

Mad Dash Across the Continent

By Sandra Dodson – April 2021

Introduction

After ten months of looking for an aeronautical engineering job, Bill and I were rather listless, waiting on the Lord in Camas, Washington. We were staying with Bill's sister and brother-in-law, Denise and Tom Syfrett. Bill's parents, Bob and Becky Dodson, also live there. In March we got a "bite" from Oklahoma and then another from Florida! Interview followed interview. (Are you talking to the OK company? Or the FL company?) I had already committed to being with my mom in Anderson South Carolina for the last week in March, which complicated logistics as it became apparent that both of these jobs were serious about hiring Bill, and the FL company wanted him there yesterday! As I boarded my plane to South Carolina on March 26, Bill still hadn't decided which company to go with. Questions flew through my mind: Would Bill have to fly to FL and leave me to drive all that way with our stuff, the glider, and our dog KC? Maybe he could start driving east and I could meet up with him on Friday? Maybe ...

The OK company is larger, more stable, and working on a government contract. It also has a better moving package and the start date is in June, giving us plenty of time to move and set up. The FL company is very personable and small and wants Bill there by April 5. We went back and forth on the phone discussing pros and cons and praying. During the early part of that week I was in Anderson, Bill seemed to be leaning towards the OK company and I relaxed some. But the FL company kept calling Bill and answering his questions, and finally Bill decided a smaller, personable company would be better; and might even be fun.

T minus 4

March 31—Bill decides to take the job at Space Perspective at the NASA base on Cape Canaveral, east of Orlando, FL. It is an hour from Jô and Marisa's home in Windermere, on the West side of Orlando. Space Perspective want Bill to help them build a gondola that will fit 9 people and has floor to ceiling windows. Hydrogen balloons, we're talking BIG ones, will lift this gondola to NEAR space height, about 100,000 ft, so their passengers can see the curvature of the Earth, and then come back. I buy Bill a ticket to fly to Charlotte NC, pick up our second car (which is with sister Joy) and drive to FL.

T minus 3

April 1—I text our daughter Liz to find out if she would drive across country with me. Liz gladly accepts. Whew! That evening, Bill finds out that due to COVID restrictions, he can't start April 5 if he flies, since he would need to quarantine for a week. So we decide to drive together to get him to the job by April 12. I am MUCH relieved and cancel Bill's ticket. Liz still wants to come. I buy Liz a ticket from Bakersfield, CA to Camas, WA.

T minus 2

April 2—I fly back to Camas, WA. Sylvia and I figure out a way for our second car to be in Anderson, so that we can pick it up en route to Florida. My flight is delayed, so gets in at night. Clean sheets- ahhhhhhh-care of Bill and his mom.

T minus 1

April 3—Bill and Tom get the glider strapped to the car while Denise and I pack boxes, pack the car, mail boxes so Liz and another suitcase will fit, and make plans to leave Sunday morning after picking up Liz

from PDX at 10:15. We take time out to take the grands for their second COVID vaccine; they treat us all to a good-bye lunch at the Olive Garden. Miraculously everything gets done!

DELAY!!

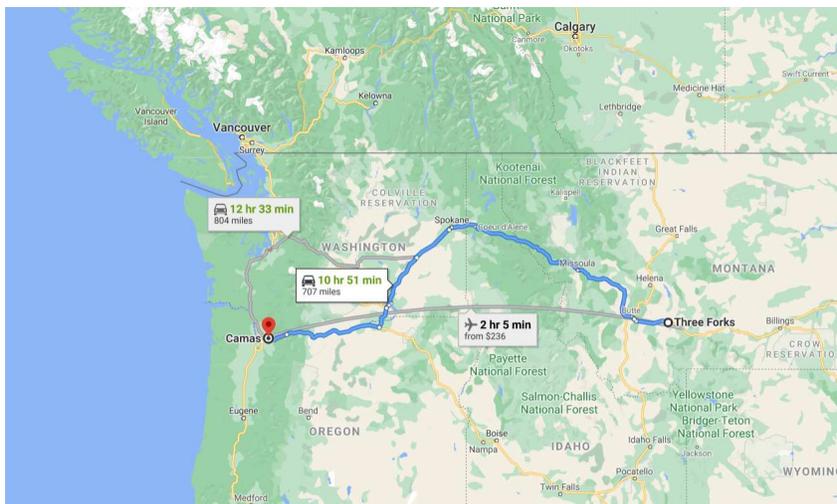
April 4—Liz’s plane is delayed, and again, and again. We end up picking her up at 9pm and going back to the Syfretts to sleep.

This is the story of our mad dash across the continent.

Day 1 — April 5

Camas WA to Three Forks MT 1150 km

6:00 Pacific - 20:30 Mountain



We left in the dark with toasted bagels and coffee in hand. Oh, and fresh baked croissants so we didn’t leave any temptations behind for the Syfretts who are all on a keto diet. I drove with Liz beside me. While we happily caught up with our lives, Bill and KC finished their nights’ sleep in back. KC perched on four file boxes and our fold out table, and Bill stretched out on the back seat. But they had to get in before Liz and I piled the last 2 suitcases and backpacks in around them. We’ve now got it down to pulling out just two things to let person/dog in and out the back.

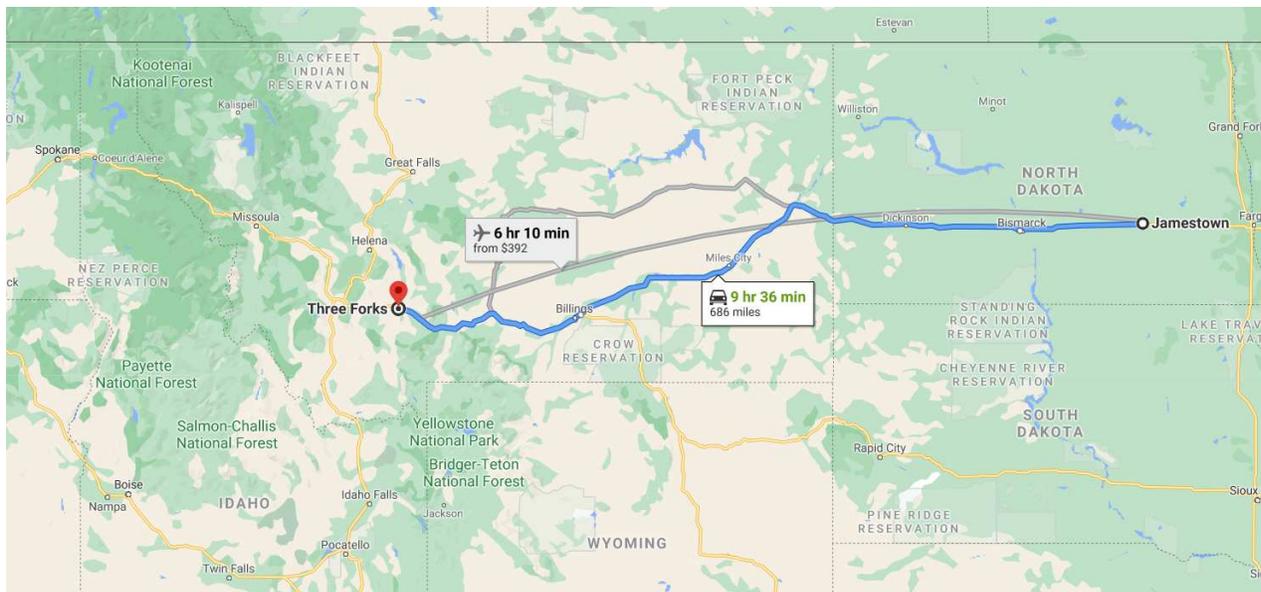
Sunny weather, following the Columbia river on I-84 (the Oregon side), we soon were in Spokane, WA where we stopped for lunch. KC stays in the car and patiently waits for us. Liz drove us through Idaho and beyond. When I took the wheel again I started noticing “Clark Fork” a river we kept crossing and re-crossing on I-90. Bill and I, sitting up front, speculated the explorer Clark used plastic forks and kept burying them along the trip where the bridges were built. I saw lots of fields, a few houses, but NO people. Then Bill drove a couple hours, and I started noticing signs for “Historic Sakajewea Hotel” in

Three Forks offering “over 100 years of practice in Western hospitality and attentive service.” It sounded so interesting with rooms like “Shoshone”, “John Colter”, and the “Lewis & Clark” room which holds up to 4 adults and a dog. I tried to call several times, but couldn’t get through. So I finally called the other hotel in Three Forks: The Broken Spur Motel, and Rick, the owner answered and was so friendly I decided to go there. When we got there the room for pets was upstairs and rather run down. But we got to talking and he told me he was remodeling the rooms as he could, but had to stop the last 3 months due to prostate cancer. It was clean, and Bill and I decided to stay. When I went to sign in, Rick gave me the key to a renovated “no pets” room on the ground floor! When I looked at him in surprise, he said, “I’m the owner, so I can make adjustments if I want to.” HA! I asked him about the Sakajewea Hotel and he said they’re closed until summer. Well! And not a word on the website about THAT! We raced to Main Street just a few blocks away to get something to eat before closing. It was a bar with a pool table and dart boards full of loud music and, what do you know, people! playing games and drinking but very friendly service and a good griller. Bill and Liz shared chicken wings and Liz and I shared a hamburger. They ended up taking some of it to go since I was falling asleep in my plate.

Day 2 – April 6

Three Forks MT to Jamestown ND 1100 km

8:30 Mountain - 20:30 Central



Best backtrack ever! It was 6 min WEST on I-90 so I didn’t want to go there for breakfast but Bill insisted and I was glad. Wheat Montana, a bakery right outside the back of their wheat processing plant. Now that’s fresh! The Broken Spur Motel had a history page in their Information book in the room with selected entries of Lewis & Clark:

“July 25, 1805—Clark arrives at the headwaters noticing the three rivers to be of nearly the same size chooses the Jefferson ‘Appears to have the most water.’ Clark leaves note for Lewis and sets out up the Jefferson approximately 26 miles in search of signs of Indians.

28th—Lewis and Clark name the rivers, Jefferson, in honor of Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, that river being the most westerly and therefore the one they would ascend. Madison, in honor of James Madison, Secretary of State. Gallatin, in honor of Albert Gallatin, Secretary of Treasury.

Lewis notes: ...this affords one of the best winter pastures for horses or cows...”

And truly, the surrounding Rocky Mountains protect Three Forks, leaving the eastern side mild in the winter and giving mountain breezes in the summer. As I drove East from there I-90 crossed the Jefferson, the Madison, and then the Gallatin covering 26 miles in a few minutes only. Especially since the Speed Limit in Montana is mostly 80 MPH. Eat your hearts out Hawaii.

We had to cross more of the Rockies and started getting rain for the first time which turned into snow in the Buteman Pass when outside temperatures dipped below freezing for an hour. But the roads were clear and salted. And man! I saw a snow plow zipping by at least 70MPH in the opposite direction throwing a huge spray of snow onto the barrier. No sissy plows here! Both the mountains and valleys had plentiful cows, black cows. They showed up particularly well against the snow. Liz kept hoping to see buffalo, but we never did. In the middle of all that snow, I did see a truck being driven across a field with bales of hay in the back, and a herd of cows following after it longingly. That’s one way to get a herd into a corral. We stopped shortly afterwards in Billings (Montana does like cities starting with a B) for coffee, change of driver, and to walk KC who is a real trooper. I bought a US map for Liz to color in the states she has been to (adding one or more each day!) and the attendant didn’t even charge for the coffees. SMILE. It tasted so much better free you know. And they sure had a variety. It took me 2 minutes to find the REGULAR black coffee among all their brews and specialty machines.



By Miles City Liz was hungry and we found Mexico Lindo, touted as the “best Mexican food this far from the border.” Loved the decor, and found crayons for our map at the dollar store next door, but the cook did not believe in seasonings and we felt the food lacked flavor, especially the beans. PPlease! I wanted to drive up to ND but I was tired and Liz promised to stop at the border so I could take a picture with the Welcome sign. When I got out of the car, a little bird perched on the sign and sang me a welcome so we could celebrate together. GRIN. About halfway to Bismarck on I-94 Liz was surprised to see an “International

date line” sign posted. Sure is helpful. Supper was leftovers in the car. I found another hotel deciding to go until about 8PM, but the receptionist said there was no need to make a reservation, they had lots of rooms available. Bill took the last 2 hours.

Crossed “Knife River.” Bill: Maybe this is where Clark left his knives

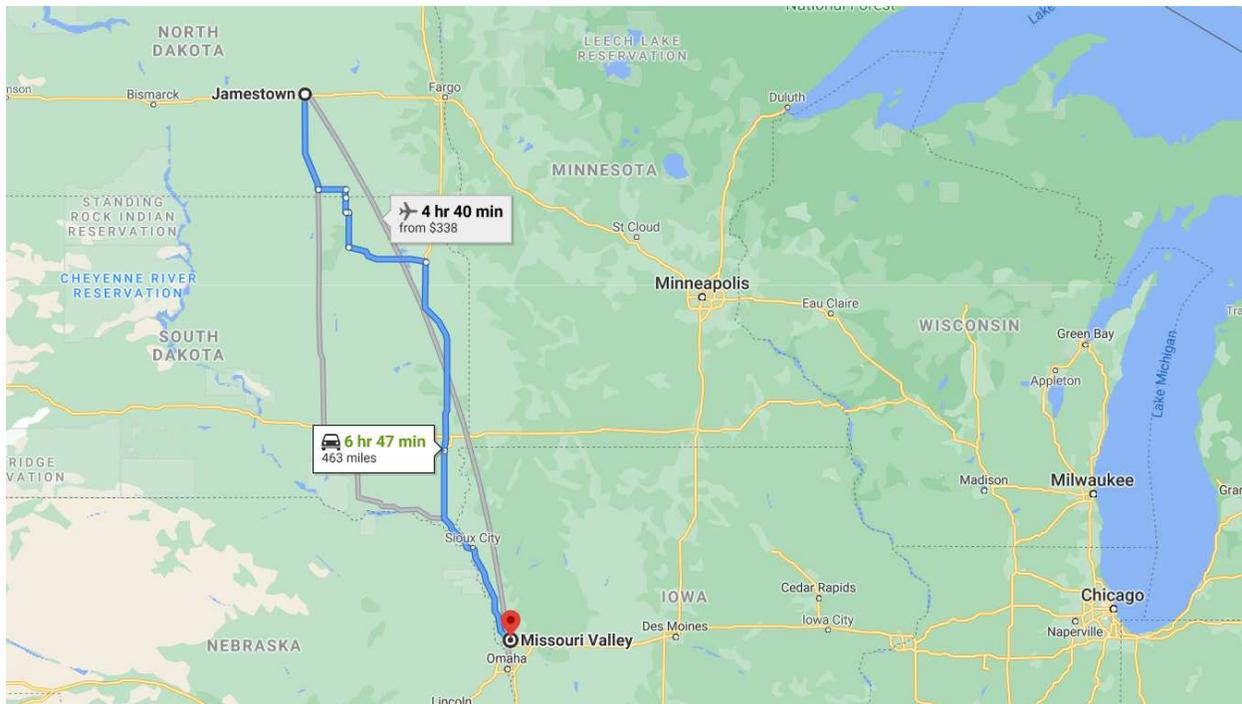
Coming into Jamestown as the sun set we drove by the “Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center.” Bill: You think maybe they left their spoons here?

We pulled into MyPlace hotel at 20:30. It is an extended stay place with extra room and a full kitchen. And under \$100. Cool. Very comfortable. Bill set up his computer for some work stuff. Liz and I just went to bed, but she said it took her a long time to fall asleep.

Day 3 – April 7

Jamestown ND to Missouri Valley IA 780 km

10:00 Central - 19:00 Central (!!lastimável mas inevitável)



Leaving things behind. I got Bill and Liz up at 6:48 but what with walking KC, who did NOT want to get in the elevator to go downstairs!, Bill sending work emails, finding and eating breakfast (GREAT coffee and bagels), and fixing the door on the van that mysteriously stopped opening/closing automatically yesterday (heh heh I had inadvertently put the child lock on heh heh), we pulled out of town at 10:00 back onto I-94 towards Fargo. But well fed and cheerful.



All these miles of Montana (1000km across!!) and North Dakota have been miles and miles of yellow grass and brown dirt. I assume they are between crops. Some black patches may be signs of being

plowed recently getting ready for planting. No color, no leaves on trees and no flowers poking out of the ground. There are mountains around, of course, some majestic, some rolling. In ND there were lots of sediment layers of different colors in the hills. Beautiful. I see lots of silos and large covered areas with bales of hay. Like I said, no people working the fields, which is different from California fruit and almond tree fields where the workers always seem to be out doing something or other. The farm houses are neat and tidy, no broken-down equipment around the yard, large closed down garages—I suppose because of the cold and snow.

An hour later, we stopped for bathroom and to find a ND mug before leaving the state and I left my glasses in the bathroom. Happily, I remembered to go back before we pulled out of the station and someone had already handed them to the cashier. I hope we don't leave anything else behind today!

11:40 in Fargo, ND, turned SOUTH onto I-29! A few minutes down the road, I got a phone call from MyPlace Hotel saying we had left a pillow—pause—could they donate it to the pet shelter in town? Bill has carried his beloved pillow with practically no stuffing from California to Virginia, to Texas, to Washington and as far as Jamestown, ND but finally had to say good-bye to it. Life lesson: it is not a good idea to take a personal pillow with a white pillowcase into a hotel room.



An hour later, KC and Liz had to pee. Rest stop in the pouring rain. We crossed our old highway I-90 (which we had left to go see ND! Love it!) and kept going. Another 2 hours and we needed food. Liz got Taco Bell and then took her parents to Panda Express. On the way she gave half her lunch and a bottle of water to a homeless man begging at a stoplight. I was so proud of her. Dining room closed, so we all ate our box lunches in the car.

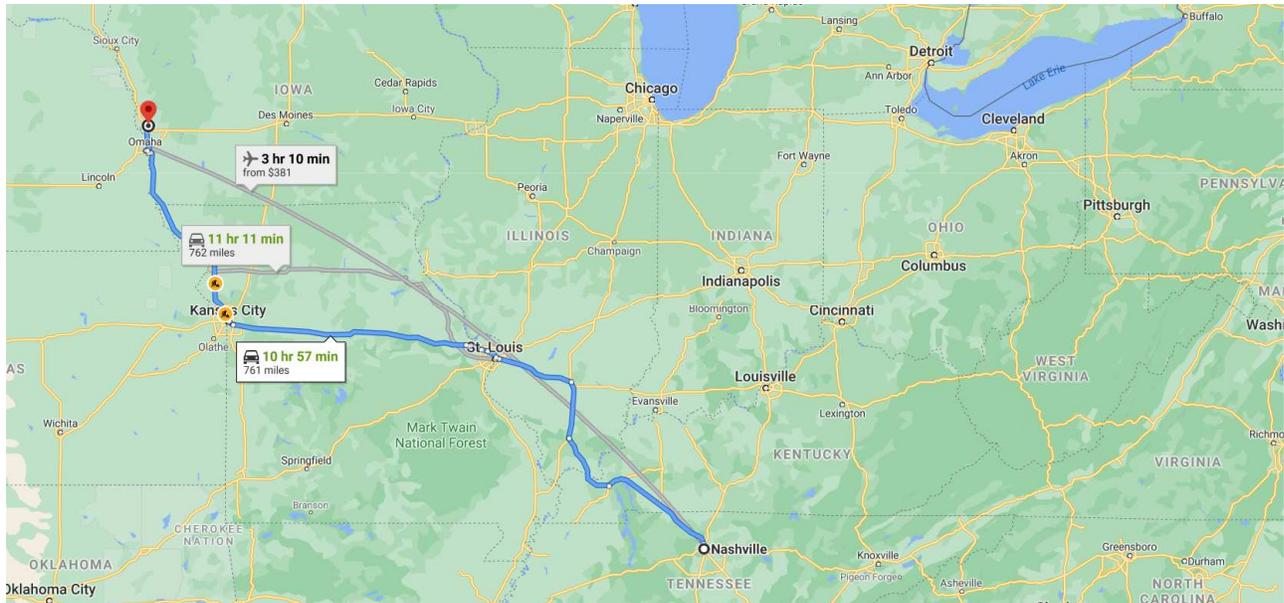
Another hour and we stopped for gas! Today we just can't seem to get gas, bathroom and food stops coordinated!!

While Liz and I helped Rodney, an older man we met in line, who fells trees for a living but needed help setting up a Paypal account on his phone (he just let us see all his passwords and bank info, "you won't remember it" he said), Bill got a call from work to send in his NASA application for an ID before sundown today. So we pulled into the DeSoto Inn, Missouri Valley, IA at 7pm and hopefully will start out early tomorrow. The bathtub is disgusting so no showers, and Liz has serious reservations about dirt under her bed, but it is raining hard, and we are all dry and can order pizza in. I say it's a win to stay put.

Day 4 – April 8

Missouri Valley IA to Nashville TN 1270 km

6:26 Central - 20:00 Central



Or was it the “Misery Valley?” Not the best night: loud music and strong smells (like incense and weed) from next door until 2am. Why the pretty Indian woman put 2 out of the 3 guests in the whole place wall to wall I’m not sure—maybe those were the only two pet friendly rooms. Earlier in the evening, while Bill worked, Liz and I did enjoy watching Tower Heist on TV (Ben Stiller, I think, and Eddy Murphy and Alan Alda playing the snob who tries to get away with millions of dollars of investors’ money. And, “Madam Secretary” herself playing the FBI agent. It took me the whole night to place where I had seen her.) I got the others up before 6am and took KC for a walk in the cold and rain. Thank you!! Denise for the gloves you gave me. We all decided to get on the road quickly so went next door to a gas station and each chose 4 items for “breakfast.” Bill’s was the strangest: cheese curds, a slice of pork, mango carrot juice and a coffee. He said it was quite filling and indeed he didn’t eat until 14:15 when we stopped for lunch.

6:26 we were heading South on I-29. Liz promptly fell asleep again with KC in the back and didn’t even budge when Bill and I changed drivers because I couldn’t keep my eyes open. The countryside had turned green overnight and we saw flowering trees especially lilac ones. They were all over Missouri, Iowa, Illinois and now Kentucky. We skirted Omaha, and Bill mentioned there was a music museum there with famous mandolins on display, but we couldn’t stop and wait for it to open today. Fica pra próxima. In Kansas City, MO we turned East again on I-70.



14:00 in St. Louis, MO, where my mom was born, we passed the Arch going from I-70 East to I-64 East. I REALLY wanted to go up in it this time, but we couldn't stop. Sigh. Fica pra próxima. Just after St Louis, in Fairview Heights, IL we lucked onto good food at a restaurant called "Cheddars." It was one of the few restaurants with indoor seating and served fresh croissants while we waited for our food. Liz got hamburger and fries, Bill and I split Baby Back Ribs and fries. We have left overs to eat at the hotel tonight. KC gets the bones.

15:00 after lunch, Bill took up the driving and I got the back seat for a proper nap. Zzzzzz. Woke up with sunshine in Illinois on I-24 for a gas stop at 17:15 and IT WAS WARM when we got out of the car! So so welcome. And gas masks, I mean face masks, were not required.

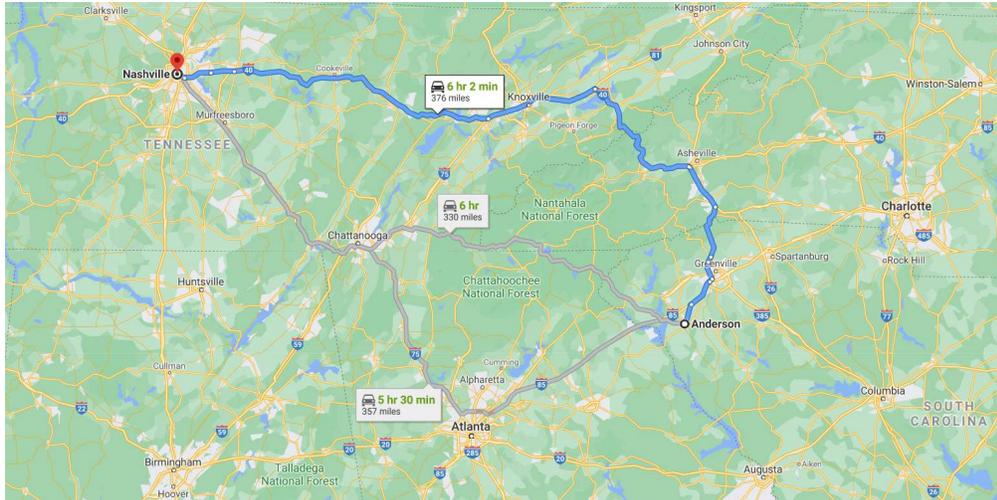
17:30 WE'RE IN KENTUCKY!!!

18:57 WE'RE IN TENNESSEE!!! And it's just getting greener and flowery-er. We are running

SE currently on I-24. The sun is shining and casting golden shadows on the trees and clouds as it gets lower in the sky. Bill finally pulled over and gave up the driver's seat to Liz. He claimed the back to commune with his recharged cell phone. His work is asking for what kind of computer he wants to be able to work!! Well, that's like asking me what kind of trip would I like...or Donald what kind of training he would like to experience with a Seal Team....or Norm what kind of coffee bar he would like set up for his group to gather at!!!! A piggy in a mud puddle comes to mind.

20:00 After Missouri Valley, I was motivated to get a more sure thing for the night so I looked for a MyPlace which we had enjoyed so much, and found one just outside of Nashville. It was just as nice. We pulled into the hotel in Lebanon, TN just outside of Nashville which we flashed past with the night lights blinking and country music playing on the radio. A nice hot shower and paperwork with Bill until 1am. They want addresses for HOW many years? (For his ID badge on the NASA base where he will work.) We actually found everything we needed in old docs on our computers. Whew. Liz, of course, was trying to sleep with the lights on. These MyPlace rooms only have a lamp between the beds. So finally I unplugged the lamp by the bed and set it on the table we were working at and turned off the overhead lights. AND, I left it that way as a hint they might want to add a lamp to their rooms. Heh heh. Tomorrow to Anderson, SC.

Day 5 – April 9
Nashville TN to Anderson SC 550 km
9:40 Central - 17:05 Eastern



The time zone might not show it but we are really in the Eastern US now: Trees and more trees all blooming and blossoming. Bright sunshine and bright colors.

9:40 Pulled out of the Cracker Barrel where we found a great breakfast. Susan, they do egg-in-a-basket! Did you teach them? :) Very nicely grilled. I also found the cutest 100-piece puzzle of the state of Tennessee. A. Doris and I love 100-piece puzzles to do on sleepless nights or between bigger activities, so I'm always on the lookout for them. My favorite is still a Hallmark round puzzle of a little people choir. The pieces are getting quite worn with my making and remaking of it. I think my final count at the Syfrett's was 1 100-pc Dowdle puzzle (The Black Hills), 22 500-pc Dowdle puzzles and 2 1000-pc Dowdle puzzles. Good thing Bill got the job because she only had 2 more 1000-piece puzzles left in her closet, (well, actually she had one more 500-pc puzzle about cars which did not interest me. The other puzzles were mostly of places) and she gifted me with one of them! So I carry their hearts, and their puzzle, with me. My favorite, I think, was "The animals of Eden." But I enjoyed "Venice" and "Jerusalem" and "Maui" and "Rio de Janeiro." The most unique were two puzzles "Over the River" and "Through the Woods" that fit perfectly side by side as one big picture.

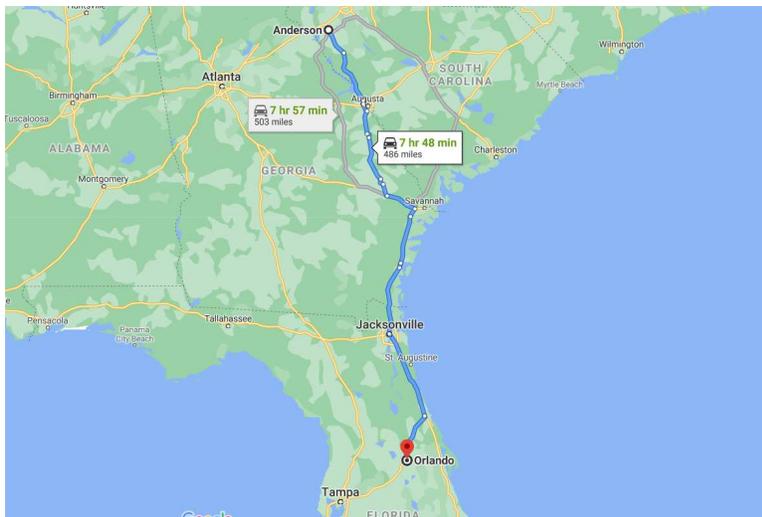
12:00, wait no, now it's 13:00, coming into Knoxville, TN and on Eastern time, which is just flying by. Saw the sign for Eli's favorite store: The World's Largest Knife Store, thought of him and waved as it went by. Liz says her favorite trip ever was coming to Knoxville TN with Eli and some high school friends. She thinks maybe she would like to live here.

We pulled into Sylvia and Woody's at 17:05 to the smells of spaghetti sauce and fresh picked lettuce. But wait! We had errands to run first. On the way we had texted Sylvia if possible to find an oil change place for our car and a massage place for Bill, who was feeling severely out of kink. Sylvia told us later that her first reaction was, "They must be out of their ever-lovin-minds! They are only here for 12 hours!" Bless her. She still came through, and Bill trotted off happily for a massage and Sylvia and I took



the van to the Express Lube nearby where everyone got in on the puzzle of how to open the hood with a hang glider attached to it. We even got the windshield wipers changed that for YEARS had been making a horrendous noise when used. It rained HARD the last two days and the silence is golden. Ahhhhhhhh. Thank you, Sylvia. 7pm we all sat down outside in the perfect weather for a DELICIOUS spaghetti (Woody) and salad (Sylvia) dinner. Liz washed clothes and the rest of us went to bed.

Day 6 – April 10
Anderson SC to Orlando FL 800 km
8:17 Eastern - 20:00 Eastern



THE HARDEST DAY! But it started out very nicely. Woody, Sylvia, Bill, Liz and I all met at EggsUp Grill for breakfast with Mom. (Ruth politely declined: 7AM!! I don't think so.) Mom got to see Paul, her favorite waiter, and talked to everybody in the room. She loves to get out.

8:17 the three of us hit the road in two cars on the last leg. We were headed to Jô and Marisa Silva's home in Windermere, FL. Liz drove the Honda Accord and I drove the Honda Odyssey. We were able to clear out the back a little and give KC more room. I wanted to go by the back country through Augusta, GA before joining up with I-95 but got turned around in Greenwood and Statesboro and the GPS felt

confused too because the arrow would drift into a field (outstanding with cows) and blink on and off mournfully. At Panda Express a couple days before Bill had gotten a fortune cookie that read, “You are heading in the right direction”! And some say God doesn’t write actual notes to people?? ;) So we wandered a bit, like the Israelites in the Sinai. Liz was really good at following us, of course it helps when the car you are following has a hang glider on top! Bill was not amused, took over the driving and made a bee-line to 95. While Bill drove and cursed “fruit-based electronics” under his breath, I started texting and calling the 12 dog-sitters (Rover app) in the area of Jô and Marisa where we could leave KC. (Bill insisted he could sleep in the car with him and Liz and I could sleep in the Silva’s house—I thought he was kidding.) One was too far, one was unavailable, one could only take him if we had a crate....and so it went discouraging word after discouraging word.

14:04 stopped in Georgia at Altman’s Restaurant on Highway 57 (?How did 57 get into it? I hear you cry...Bill was driving...let it go.) where you can get anything fried, even ice cream, which we didn’t order, but their fried okra was EXcellent. The place looked like one of those places in Brazil we used to stop at between Dourados and Campinas—without the flies. Well-worn tables and chairs on a nondescript floor and pages of magazines tacked to the wall for decoration. I felt right at home.



4 hours to the Silvas—After lunch I started calling pet-friendly hotels for the 4 of us near the Silvas for Saturday night. 3 hours to the Silvas—called hotels near Bill’s work...all either booked, or way expensive. I found out Bill’s work was AN HOUR away from Silvas! 2 hours to the Silvas—that campsite Airbnb started sounding pretty good; kept checking for responses from the Airbnbs we had contacted, no joy, either no answer or the answer was “no.” Stopped for gas at the biggest gas station I have EVER seen. Felt like Disney World for cars. Welcome to Florida. 1 hour to Silvas—rain and high

winds hit, so now we were ducking branches too, but those silent windshield wipers still were music to my ears. I talked with Marisa and she started getting in touch with friends who might keep KC.

20:05 two cars, three tired people (Liz having driven the WHOLE way) and one confused dog arrived at the Silvas. We left KC in the car and went in to a tour of their new house and a very nice supper. Jô was out working. We still had no place for KC, and I was too tired to try any more options so Bill actually slept in the car with KC! Marisa, of course, was appalled. I just shook my head and went to bed. Tomorrow is another day. Soooooo tired.

Epilogue

Sunday, April 11, 2021

I wanted to go to church with the Silvas, I really did, but they left at 8:40am and I just couldn’t wake up. So I texted Marisa from bed to tell her before falling asleep again. Next I knew, Bill was texting me from the car with a “Good morning!” Family togetherness in the 21st century. :) When I asked him how his

night went, he said, "Not great." But left it at that. Marisa had left us a breakfast table with 12 or 13 options! Quite the hostess! Bill wrote his job contact that we were having trouble finding a hotel room and within the hour he wrote back with a reservation in our name and a confirmation number! It was a bit pricier than we had been looking at, but we had no energy to quibble anymore. We met Silvas for lunch at Agave Azul Mexican restaurant. Bill and I shared a great "Churrasco" plate with rice, beans, fried mandioca, pickled onion and steak. Jô and Bill fought over the check—Bill won once he assured Jô this was part of our "travel expenses" for getting to his new job. We decided to pack up (in the POURING rain) and head on over to Cape Canaveral side.

We pulled into Homewood Suites on "Astronaut Blvd" about 4:30pm. KC, and us, wobbled into a VERY nice room with living area and kitchenette (complete with 2 pots and measuring cups and spoons). Bill and I promptly took a nap. Liz mumbled something like "old people" and entertained herself on her phone in the dark. When we got up, Bill and I RUSHED out to buy him some work pants. The stores 10-15 minutes away were all closed, but Bill found a Kohl's 25 minutes down the pike. Of course, dressing rooms are closed because of COVID so we bought six pairs of various sizes and brought them back here



to try on. He has gone down 2 sizes! And is now a 38x30 and looked spiffin for his first day of work.

Monday, April 12, 2021

Bill woke up at 4am and we searched and found the key to get his birth certificate, figured out how to get to the badge office at the Kennedy Space Center, tried on clothes, fed and walked KC, then had breakfast ourselves. This hotel actually serves a hot breakfast included in the room price! AND, the lady setting everything out was a morning person and cheerfully greeted and talked with us!

Bill took off at 6:30am and I went back to bed. Ahhhh. I received some calls back about rentals. Liz and I went to see a couple at opposite ends of Merritt Island this evening. One we really liked was pricey; another was more trailer park trashy. We'll keep looking.

Liz offered to take Bill and me out to a celebratory dinner tonight, but Bill got back, ate something, and fell fast asleep. So she agreed to do it another night and went out and got herself a Wendy's meal. She has been MOST pleasant, helpful, and flexible this whole trip; ESPECIALLY with the driving. My body hasn't fared so well and I ache from my neck to my toes. However, NO migraines. Hallelujah! Bill and I have counted MANY blessings from God.

Bought some groceries—about \$30 more than I would have paid in Camas, WA. But I walk outside and there is sunshine, and palm trees, and large bodies of water, and when I pass by workers and ask, "How are you?" they answer, "Having fun!" Everyone seems to smile. It is a good place to live and I am glad to be here.