



Of a certain AGE

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Columnist

Home is best

There's nothing like a week away from home, especially in a large metropolitan area, to hone my appreciation for our little corner of the world.

I used to love the adventure and novelty of travel — seeing new places and meeting new people. I fear I am becoming an old curmudgeon where travel is concerned. Gone are the days of running down the jetway at the last minute and knocking on the closed aircraft door to gain late entry to my flight.

Lines and more lines have become the norm, even more so on no-frills airlines like Southwest. Removing shoes, belts, electronic devices of any description, liquids, jackets, and any other X-ray-offending article certainly takes the fun out of

“taking off.”

On my latest trip, with the current flu epidemic, I wished I could hold my breath while captive in the closed crowded confines of the plane, breathing the recirculating air of coughing passengers, and trying to touch just as few surfaces as possible.

Once on the ground in Southern California there were six days of the urban onslaught of stalled traffic, and sensory-assaulting noise of airplanes, sirens, train whistles, throngs of people, and traffic.

It was wonderful to spend the time with my cousin who is two years my senior. As young girls, we shared a great deal of time together when I spent many nights at her house and we roamed the empty acres around then-rural Hillsboro on horseback.

She lives in relative quiet in Canyon Country, northeast of the L.A. bedlam, but civilization is encroaching on their once-rural lifestyle.

I soaked up all the “culture” I could, appreciating the exquisite architecture and mind-blowing engineering employed to construct the Walt Disney Music Center in downtown L.A. The evening of chamber music there was exquisite. The drive home... not so much.

The guided tour of the Catholic cathedral of Our

Lady of the Angels, also in downtown L.A., was a journey through amazing engineering feats, Catholic dogma, California and church history, and over-the-top donations of millions of dollars to construct a building. I found myself contemplating how many ordinary people could have benefited from those dollars being spent on human services, education, and housing.

One evening was spent viewing a private screening of the movie “Get Out,” one of the nominees for a number of awards in this year’s Hollywood self-congratulatory season. The home was 10,000 square feet with an indoor pool that resembled a natural pond with rocks and live plants in a huge glass enclosure, a guest apartment attached.

The house’s interior would put *Architectural Digest* to shame. The home theater where we viewed the film had eight very large overstuffed leather reclining seats, each with its own beverage holder and large container of chocolate-covered almonds. Our hostess also provided individual bowls of fresh popcorn. She is a member of the Screen Actor’s Guild, who receives all the nominated films every year to view in order to vote for the awards. She shares them with friends. By the time

we returned to my cousin’s homey 40-year old rambler, I was numb from the excesses.

The delineation of the haves and have-nots in Southern California is blindingly apparent. The homeless, who will never be able to afford the escalating rents and home prices, live right along the freeway, on dirt banks behind the cyclone fences that separate them from the traffic. Debris from deserted encampments litters the freeways and surrounds.

For many, home is a rental unit in a shoddily constructed multi-family multi-story complex next to the freeway. There is neither grass nor play equipment for children to play on and everyone’s blinds are drawn shut all the time. I suppose that makes sense when the view through the smoggy air is the adjacent freeway, the parking lot, or the neighbor’s bedroom window.

At the other end of the spectrum are the gated estates with immaculately manicured yards, swimming pools, multiple-car garages housing expensive luxury vehicles, and enormous mansions tended by servants.

I certainly missed the smiling faces and friendly greetings that are part of everyday living here in Sisters. The clear dark

skies full of twinkling stars greeted me upon my return home. The hush across the high desert, allowing me to hear the wind, the creek, and the howl of the coyotes, was a welcome relief from the urban cacophony that assaulted me during my visit.

I feel sad when I acknowledge there are millions of people, especially children, who may never experience the beauty of the morning alpenglow on a snow-covered mountain or the gentle gaze of a curious doe walking her fawn along the creek.

My heart breaks for the myriad ways humans have despoiled Mother Nature. We do not own the earth. We are meant to be good stewards of her bounty, not conquerors. Have we crossed into the land of no return in our plundering?

I may not live to see the answer to that question. All I can do is honor what we still have here in Sisters. I can work to protect our natural surroundings as well as the quality of life enjoyed by most of us. For those who are struggling, I can offer my hand and my heart. And I can greet each day and each person with a smile, a hello, and my good intentions and actions.

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