

County watch—“Oh, it’s a LONG way to AlbuQUERque”

I felt a need to “get outta Dodge,” so I have been meandering on two-lane roads to visit my dear friend Wyoming native **Bruce StJohn** and equally dear wife **Carol** in Albuquerque.

From rolling Pike County, which has to be one of the deer-hunting capitals of the country, I crossed over the Big River at Louisiana (MO), stopped for coffee in Mexico (MO) and stayed over in Nevada (MO); I was confused.

I stopped in Jeff City, capital of MO. Nice small city—neat, hilly, heavily tree-lined, all centered around the stately capitol. On way out of town, I took a wrong turn (who, me?). I stopped at a gas station to ask directions back to my highway, which wasn’t far away.

Of the three people I asked, not one could tell me. “Oh, I don’t know the streets. I always use my smartphone for directions.” Ditto for the others. I really worry what our society will do when one day a cyber-attack “turns the lights out.” Will we all be helpless, totally dependent on our devices?

Missouri is, as readers who visit Branson and Lake of the Ozarks well know, a pretty state, undulating, with lots of wooded territory, now all turning sparkling gold, rust and orange.

Speaking of Dodge, I spent an evening at the Boot Hill B&B in that city; very comfy, by the way. I was indeed at the top of the infamous knob of a hill, overlooking **Miss Kitty’s (Amanda Blake**, of course) remains.

I didn’t see **James Arness** or **Dennis Weaver** clomping across the plank walks, but I did stop in a new brew pub. I chatted up **Larry Cook**, the owner and brewmaster, complimenting him on a fine pilsener.

I asked about his yeasts. This gave me a chance to talk of my acquaintance with Osceola native **Lance Shaner**, who owns Omega Yeasts in Chicago and with brother **Zack** back home is starting to grow hops right in Stark.

Omega has 600 craft brewer customers, and Larry sounded interested. So, I put them together by email. Lance owes me a brew—probably his next venture—if Larry becomes a customer.

Next day, I stopped for lunch in Clayton NM, about the size of Galva, in the NE corner of the “Land of Enchantment.” I was attracted to an old three-story, stone hotel, obviously built about the 1880s, when the town was founded.

The Eklund Hotel is a real find. Neat and clean, they haven’t changed a stick, other than to make 40 rooms out of what was 60, to add bathrooms, in place of the one bathroom per floor, which I appreciated.

The old-time bar is a treasure, and co-owner **Jo Beth** proudly gave me a tour of the photo-lined walls filled with its history.

For example, notorious train robber “**Black Jack**” **Ketchum** (which the sheriff did) was caught in 1892 and the town wanted to make an example of this desperado, so they voted to hang him high.

But they didn’t have much practice with such. They built the gallows high and sold tickets to the biggest social event of the time.

Black Jack’s last words—all was recorded in words and photos—were: “Hurry up, fellows. I want to be in Hell for supper.”

With great ceremony, according to Jo Beth, the hangman pulled out the floor from under Black Jack. He fell so far that he was indeed decapitated, rather than the more civilized simple neck-breaking! Oh, well, I guess one way is good as another. All this is captured, of course, by the photog.

That evening, I sat in the bar, right under the trophy head of a huge buffalo, while locals—quite talented at that—held forth during an open mike evening. For example, the city manager came in after work, in boots, jeans and cowboy hat, and sang some fine oldies, including my Simon and Garfunkel favorites.

Don't miss the Eklund Hotel!

Next day, I reached Albuquerque, a town of over half a million. Bruce and Carol live above the city in muted splendor, in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains. The couple of half a century, I'm guessing (I was in the wedding, so should know), reside in a large two-story, dust-colored adobe home, big windows on all sides, that blends into the sand and scrub brush surroundings like camouflage.

A buffalo herd grazes just behind the StJohn fence line, part of the Sandia "rez."

If you use your imagination, the angular home offers a faint resemblance to the adobe and cliff-dwelling homes of the ancient Pueblo Indian tribes still living nearby.

On their broad, wrap-around wood deck, we enjoyed sunsets and saw the mountain walls behind us turn from grey to rust-gold and then back as the sun fell below the horizon.

A friend and I toured the museum of atomic energy, which takes one from the discovery of the atom to the bombs over Japan, with a restored B-29 and B-52, on the tarmac outside. Quite impressive.

We also did the Petroglyph Park, with its 23,000 primitive carvings by ancients into volcanic stone millennia ago, plus probably a few “Don loves Cindy” carvings along the 20 miles or so of the petroglyph works. We didn’t see it all.

And then there was the museum of Indian culture, where we were treated to native Indian dancing in the courtyard. I was almost—emphasize almost—moved to do my Chief Illiniwek Dance, of which I can do a surprisingly apt rendition—after a couple of beers.

The four of us also dined at again oohed and aahed at the sunset from the four-star restaurant at the top of the upscale Sandia casino, a few miles from the StJohn abode (note: I just realized that word is adobe if you reverse a couple of words).

Dinner included no less than shaved Oregon truffles over her salad, which we insisted she let all taste (it was a huge offering of truffles, Carol remarked of the expensive fungus).

As Carol lifted a fork with a shaving across the table toward me, I reached across a table filled with very tall glassware. My blazer cuff caught Bruce’s chardonnay, splashing it all over our table. Embarrassed? Me? Have you ever seen the magic of a 6’2” guy shrink below a dinner table!

Fortunately, the attentive young waiter had us back to normal in a nanosecond, somehow.

I have more, like all the different crops I observed, but will hold off til next week, as I’m out of space, and you are tired of all this, I’m sure.

Nice trip.