

2023 Newsletter



View of Hope Valley, California, from a ridgetop near our campground. About 25 minutes from home, the valley rests at an elevation of 7,300 feet surrounded by Jeffrey, Sequoia, and Lodgepole pines. The West Fork Carson River runs nearby.

The old-timers around these parts say they haven't seen a winter such as we had this year in more than 50 years. Before it was over, I was seeing a back specialist, and a physical therapist, to address issues with my lower back from shoveling all that snow. On the other hand, it was often very pretty. These mountains and skies are an ever-changing canvas upon which Nature splashes seemingly impossible colors, shapes, and textures. One morning, when the temperatures fell below zero, we were treated to a *pogonip* frosted (aka 'frozen fog') landscape. As the drama unfolds each day, we give thanks each sunrise and sunset, for our blessing to be able to live in such a beautiful place.



Michael shoveling 'California Concrete'



Pogonip ('Frozen Fog') frosted trees



Moonset & contrail

With worries of COVID having lessened, we were more active in travel and connecting with family and friends this year. Altogether we made 10 trips with our Airstream trailer ("Stella"), covering over 6200 miles, and have now made 61 trips in Stella totaling over 42,700 miles since we bought her in 2017. We also made a few trips without the trailer and had a number of friends drop in for short visits throughout the year. Danielle's sister, Lisa Rieves, visited us from Florida for a few days in early February during which we met up with the grandkids for breakfast in Colfax CA. In early March we made a quick visit to Monterey to visit Michael's brother, John, and his partner Sarah. While there we also met with Aikido friends, Cathy Jaeger and Nicki Ehlich, to start making arrangements to donate the artwork and training mats that had been in storage since Aikido of Monterey moved from its rented space. In early March we drove to Oregon House CA to celebrate Michael's 72nd birthday with Colin, Jaclyn, and the grandkids, and we treated ourselves to a two-night stay at Café Collage/B&B.



Lisa and Danielle – walking path to Genoa



The grandkids: Kara, Brennan, Keea, and Aria

In April of 2022, while driving over the Sierra Nevada mountains, Danielle experienced what seemed to be typical sinus pressure, except that it didn't clear after descending to lower elevations. When it had not cleared after several months her doctor made a referral to an ENT. Multiple CT, MRI, PET scans and visits with various specialists ultimately led to the diagnosis of a benign mass in the right mastoid that was treatable with a Cyberknife, a specialized device that seems straight out of Star Trek. That seven-month 'journey' was a lesson in staying with love, faith, and gratitude.



Stacked training mats



CyberKnife preparation

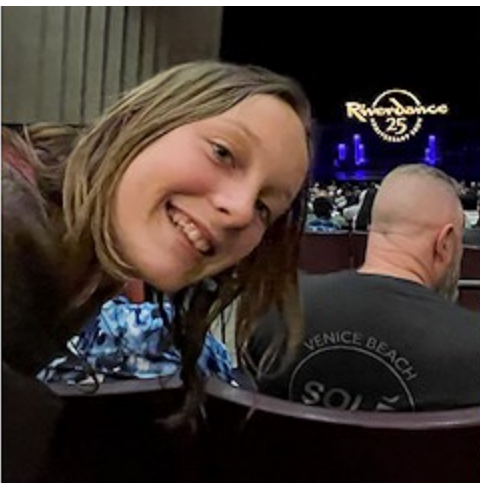


Aliens (?) beaming down

The oldest granddaughter, Aria, is currently into all things Celtic, so when we learned that Riverdance was being performed April 25th in Fresno CA, we grabbed 3 tickets and made a spontaneous, one-night trip with her to see it.



Keea the 'mermaid'



Attending 'Riverdance' with Aria



4th of July Smith family gathering

We continue to stay connected with the Aikido community by participating in online events and classes. We regularly participate in the 'Morning Misogi' classes taught by Linda Holiday Sensei. And, on occasions when Linda Sensei is traveling, both of us have taken turns leading those classes. We also connected with several long-time Aikido friends throughout the year. Senseis Bernice Tom and Ben Teeter from San Diego visited us in June; Cyndy Hayashi Sensei and Keith Everett from Redwood City visited in July. We visited them later in the year and were treated to a fabulous dinner at Selby's (1 star Michelin). Close friend, Pat Hendricks Sensei from Oakland stayed with us in November.



Tahoe dinner with Bernice and Ben

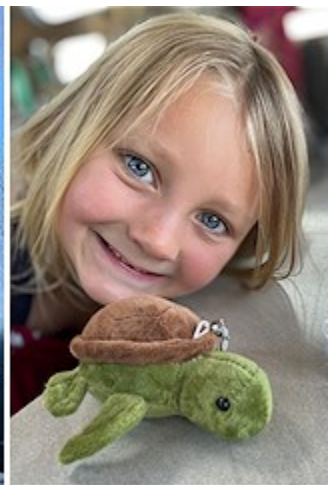


Selby's dinner with Cyndy and Keith



Hiking Faye-Luther with Pat

Our 'Stella' trips with the grandkids were closer to home (relatively) this year. In June, we took Keeva to the Monterey Bay Aquarium and had her spend the night with us on Stella while we were camped at Laguna Seca. When we lived in Monterey, Danielle regularly took the older grandkids to the Aquarium; Keeva was the only grandchild that had not been.



We planned back-to-back trips in August for Aria and Kara. Earlier in the year, Aria had expressed an interest in attending a Shakespeare play, so we had purchased tickets for a performance of "Twelfth Night" at the OSF Elizabethan Theater in Ashland, Oregon. We left for Ashland a few days early, but because of the heat wave we decided to stay at Diamond Lake instead. We had with us our 3 collapsible kayaks, so we spent the next morning enjoying the lake; then made a trip to Clearwater Falls in the afternoon. The next day we headed back to Ashland, where the temperature was 107F. We'd already been advised that the evening performance was being delayed 30 minutes due to the heat. Then, just before we were getting ready to leave, we received an email that the performance was cancelled due to a cast member testing positive for COVID! The next morning we awoke to a dark red sun due to all the smoke from the fires raging in southern Oregon and Northern California. And a notice from the campground that due to a break in a water main, the water from the hookups should be deemed non-potable 🙄. Time to head home... and pick up Kara.

Ever since we took Aria to see Crater Lake, Kara has wanted to go, so we planned her trip to include Redwoods National Park and Crater Lake National Park. We made Ancient Redwoods RV Park our base camp for exploring the Avenue of the

Giants and several of the areas hiking trails. Kara worked hard on her Junior Ranger workbook and earned her 9th badge from 10 National Parks! The park ranger was so impressed that Kara had completed nearly all the activities in the book, far more than required, that she awarded her a special badge in recognition of her accomplishment. We are so very proud of her. 😊 Our original plan was to head to Crater Lake National Park, but forest fires raging along the California-Oregon border closed the roads. Plan B: we drove north to Trinidad and met Aikido/Aikibojitsu friends Tom Read Sensei and his wife Marilyn. We camped at Sounds of the Sea RV Park, near Big Lagoon where we spent the following day kayaking. We drove back to Dutch Flat RV Park where we met Colin, Jaclyn and the kids and celebrated Danielle's 76th birthday. A failed trailer brake forced a brief return to Toscano's RV dealership before we finally headed home.



Aria at Clearwater Falls



Aria and the curious duckling – Diamond Lake



Kara at Redwoods National Park



Junior Ranger



Big Lagoon

In early September, we decided that we really wanted some quiet time just for ourselves in the mountains. We loaded up Stella and headed to Hope Valley campground, a short 25-minute drive from our house. We brought our two folding kayaks and paddled Caples Lake and Kirkwood Lake. We visited Blue Lakes and hiked trails near the campground and the West Fork Carson River. We just kept extending our stay until 12 days later we reached the end of the season and the campground closed.

We planned a short trip with Aria to watch the Annular Eclipse that occurred on October 14. At the last minute, all the grandkids came down with some sort of bug, so she had to cancel. Since we had campground reservations west of Winnemucca we decided to go ahead. The morning of the eclipse was overcast and the prospects of seeing the eclipse looked dim. We decided to look for possible breaks in the cloud cover to the east of Winnemucca, thinking that Sonoma Peak would create a 'rain shadow'. As we passed through Winnemucca on I-80, overhead road signs flashed a message: "Keep your eyes on the road NOT on the sky!" We pulled off on the Golconda (population 182) offramp and found a spot

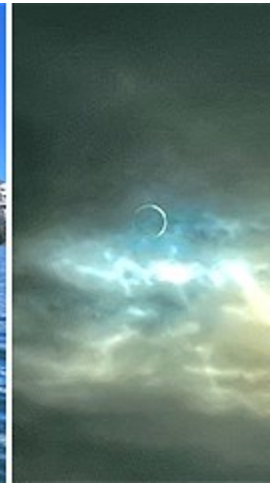
in an open field – along with about 50 other vehicles. Luck was with us and during the height of the eclipse we caught several brief openings in the clouds.



Hope Valley campground



Kayaking at Kirkwood Lake



Annular Eclipse

Two weeks later we travelled to Santa Cruz to celebrate the girls' (Jaclyn, Aria, and Kara) birthdays. On the return we again stopped at Toscano's RV in Los Banos to replace the water temperature mixing valve. Yay! Stella has hot water again! In November we made our last trip of the year with Stella to visit my sister down in Yucaipa for a family gathering and Thanksgiving Dinner. From there we travelled to Santa Cruz to meet with the kids and grandkids before heading home with our grandson Brennan and granddaughter Keeva. It was already below freezing when we got home, so we did a very fast winterization and put Stella into hibernation until Spring.

Keeva and Brennan spent hours building gingerbread houses – we'll be finding little candy bits around the house for the next few years. But the big activity with them was the "Polar Express" train ride. Danielle first read them the book; then we watched the movie, and the next night we all put on our pajamas and headed to Carson City to catch the train. The experience featured actors recreating scenes from the movie; hot, **hot** chocolate, and of course a sleigh bell from Santa. Great fun for everyone 😊 Then the two oldest grandkids, Aria and Kara, visited for several days during which they made a variety of gifts for their family and friends. The big project was making 3 batches of almond butter which went into 12 half-pint jars that they decorated. They also built some very elaborate gingerbread houses – which somehow added more little candy bits in unlikely places around the house. Spending time with all the grandkids, doing Christmas activities, watching Christmas movies, decorating the Christmas tree, all added to the feeling of sharing Christmas Joy!

Michael is still connected to Shop.com, but his consulting hours have dropped to a trickle. Still, we were invited to the Christmas party in Monterey, and it was great to see everyone again. Maureen and Sean drove up from Yucaipa and we all gathered at Sharon and Kent's for Christmas Day dinner.



Halloween with the kids



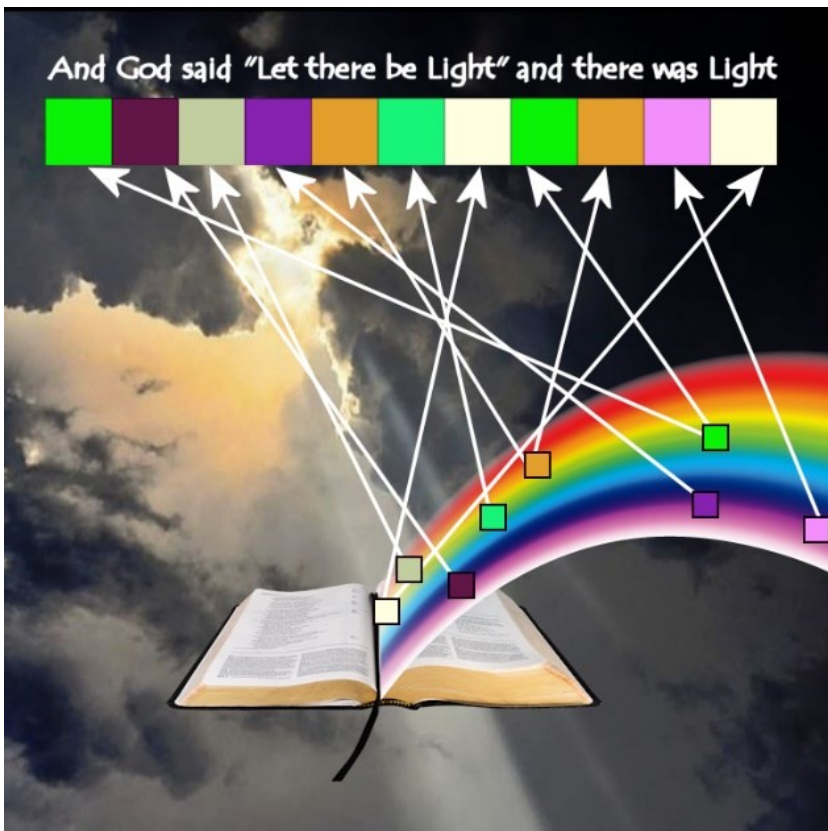
Smith Family Thanksgiving



Aboard the Polar Express



October 21: A 'fire dragon' cloud soaring over the Sierra Mountains



The big project of the year was launching our own website: CHROMANYMS.COM. Michael first conceived of this project 12 years ago. Chromanyms™ is an extension of his Symonyms™ Project, which seeks to explore underlying energies within the dimensions of Thought that coalesce and emerge as verbal, musical, or sculptural expressions of our human experience. Chromanyms.com is a viewer of these patterns, presenting them as arrays of unique word-colors based on a mapping of the visible-light color spectrum across a concordance of the selected literary source. The results are vibrant, full color, "wordless" mosaics corresponding uniquely to user-selected passages from each selected work. With the support of close friends and family, and the technical skill and efforts of our close friend Jordan, our site went live in November.

"... colours are the mother tongue of the subconscious..." Carl Jung

Peace, Health, and Joy in Abundance to All.