see us, as we were to see them. "Stay right there!" has special meaning at our family...and Austin remembered it.



Connor, Ruth and Austin
on plane



Ruth, Connor and Austin
in Vail



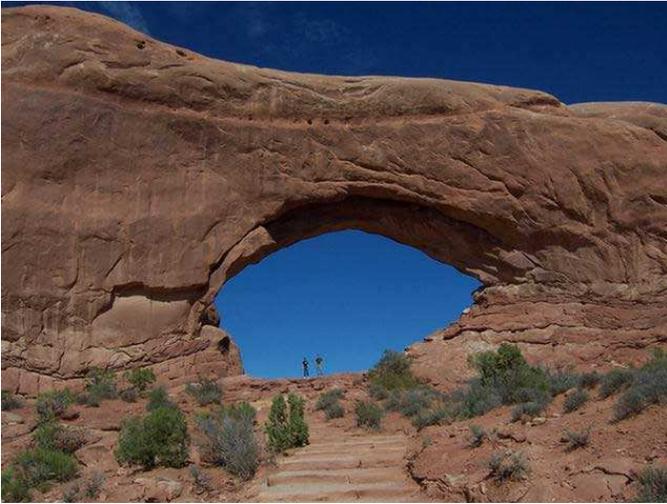
Three Gossips at Arches National Park (Arches)



Boys holding Balance Rock at Arches



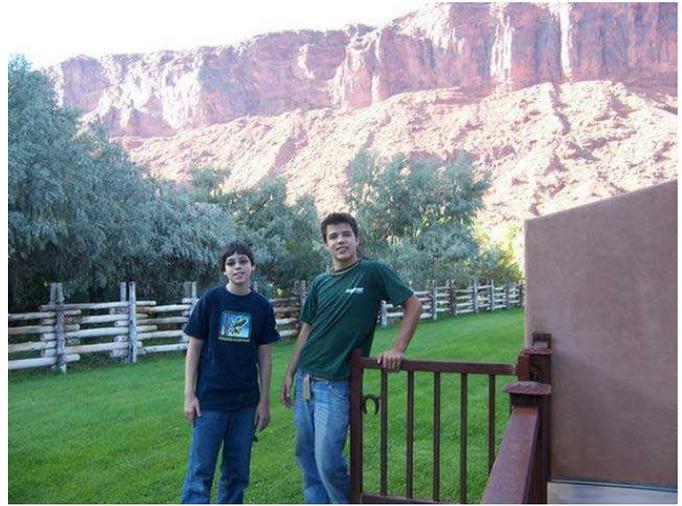
Travelers at Balance Rock (Arches)



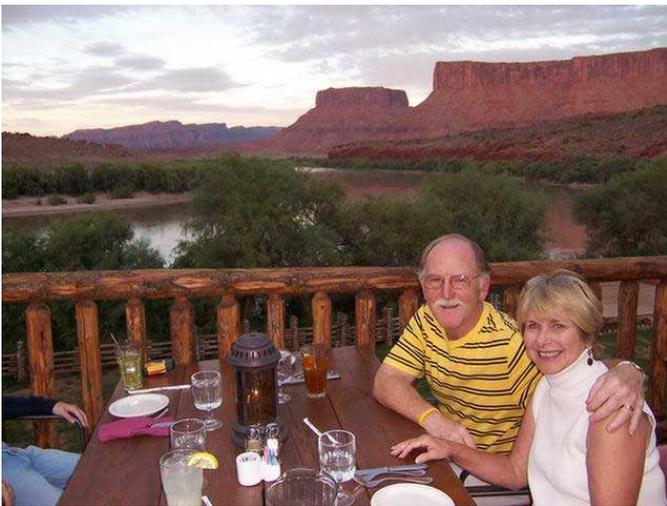
Austin and Connor at North Window Arch



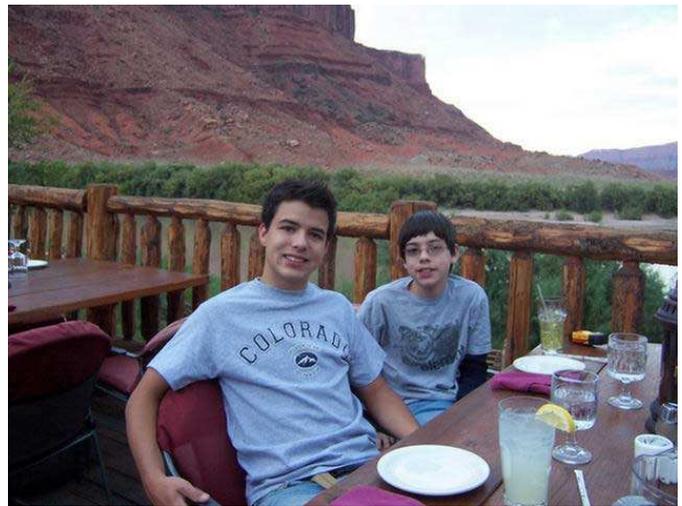
Our room at Red Cliffs Lodge



Austin and Connor



Glenn and Ruth overlooking the Colorado River



Connor and Austin

Day 2. Moab, UT to Cortez, CO. We left the Red Cliffs Lodge and went into Moab for breakfast and shopping. Connor and Austin have shopped with Ruth enough to become very good shoppers, and so, they all shopped while

Grandpa sat on a bench and watched tourists. They bought necklaces and rings and then we headed for Canyonland National Park, about sixty miles away. Canyonland has a very unique feature.

The limestone on the top of most of the cliffs has been eroded by millions of years of wind, rain and sand; it appears to be drifts of snow on top of the cliffs. When the light strikes the “snow drifts” just right, you feel like you are in a valley during the midst of a cold winter’s day. The boys used up some energy climbing rocks before we headed for Mesa Verde. The drive to Mesa Verde was pleasant. We had feared we might be traveling during some very hot weather, but our entire trip was completed in mild (70-80 degree weather) and under always-sunny skies.

We arrived at Mesa Verde in the mid-afternoon, drove to the top in about thirty minutes and purchased our tickets to the various cliff dwelling sites. Mesa Verde is a huge mesa, erupting from the ground to a height of several thousand feet. To get to the top, one has to take the winding roads with harsh falloffs and scary turns.

We elected to visit Balcony House and Cliff Palace, two of the best sites. We arrived at Balcony House just as the tour was leaving. To see this particular dwelling, one has to walk along a three to four foot wide path about eight hundred feet above the valley floor. This is not Ruth’s “cup of tea,” but she stayed near the wall and plugged along with the group. I had warned her that this tour involved a large ladder ascent and she was preparing herself. When we rounded the corner of one turn, there it was...a thirty-two foot high ladder resting

on a concrete pad.... just thirty-two feet up, but eight hundred feet down! After a short lecture, Ruth said she could do it and we followed the boys up the ladder.

The ladder was doublewide with rungs nearly three inches in diameter (not a good size for small hands). I climbed beside Ruth and she said she was doing fine. We were going pretty slowly and the man behind me was bumping into me...I sped up a bit and got to the top before Ruth. She got off the ladder and her hands were shaking. She said that near the top her left leg didn't want to work any longer and she had to take all of her steps up with her right leg. I don't think I have ever been prouder of Ruth...she hated what she was doing, but wanted to be a part of this special activity with the boys. The cliff dwellings were great! The Balcony House was home to about forty family members around 800 AD. These former hunters and gatherers farmed the land above and lived in these cliff houses nearly one hundred feet below for security reasons.

It is believed that once they had ruined the land due to poor farming methods and a period of drought, they moved from this area without a trace...probably dispersing to various other locations and resuming their hunting and gather ways. The tour was interesting, but Ruth mostly remembers that it concluded with two more ladder climbs of twenty and ten feet, before climbing on our hands and knees out of the entrance tunnel! The boys couldn't stop laughing about guide always calling Mesa Verde, Mesa Verd, and never stopped calling this beautiful site by this new name! I think they will always call this location, Mesa Verd!

We went to the Holiday Inn Express, ate dinner at a nearby restaurant, and returned to our room to play euchre. Ruth and I won 10-9 after trailing 8-1! That will show those young whipper-snappers a thing of two!

Quote of the Day was by Ruth: "Mesas look like mountains with crew cuts!"



Climbing Grandsons



Austin, Ruth and Connor at Canyonland



Canyonland



Cliff Palace



The Ladder

Cortez, CO to Taos, NM Today was a long drive to Taos, but very beautiful one in this high desert. For lunch, watching my weight, I ordered mixed vegetables and coffee. When the orders arrived, my dish contained approximately two teaspoons of vegetables. Ruth and the boys started laughing and couldn't stop! The carrots looked like diced baby-cut carrots, there were three peas and two pieces of squash no larger than buttons. I just looked at the dish and everyone kept laughing. The waitress wanted to know why we were laughing and I said, "Because the vegetable serving is so small." She said, "That is a full serving." And my tablemates laughed even harder! When they stopped laughing, I ate my

veggies and said, “The serving may have been small, but it was very filling.” And, That started them laughing even harder! Ruth offered me crackers...and that made everyone laugh. We had a really memorable lunch!

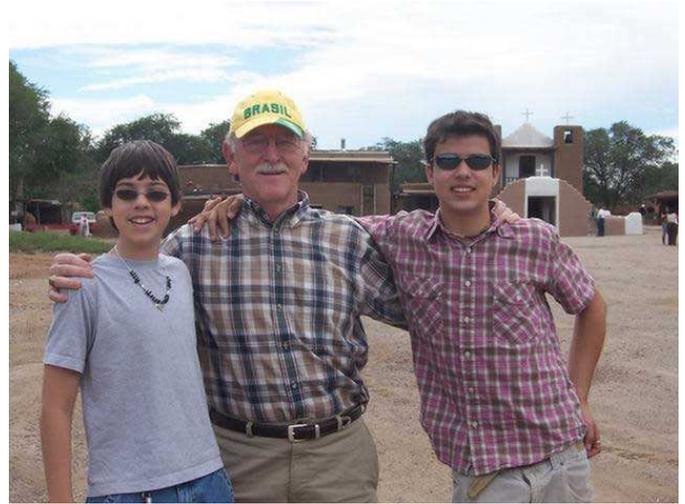
We arrived in Taos mid-afternoon and went directly to the Taos Pueblo. This pueblo is part of the Blue Lake Wilderness Area, a 100, 000 acre reservation. A number of Indian families live in the pueblo and preserve their original tribal way of life. There is no running water or electricity, and most make their living by selling crafts and art. After our tour, we swam at our Comfort Inn and ate dinner at Orlando’s Mexican Restaurant.

In an interesting side note, I have been to Taos three times: Once with Ruth to visit Ben and Carlyn Bassham; once with Tom Blosser to visit and hike with Ben; and this time with our grandsons and Ruth. Each time I had dinner the first night at Orlando’s. I am getting tired of this place. We concluded this day with a game of euchre...Austin and I losing 10-6, after a very hard fought game (Note: I had to drive all day!)

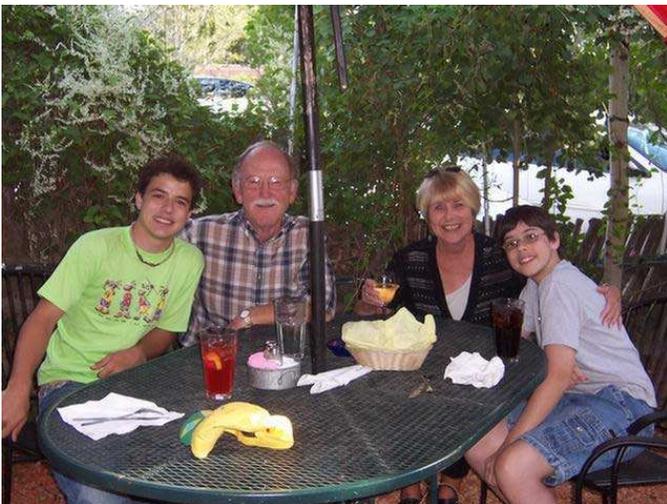
Quote of the Day was by Glenn: “The serving was small, but it was very filling.”



Connor, Austin and Ruth
at Taos Pueblo



Austin, Glenn and Connor
at San Geronimo Church



Tired Travelers at Orlando's

Day 4 Taos and Santa Fe. Ruth and the boys shopped all morning in Taos and managed to visit almost every store in this quaint and beautiful city. I sat on a bench and watch tourists, artists and hippies (some of these categories overlap). To cool off the credit card, we headed for Santa Fe.

Upon arrival, our first visit was to the Santa Fe National Cemetery. I wanted Connor and Austin to see a statue which I have thought about many times since I first saw it a number of years ago. Around 1800, a private in the US Army deserted his Santa Fe post and did not return for nearly five weeks.

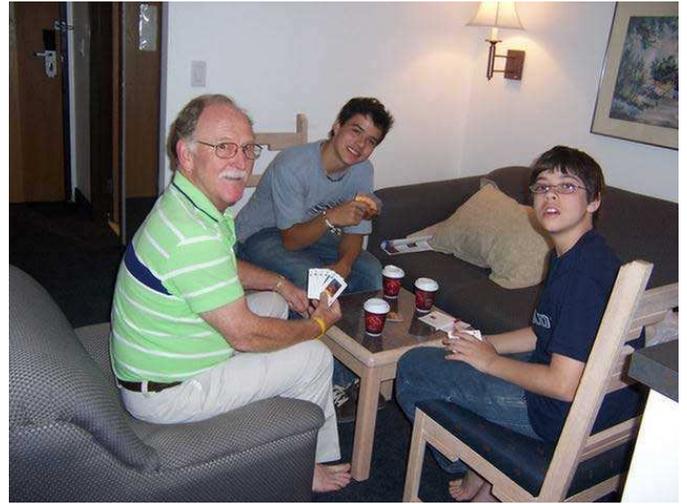
After he had served in the brig for his offense for several months, he was returned to duty, only to be found dead by his own hand a few weeks later. A note was found near his body suggesting that some of his possessions could be found in a canyon high up in the mountains. A team of soldiers was dispatched to retrieve his belongings, only to find a statue that he had carved of himself, in full military dress, with the dates of his birth and death, inscribed on the statue. Statues are normally not permitted in National Cemeteries, but an exception was made in this case (see photo).

The remainder of the day they shopped at the Governor's Square. Ruth found the perfect dress for the Robinson Gala we are Co-chairing, and the boys bought more rings and necklaces. We retired to the Holiday Inn Express for swimming and then dinner at Applebee's. The evening concluded with two euchre games. Austin and I lost 2-10, and won 10-2.

Quote of the day was by Connor: "Grandpa is the best card player I have ever known!" Or I think this is what he said!! Ruth said she didn't hear him say that!



Sculpture of Soldier



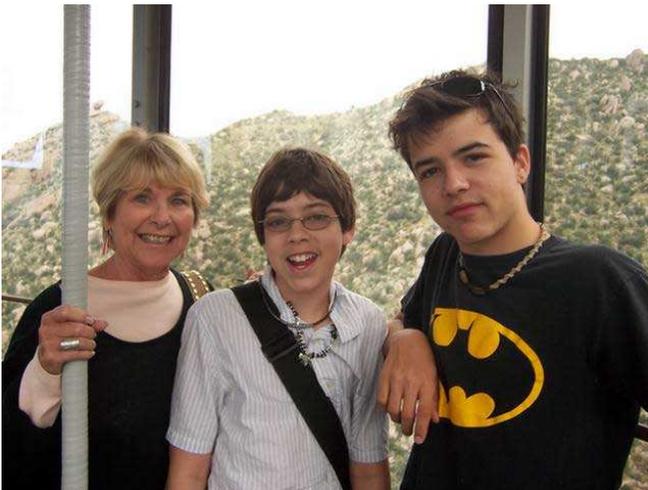
Card game...Note Glenn's hand

Day 5. Santa Fe to Albuquerque to Denver to Akron. We drove to Albuquerque, a short seventy-mile drive through ever-changing terrain. Sometimes you are in the high desert, sometimes in rolling hills and valleys, sometimes in mountains and sometimes in what appears to be volcanic remains. I don't ever think I have been in terrain that changes so quickly.

A beautiful drive! Our goal was to get to Albuquerque (Isn't it fun to type that word?) in time to take the Sandia Peak Tram to this area's highest elevation and view the beautiful Rio Grande Valley. For you non-tram riders, the ride is thrilling and the view breathtaking (The many colors of the vegetation and rocks give the peak a red-ish glow, thus the Sandia, or watermelon, name.) After the ride, we had time to go to Old Town, for, you guessed it, shopping and lunch at the Rolling Dough Bakery.

The shopping was good...more rings, earrings and necklaces, and more bench time for the grandpa (who this time was armed with a USA TODAY.)

We returned our car...and only had to pay \$450 American (Ouch!) for the five days! We flew to Denver, everyone but I shopped during our layover, and then home to Akron, and eventually, Twin Lakes. We took the boys home, their Dad had waited up to see them, and we got into bed at 1:30am. We set the alarm because both Ruth and I had long ago scheduled eye appointments at 8:30 the next morning.



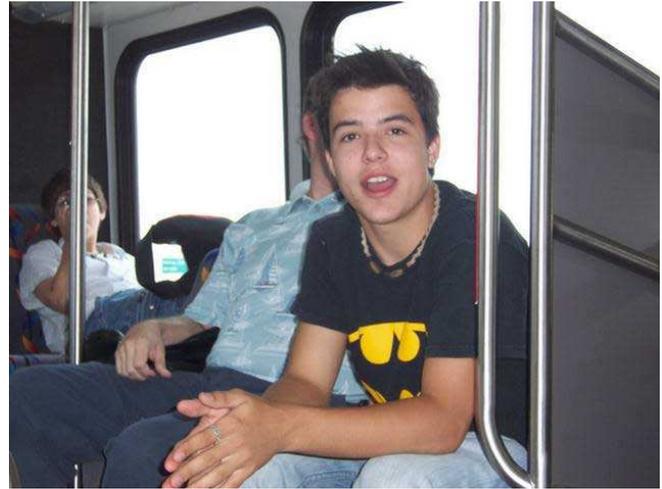
Ruth, Austin and Connor on the Tram



Another Tram



Austin on airport bus



Connor begging to go home!

Conclusion: Ruth has been talking about taking a trip like this with Connor and Austin ever since we took Dan and Andrew on a “western experience” ten years ago. Ten years! Where did all that time go? Dan is now in his second tour in Iraq and Andrew is working after two years at BGSU, and hoping to return to college sometime soon. We are older, I am turning seventy-one in several weeks and Ruth remains locked in at fifty-six.

We are thankful that we have our health and have been able to spend this time with our two youngest grandsons. They were a delight with whom to travel, opening car door for their Grandma, being polite to waitresses and salespersons and Connor even said he did not want the spending money we offered him because he had worked this summer and had his own money. He also offered to give the tip to the waitress the first night...he is either the best grandson anyone can ever have or he is headed for a career in politics! Lots of

grandparents do not get the chance to spend time with their grandchildren like we have.

We are blessed...and only hope that some of our old-fashioned values rub off on them and will serve them well as they get older and have to tackle some of the more difficult aspects of our world. Ruth and I felt blessed that we got to take this trip with Connor and Austin. We hope they always remember this trip as fondly as we always will. We love our grandsons and want the best for them, but know that most of that is up to them.

The End

August 27, 2006