

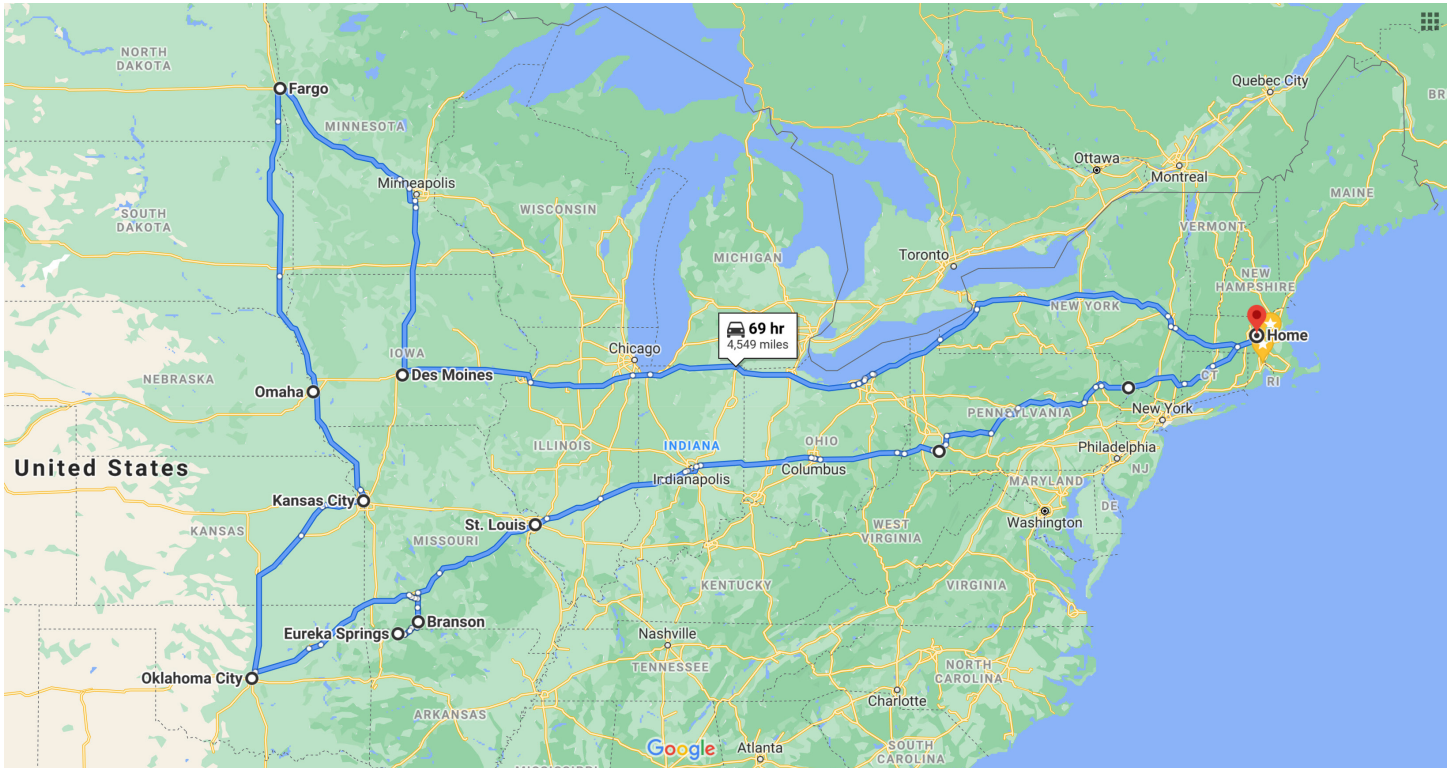
# Etoonin' Incorporated - All for the Lord

2021.07.18

The Midwest 7 State Tour

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I know I have tried to make my life about God, but this trip takes the cake. Not because I made something about God, but because of how He made something about me. I just can't believe how gracious God is, nor express how grateful I am for this trip. I know that, someday, I will praise His Name in Heaven like I am supposed to, but for now I have to cry out my thanks as publicly as I know how. This Etoonin' just cannot express it properly. There is no way I can repay God for what He did for me. There wasn't really one specific thing that made the trip special, but that God would bless me like this at all. This trip is truly a mountain top experience. In 28 days, I got to drive through 16 different states and visit 7 new states on my list to visit. I am trying to visit all 50 states. Now, after the completion of this trip, I only have three more for the full 50.



5,721.6 miles - 98.5 hours driving - 28 days

168.86 gallons gasoline, 33.88 mpg, total: \$503.87

motels/hotels total: \$1,927.23 - \$71.38/night

food total: \$1,352.36 - \$48.30/day

other: \$563.71 - \$20.13/day

**\$4,347.17 - \$155.26/day**

Iowa, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas

MA, NY, PA, OH, IN, IL, IA, MN, ND, SD, NE, KS, MO, OK, AR, WV, CT

# Summary

It would be impossible to capture everything about my trip, like the sights and sounds and even the smells. Motel 6 has its distinctive smells and they get caught in my CPap machine. I want to also capture my mindset. This trip comes directly after the COVID-19 Pandemic. The nation, and the world, was set in lockdown for over a year. People could not travel nor move about freely. Everyone wore masks. If someone did want to travel, they had to quarantine for two weeks or take a COVID-19 test. It was tough for everybody, if not for me. For my part, I just tried to ignore it. I wore the mask as part of the social contract. Because of the pandemic, I couldn't travel, which is something I love to do. Then came the vaccination process. It took some time, but people got the vaccine, those with underlying conditions first. I waited for my turn. I was so excited to get vaccinated because the CDC guidelines stated that, if you are vaccinated, you don't have to get tested before and after travel. That really appealed to me. So, I signed up, got my first dose of Pfizer, waited three weeks; got my second dose. After two weeks from the second shot, you are considered fully vaccinated. As soon as my two weeks were up, I took off! I just couldn't wait to travel any longer! My last vacation was in October 2019.

God always lets me travel, and this time was no different. I was considering the Midwest 7 State Tour, but due to expenses I wasn't really sure of it. I was a little gun shy. I considered traveling down south, like I often do, to visit family and friends. But, for whatever reason, it didn't seem like people could host me when I wanted to travel. I counted up the costs, and it seemed like I could do the Midwest Tour. I went for it! I took the plunge! I was anxious about it, but could not control myself. I remember I was going to leave on a Monday, but was so anxious to start travel that I actually left on Sunday, May 23rd, 2021. I drove to New York that day. For the first week or longer, I was hypomanic. I was so excited to be traveling that I couldn't get enough sleep. I kept waking up around 5:00 Am for at least a week. But as the trip went on, I calmed down. Oh gosh, I did so many things, it would be hard to document them all right here. If I can only capture the feeling of the trip, I'd be happy.

I brought my computer and, at each Motel 6, I'd spend time praying or doing whatever on it. I had reserved tons of Motel 6 rooms in advance, but quickly realized I'd have to play it more by ear. I had to rent motels about three days in advance, when I knew more what I would do. I also bought food and drinks from grocery stores.

I also noticed that people pretty much stopped wearing their face masks a few days into my trip.

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As of this writing, it has now been 2 weeks and 2 days since my vacation ended. I am hoping, by my writing, that I can still capture the feeling of the trip, though my memory is fleeting.

I did a lot of things on my vacation: saw lots of museums and did a lot of activities, but it was the feeling I remember the most: the feeling of just living in the moment and doing whatever came to me. I remember the long days of driving, and how I'd listen to music and zone out and think and pray to God. Every day I had to secure my case of Diet Coke to drink, as I am addicted to Diet Coke. Every night I'd spend time in my motel/hotel praying and listening to music. It is those times of praying and listening to music that really set the tone of the trip for me. I know I did a lot of things on my vacation, but I was still my regular ole self, and I pretty much pray every day.

I remember being at the Motel 6's and filling my cooler with ice from the lobby ice machine so I could keep my drinks cold in the car while I was driving, or to make drinks cold for my day whatever I was doing.

When I started this vacation, I quickly became unsure if I could do all the driving. I drove for three days out to Des Moines, Iowa. I stopped in Niagara Falls, NY and then Elkhart, IN. I was very excited to go traveling after the lockdown, so I was hypomanic and wasn't getting enough sleep. I'd wake up at 5:00 Am and set off for my day around 7:30 Am. When I got to Iowa, I just rested in my Motel 6 in Altoona, IA. Although I had my trip very well planned out, I quickly realized that my plans were kaput: I couldn't do all that driving. So, I cancelled all my Motel 6 reservations and started planning out my vacation about four days at a time. I remember being in the Iowa Motel 6 and spending about half a day (four hours) planning where I would go next and where I would stay. I did other things, too, like I got a massage, I went to the Living History Farms, and I went out to eat at a BBQ joint. I just kind of went with the flow of things, which was really nice. I needed a massage from all that driving, and I have a bad back in general. The Motel 6 rooms did not help with that because their desk and chairs were very stiff with no cushions. I know I saw a great many



things, and the rest of this Etooinin' will capture that, but it really was the feeling of being in those Motel 6's that I'd like to capture and write about.

Most days I traveled, I'd pull up to the Motel 6 and then bring all my stuff in. And I had a lot of stuff, about 4 grocery bags and two travel bags and a cooler. I went from motel to motel about every 1, 2 or 3 days, so I'd have to lug all that stuff in and then out of my motel. A lot of this vacation was simply the logistics of surviving and providing meals for myself. Especially at the beginning of my trip, I relied on grocery stores to get all my food. I bought cold cuts and kept them in the cooler and would make sandwiches on the fly. I also continued to eat my staple, the PB&J, at night before bed. Some nights, I'd lie awake in bed just listening to music. It was this music that became the soundtrack to my vacation. I would also listen to this music while driving, so it became pretty engrained in me. In particular, I listened to the Apple Music album, Above and Beyond Group Therapy 433 and 435 (Above and Beyond does an album every Friday). I listened to Operation Midnight – by Luttrell. I also listened to a BT remix, The Light is Always On, while driving. I must say that I kind of avoided listening to Christian music this whole trip because I was tired of the focus on anxiety that most songs seem to lament.

For at least the first week, I was pretty hypomanic, which is a state of elevated mood and decreased sleep. It can become dangerous if I don't get enough sleep, so it was something I paid attention too. I remember driving to Minneapolis from Des Moines and I was so, so tired it felt like a schism in my head. I had to pull over and reconstruct myself. I found, at some points, that talking to others on the phone helped keep me awake and alert. The driving got better as I went along, but in the beginning, I was pretty tired of all the driving. I decided to stay longer at each location so that I could relax and rest. But as the vacation went on, the driving got easier. I prayed to God a lot for protection while driving, because I am not the best driver. However, I found that the driving was pretty safe because many places I went there was so little traffic, like in Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota. The road was two lanes wide and I'd only see other cars occasionally. There were crows that would just stand in the road, which is unlike the Northeast where there is too much traffic for a bird to rest on the road. Later, when I got to Omaha, the cities were more congested and with confusing routes and whatnot. That became like driving in Boston, with lots of turns here or there. Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis and other cities had congestion and confusing routes around the city, but places like Fargo, Oklahoma City and

other places were laid out on a grid. Fargo had city roads that were three lanes wide on each side of travel. There were virtually no traffic problems in Fargo. Everything was about 10 minutes away in Fargo. It was easy to get around. It seemed like Fargo was made so it could handle an increase in population very easily.

At the beginning of my trip, in Iowa and Fargo, I followed my home pattern of going to Panera to eat and pray on my computer. However, I stopped going to Panera after I left Fargo. I just wasn't interested in going there to pray because I found I enjoyed praying in my motel room. I remember the views from my Fargo Motel 6. It was a little industrial there. I enjoyed praying and writing up emails about my trip at night. I normally keep a travel log, but I found that the emails I sent out sufficed as my travel log. A lot of people really enjoyed my emails, as they felt they were there traveling with me. It was kind of humbling: a nice side effect. When I returned, I had people tell me about different parts of my trip and ask questions about it. I was pleased that people seemed so interested in my trip. One person even shared photos of a Lutheran Mega Church with other people to see if they'd believe it, that there could be a Lutheran Mega Church. It was so nice all the compliments I got. I suffer from depression a lot, so sometimes my mass emails can be negative, but I tried to keep a positive vibe with my travel email list. While on vacation, I did go run the gamut of emotions. There were days I was happy, days I was sad, and everything in between. It was like being home, but different in that I had to stay motivated to provide everything for myself (which consisted of buying Diet Coke and seltzer from grocery stores, along with PBJ materials and other foods). But I had leeway to do whatever I really wanted. My times sitting in my room and spending four hours planning the next parts of my trip were pretty sweet. I love organizing things and paying attention to detail. It was just so wonderful to be on vacation.

I have a confession to make in that some of the things I did, like seeing museums or other sights of interest, I did only so I'd have something to write in my travel emails. Kind of silly, I know, but I am not really a tourist. On most of my vacations, I travel places where I already know people, and I do things with those people. But on this vacation, I didn't really know anyone, so I did things alone. I probably would have been happy just sitting at Panera at a bunch of different states, but I didn't feel that would make for a good travel report, so I did random things, like going to the Durham Museum in Omaha and the Memorial Museum in Oklahoma City. I also found that friends would suggest places to go see and it was just the right suggestion at the right time. Some people were

amazed at the sights I visited, but honestly most of the places I saw were recommended to me, not places I researched or found on my own. Toward the tail end of my trip, I did more Christian types of activity, like seeing the Thorncrowne Chapel, going to a play about Jesus and going to the Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. I also went to Church each Sunday at a different LCMS Church (LCMS stands for my denomination: Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod). I have this habit of visiting LCMS Churches when I travel and I like to get a photo of the building as well as a photo with the Pastor that preached. My absolute favorite part of my trip was the Church service in Overland Park, Kansas. I was looking at three nearby Churches to visit, but chose this one because the lead Pastor was the most handsome. Not a great reason to choose a Church, but I was rewarded in that the service was so special. The lead Pastor was nowhere to be found, but a different Pastor preached on how God is like a Potter molding, making and shaping us. There was a retired dentist who also happened to do pottery, and during the sermon he talked about the various parts of making pottery with a wheel and how it related to how God shapes us. The Potter would talk for a bit, then work on the pottery while the Pastor expounded more on Bible verses that supplemented what the Potter had talked about. It was such a touching sermon that I cried the whole 20 minutes or so of the sermon. I love crying because that is when I feel closest to God, in my sorrows. It was just phenomenal.

I went to two other Churches during my travel: St. Andrews in Fargo, ND and Pathfinder in St. Louis, Missouri. I like to photograph the buildings because Lutheran Churches can have interesting architecture. Pathfinder and Christ Lutheran (the Kansas Church) were both big Churches for the LCMS denomination. Both had about 200 people in attendance, and the service did not follow the liturgy that most Lutheran Churches do. When I went to Church in Fargo, they followed the liturgy and the Pastors wore robes. But at Christ Lutheran and Pathfinder, the Pastors wore more casual clothes and there was not all the standing, sitting, and distinct parts of the service, like Mt. Calvary and Our Savior have here in Massachusetts. When I went to Church in Fargo, I invited myself to a BBQ on Memorial Day. It was really pretty sweet. I was in Iowa, choosing which Church out of three Fargo LCMS Churches I'd go to. I wrote emails to each of the three asking if there were any BBQ's I could go to. Well, Pastor Jahnke wrote back and mentioned that Pastor Eric, from Mt. Calvary, had given me a glowing review. I found it so nice that Pastor Jahnke actually called Mt. Calvary. Pastor Jahnke organized a BBQ I could go to as well, at Joe Franklin's house. It turns out it was a high

school graduation party. I didn't realize that, and voiced my hesitation, but Joe said I could still come. When I got there the next day, Joe asked me what kind of beer I'd like. He had a makeshift bar that his son was attending too. I was going to go for a Bud Light, but then I saw he had Guinness, so I chose that. This made Joe so happy because he had recently discovered Guinness in 2013 during a trip to Ireland! So, Joe said, "Would you like a black and tan?" Of course! It was really something.

The party was in a very well cleaned and kept garage. I never mentioned this in my email about this time, but it was a little awkward being at this party. It was a mixture of family and Church members. One woman, Joe's sister, who was very worldly, asked me what I was doing there: how did I get there? I explained as best I could. I also talked to Joe's father-in-law, who mentioned he suffered from depression at times, so I felt bad for him and tried to console him. I also saw Pastor Jahnke there and talked with him and his wife a bit. I don't know if I'd do something like that again. I had an idea in my mind how it would go, with Church members being really interested in another Christian from MA, but it seemed like most people were not that curious about my background. It also seemed like a typical family party where people complain or hog the attention and I don't know. It just didn't go like I thought it would, but at the same time, I didn't realize it was a graduation party not a BBQ. However, I am very glad I tried that. I didn't bother to do that at any of the other Churches I went to in my travels. Another unintended side effect of inviting myself to this party was that everybody, when they heard I was on a trip, recommended lots of places and things to see and we didn't really hold a normal conversation. I did find out that Joe liked to go north into Canada to fish on vacation.

When I was in the Fargo LCMS Church, there was an assistant Pastor. His son saw that I was wearing a purple dress shirt. When he heard I was from MA, he said I was welcome as long as I was not a Patriots fan. I hated to disappoint him, but he was good natured about it. He said, "At least you are wearing a purple shirt." His team was the Minnesota Vikings, which have a purple uniform. I wasn't used to younger people talking to me, as that rarely happens in Church in MA, so it was interesting and I had to adjust on the fly.

Fargo was okay. It was nice in that it had very wide roads and very little traffic. It seemed like everything was 10 minutes away. Everything was on a grid there. But I didn't find Fargo to be very interesting. I went and saw the Fargo Theater

Marquee, but it wasn't open. As I was in Fargo for the weekend, the museums were all closed. I am very glad I went to Church there and went to the BBQ, but I have no interest in going to Fargo again. However, I will say that while I was driving, in the sun, from Fargo, ND to Omaha, NE, I felt really so, so grateful that God had brought me to Fargo. I felt very grateful for being there, and enjoying it. I guess part of this feeling was based on the fact that, for a long, long time, Fargo was just a place on a map that I wanted to visit, but now I had done it!

Des Moines, Iowa, was pretty nice. I really loved Iowa. My drive into Des Moines on I-80 W was a real treat. There were rolling farms everywhere, and I saw a lot of wind turbines too. I was amazed at all the wind turbines because it seemed like Iowans were not afraid to put them up. I recalled how residents of Martha's Vineyard resisted a wind farm off the coast for fear of how ugly it would look. I was impressed that Iowans would use natural means to generate their power. I found out that over 50% of electricity in Iowa is generated by these wind turbines. The countryside was just so beautiful in Iowa. The other place with beautiful, rolling farms was Kansas, but more on that later. I wasn't terribly impressed by Des Moines, though I thought it was nice. It was also the kind of place where going across town only took at most 20 minutes. It was pretty organized. I got a massage there, the best massage I've ever had. The masseuse dug her elbow deep into my lower back muscles. It hurt so much but also felt so good. I also went to the Living History Farm recommended by my pharmacist. It was nice: I enjoyed learning about how the farmers of 1876 thought they had it so much better than the generation that came out and started the farm. The gist is that the original settlers had to clear the land and build the house and stuff like that. By 1876, the farmers just had to do the farming. I learned that there were innovations in technology in that planting plows were developed so the farmer could ride them, instead of just walk behind the oxen with it. This small change seemed to improve their lives a lot. I found out that the plows of that time could plant two rows of seed at a time, but that, using a tractor, modern farming can plant 48 rows of seed at once. So, things have changed a lot. I also learned that amputation was the most common surgery, and had to be done without anesthesia. That sounded scary. So, things have certainly progressed since 1876.

In Des Moines, I also visited a downtown sculpture park. I did this at the recommendation of Chris van Leer, who used to live in Chicago. I could have cared less about it, but I did it so, like I mentioned, I could write about it. I walked from sculpture to sculpture quickly and photographed most

of them so I could share in my email. Then I went to the restaurant Americana, and had a hummus plate. It was only \$7, but my, was it delicious! Another couple heard me tell the waitress I was from Boston, and they came up and talked with me a little bit as they left. I don't know for sure, but from what I observed, it seemed like Iowans were friendly, another thing I liked about Iowa. I also saw the state capitol building, with its nice gold dome.

Anyway, I wrote about all this stuff in my daily emails, which are outlined below in this Etooin'. I will try not to rehash them, but I did find Iowa to be quite refreshing and nice. I still remember sitting in my Motel 6 room and planning out the next few days of my trip. In doing that, I arranged for the time in Fargo. I also got what was probably the best massage of my life. My lower back muscles get very tense and compress my spine, which really hurts. This Asian woman dug her elbows deep into my lower back muscles. It hurt so much but also felt so good at the same time. I got massages one a week, on my trip, by looking on Google for places. The thing that I remember so much is being at that Motel 6 on a gloomy day and just working on my computer in my room.

As I mentioned, I initially found the driving to be a bit much. So, I was going to cut out parts of my trip. For instance, I thought to just go to the northeastern edge of Oklahoma instead of driving hours to Oklahoma City. I figured that just being in the state counted. I was also going to cut out the drive to the U.S. Center Chapel, in Kansas, which would take me at least six hours out of the way I was going. But thankfully, the driving got easier as I went along and I started to enjoy it more, so I was able to do both things.

I went to Des Moines, Iowa, and from there drove to Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was so tired at this point, because of the hypomania and not getting enough sleep. But I took a nap and then went to the Mall of America with my friend from the Odd Todd TV Bored, Bethy. I never would have chosen to go to a mall if it were up to me, but supposedly this mall was all the rage as a tourist site. We went in there and it was gigantic, with an indoor amusement park. There were four levels. Anyway, I still wasn't very impressed: it just seemed like a testament to consumerism. We had dinner in the Mall, which was pretty good. I had steak. Bethy treated. She also gave me a bunch of her handmade greeting cards. Then, on the ride back to my motel, we took a detour to get coffee. We couldn't find the Starbucks, but instead found a bakery that reminded Bethy pleasantly of her deceased mother. We went in and they were just closing, so the clerk gave us tons of free donuts! I also bought Bethy some carrot



cake, which she reported she really liked. It seemed like a bit of a God thing, in that it reminded Bethy of her Mom.

The next day, after only one night's stay, I drove to Fargo. I already explained what I did there. I basically went to Panera, went to Church, went to a graduation party, and saw the Fargo Theater Marquee. I also had to do some grocery shopping while I was there. I remember driving around the roads and looking for the grocery store. It was a little bit hot, however, most of my time in Fargo I could wear long pants. I know I bought seltzer and Diet Coke and I might have bought more cold cuts. It was kind of a pain to go grocery shopping and lug the drinks around, but I was really aiming to keep costs low, and I always enjoy having plenty to drink. I drink the Diet Coke in the morning and then the seltzer at night. It is heavy to lug around, but enjoyable to have when I want it. I drank a case of Diet Coke (12 cans) each morning, and I had plenty of time to do so, as I kept waking up so early.

On Tuesday, I drove from Fargo, ND to Omaha, Nebraska. I stopped to see the waterfalls of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, at Art Rankis' recommendation. This is why I say that other people told me about the stuff I saw, as I didn't even realize that Sioux Falls HAD a waterfall, even though it is in the name of the city. The speed limit southbound in North Dakota was 75 mph and in South Dakota it was 80 mph, but people still passed me. Sioux Falls was beautiful: lots of water flowing over red rocks in the middle of the city. It really was a treat. It was also quite hot and I had to ice a case of Seltzer for the rest of my ride to Omaha. I probably drove between four to eight hours each time I drove someplace.

Omaha was nice, but not that exciting. I remember being in a Motel 6 on the Iowa side of Omaha, but I switched to a Motel 6 on the western side so I could avoid early morning traffic when I drove to Kansas. The temperature from this point until the end of my vacation stayed in the mid 80's. I went to the Durham Museum, the Mormon Trail Museum and out for steak dinner. The Museums were nice. I went to a really expensive steakhouse and got a ribeye steak. It was so good! It cost \$62. But it was something the woman from Joe's BBQ in Fargo told me to do, so I did it. Also, after visiting the Durham Museum, I went to a local steak and cheese fast food chain called Runza. It was very good and came recommended by Matthew Haynes' cousin. I didn't really like Omaha as much as Des Moines and Fargo because it was way more congested. I never got caught in it, but I noticed backups during rush hour traffic. I think I described the Durham Museum and Mormon Trail Museum elsewhere in this Etooin'. I love the Mormons, so I wanted to see

their history museum. The Mormons basically got kicked out of Illinois and traveled all the way to Salt Lake City to escape persecution. There was nothing in Salt Lake City, but thankfully some of the Mormons learned about irrigation, so they used that info to improve Salt Lake. It was a 75-to-90-day journey to Salt Lake City until the train was put in, then it went to about three days. The Mormons established a temporary outpost somewhere along the way, which was part of what the museum was about. The Durham Museum was in an old train station and showed old fashioned trains, cars and wagons. I saw an electric car from the early 1900's and a Model A Ford, I believe (I can't remember for sure). I also learned a lot about what Omaha was like from the founding when Lewis and Clark explored the Louisiana Purchase. I guess that Omaha was an outpost people came to and restocked on supplies as they continued west.

The Motel 6's in Omaha were okay. The problem with Motel 6 is that the beds are very stiff and cheap and it hurt my back a lot, compounded with the fact that I'd work on my computer a lot with a stiff Motel 6 chair. Each Motel 6 seemed to have its own smell, usually like a cleaner of some sort. Some Motel 6s smelled like baby powder, others smelled like disinfectant. I won't describe the smell in others, but Motel 6s really do vary in quality a lot. The Motel 6 in Fargo was new and so that was one of the better ones. Motel 6 seemed to range in price from \$50 - \$80 per night. I really did enjoy being at Motel 6 because it was so cheap, but eventually I got fed up with it. More on that later.

When I left Omaha, I drove to Lebanon, Kansas, to see the Geometric Center of the Lower 48 States. There is a little chapel there right on the site. It is called the U.S. Center Chapel. It was actually featured in a Super Bowl LV (Super Bowl 55) Jeep Commercial starring Bruce Springsteen. That is the only reason I knew about it. It is basically in the middle of nowhere. I was thinking, early in my trip, about skipping it because it was at least 6 hours of driving out of my way. But as I mentioned, I started to feel better about driving as time went on, so I took a chance and drove there.

Because I was on the west side of Omaha, I escaped the city pretty easily. As I drove toward Kansas, I took two breaks. One was to see the stations of the cross at The Cloisters on the Platte. This was very close to Omaha. It was part of the Christian stuff I did. It was very well done: 14 stations of the cross done in magnificent sculptures. I breezed through it kind of quick, but it was really well done and captured the process of Jesus walking to His crucifixion very well. I highly recommend it. It seemed like God orchestrated this

perfectly, because you need to take a bus from the parking lot to the stations, but at both points the bus driver was right there so I didn't need to wait at all. Jim Bures does not like waiting. Another aspect of my trip is that I often wore sunscreen on my arms and knees while driving so I didn't get sunburned. At the Cloister on the Platte, I recall putting on sunscreen at the visitor center. It was another aspect of self-care I had to do: putting that sunscreen on all the time while driving or out in the sun. God helped me to care for myself in that way. And my left arm is now tanner than my right arm, from the sun coming in the driver's side window. The second thing I did was go to Lincoln, Nebraska, and photograph the state capitol. It was nice, but not very eventful. After I left Lincoln, I found Runza along the highway somewhere. Man, is Runza good food! They make their own rolls, which are mushy but good texture, and the classic (steak n cheese) sandwich is just so delicious. I ate a lot of good food on my trip, in addition to grocery store bought food, and I actually lost 6.2 pounds over my trip! I thought that was amazing.

Anyway, after I left Lincoln, NE, I made the long way to Smith Center, Kansas, where my next motel was. Driving on I-80 W wasn't as good in Nebraska: it was a lot more crowded than other drives I'd taken. It was a two-lane highway, but there were much more cars and lots of trucks. I drove west and then took state route 65 south. This was a scary road because it was a single lane road each way with just a yellow line separating the two lanes. What made it scary was that the speed limit was 65 mph! This would be a 50-mph road in Massachusetts. The other thing I didn't like about Nebraska was that it was so flat. It was flat on route 65 too, and somewhat crowded. But once I got over the border into Kansas, the road became hilly again, and the traffic disappeared. I was alone with the Lord on this road. In the Midwest, a lot of state roads go straight north south or east west. So, this road was going south. But because of the hills, I could see the road five miles ahead of me, straight ahead. I remember that: going from hill to hill and clocking how many miles it was from crest to crest. I think I measured 2.5 miles on one of them.

It was sunny and warm and I got to Smith Center with plenty of day left. I stayed at the Buckshot Inn for one night. This was a motel in the middle of nowhere. It was very rustic, with older furniture inside the room. I really liked the change from Motel 6, with their detergent smelly, formal rooms. Because there was still sunlight, I decided to drive the 15 minutes to the U.S. Center Chapel. It was straight east 12 miles then straight north 2 miles, or something like that. I kinda knew what it looked like from the Jeep commercial. It

was really small, maybe 9' x 12' inside, with four single seat aisles on either side with a wooden podium. I photographed it thoroughly, but then spent some time inside praying and reading my 1984 NIV Pocket Bible. I was there maybe an hour. I sent out photos of the Bible, and Roger noticed that I was in the exact center of the Bible! That was fascinating. There was no one else around: I really got to enjoy it. I pray and exclaimed to God out loud. I also prayed for our country.

Then I drove back to the Buckshot Inn and spend some time on my computer before calling it a night. I think, by this point, I was getting better sleep and wasn't waking up as early. The bed wasn't really any different than a Motel 6 bed, but it was still nice because of the rustic furniture. The next morning, I woke and happened to see the owner. I don't know how we got on the topic, but he told me that the World's Largest Ball of Twine was 30 minutes away. I knew that this would really fascinate my brother, Tom, so I decided to go there. Before leaving, I went to the town grocery store, which was small and filled with Caucasian farmers. That was the other thing I noticed about Kansas: all the farmers were older and white. Anyway, after loading up my cooler with ice and drinks, I set out for the U.S. Center Chapel for a morning prayer. This time there were two motorcyclists there. I had one take my photo with the Chapel. Because others were there, I didn't feel as comfortable, so I didn't stay that long. As I left, another car of people drove up.

I made it the thirty minutes to the ball of twine, and man, did it smell. It was very fortunate because just as I got there, another family was leaving. The mother took my photo next to the ball of twine! That was so fortunate because there was nobody else around. The ball of twine is in Cawker City, a depressed, run down city. There were lots of closed storefronts. I texted the photo of me and the twine to my brother and sister and I could tell I really impressed my brother. He said he was so jealous! But really, that ball of twine was in the middle of nowhere. There was a whole history of the twine ball that I also photographed: basically, this guy with leftover twine kept adding to it over years. Because of the text, my brother was moved to offer to treat me to a steak dinner in Kansas City when I got there. It was such a lovely, loving reaction.

I took off and kept driving. I stopped somewhere for gas or more ice and I happened to see the same two motorcyclists! The one who took my photo said he was glad to see me again. This area of Kansas was really dilapidated and depressed. There wasn't a lot more around than old buildings. I noticed that they had gas stations pumps at various spots that had

no storefront attached to them, nor any cashier or anything. I guess you could fill up alone using a credit card and be on your way. There really was nothing around. I have never seen a more depressed looking part of the country before. I mean, I used to live in Worcester, and I guess that was pretty depressed, but this area of Kansas was really empty and open. There didn't really seem to be much reason to be there unless you were a farmer.

I drove the rest of the way to Kansas City, for my next stop. Eventually, I got onto a major highway, but my iPhone GPS started acting up. The battery would die even attached to the charger and the GPS would disappear. I grew nervous about that because without that GPS, I couldn't go anywhere else on my vacation! I didn't even have a map book at all. Thankfully, I coaxed the device to work until I got to the Motel 6 in Overland Park, Kansas. That was a horrible experience too. Although this motel was roughly \$50 / night, it was really scummy. The attendant was behind thick glass and it seemed like a slum. There were no laundry machines, no fridges in the room and the ice machine didn't really work. The lobby wasn't open either, and the attendant's window had all types of passive aggressive written notes about how cheap Motel 6 was so they couldn't provide any amenities. It seemed like an awful motel in a chain already made up of awful motels. I debated finding something better, but my phone wasn't really working. Thankfully, there was a Batteries + store really close and the GPS worked until I got there. Within 15 minutes, I had my phone back and it worked the rest of my trip. But by this point, I was so frustrated that I didn't take my brother up on his offer to pay for a nice meal. We kind of got into a fight, too, because of the battery being dead. It totally ruined the blessing that arose from me sharing the ball of twine with him. But these things will all work out in Heaven and I know he had a good heart when he offered me the meal.

I was totally frustrated by this crappy Motel 6 and, though I wanted to switch to a nicer place, I was too lazy to bother. It worked out well enough. In my email updates, I kept complaining about Motel 6, which made my Mom offer to rent me a nice hotel! That was cool. So, this was the last Motel 6 I stayed at. The next day, Saturday, I felt kind of down. I was upset over the fight and I have a mental illness that doesn't quite ever go away. I got together for dinner with Erika, her husband Lincoln, and son Tyler. We went to a BBQ place: Jack Stacks and she treated! She is a friend from Grace Chapel in New England. It was a nice dinner: I enjoyed talking with her and Lincoln a lot. Tyler was extremely well behaved: I barely noticed him. The brisket and pulled pork

were nice too, and they served a side of corn with melted cheese. It was like mac n cheese except with corn instead of macaroni.

From my notes, I see that I took the day off and used it to plan the sites I saw in Kansas City. I also did some grocery shopping and saw Patrick Mahomes (NFL Kansas Chief's QB) cereal. I bought some laundry detergent and did my laundry at a nice laundromat that had Wi-Fi and seating. But it was unfortunate I bought my own laundry detergent, and because I didn't fully close the cap and it all poured out on my car's back floor. Ugh. If I had bought coin op laundry detergent, I probably would have only had enough for the laundry and that wouldn't have happened. Oh well. So, my car smelled like Motel 6 the rest of my trip. It took me forever to figure out what was causing the smell, because I didn't notice the detergent bottle until much later in my trip.

After laundry, I just kind of chilled at Motel 6. I am sure I listened to music until I went to bed. Back to the logistics of this trip: I had been carting around a jar of raspberry jam. But when I took it out of the cooler to put more ice in, I dropped it and the jar broke and there was jam on the sidewalk. I had to alert the motel cleaning staff. It was frustrating, because I really like eating PB&J. At the grocery store, I found strawberry jam in a squeeze tube, so I started using that. But when I stored it in the cooler, water got inside and ruined the jam. So, from that point on, I had to keep the squeeze jam a gallon zip lock bag in the cooler. It was a complicated solution to the fact that I could not carry around glass bottles anymore. I share this detail to show that there were a lot of little logistical things I was paying attention to. Because the ice machine wasn't working, I had to go to the gas station each morning, and maybe evenings too, to ensure that my cold cuts did not spoil and to keep my liquids cold. Most of the Motel 6s had fridges, but this one was too cheap.

That Saturday was a really low-key day, but I made up for it on Sunday. On Sunday, I went to Church; got a salad at Panera; went to the Hallmark Store in Crown Plaza; saw a cartoonist exhibit in the Crown Plaza; went to the WWI Museum; ate BBQ at Slap's and visited IHOPKC, the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. I wrote about all that later in this Etooin'. The day was very busy, but I did it all. Going to Church at Christ Lutheran was probably my favorite part of the trip, because the sermon was so good, I cried the whole time. I feel closest to God when I cry. I just got the impression that the two people preaching were really talking about how God has fashioned me, as person. The sermon was a combo of a Potter spinning a clay pot and comparing



that to how God is the Potter and we are His clay. The Pastor also interjected as the Potter worked, and backed up the analogy by reading key Scriptures. It really was something else. And I only chose this Church because of the handsome photo of the lead Pastor, who wasn't even present.

I bought some cards and presents at the Hallmark Store. I went to Crown Plaza and the WWI Museum because Erika recommended both, I believe. At the WWI Museum, I learned that the reasons for WWI are not very well known. It seems to be because of the buildup of class tensions, coupled with lots of treaties signed by various countries. The spark that ignited the war was an assassination that was actually called off, but word didn't get to the killer in time. Slap's BBQ was very good and featured a nice view of downtown Kansas City. The IHOPKC Church was okay. I've seen that style of worship music before. I am not really into Charismatic Churches anymore. I was hoping there'd be a word for me, but there was just music. There weren't a lot of people there, either. IHOP is a place you can go any time of day: they have worship 24-7 since 1999. It is free and open to the public.

At this point, I was on Day 15 of a 28-day trip. Because part of Kansas City is in Missouri, I had now visited six out of seven Midwest states. That put me at 46 states seen out of the 50 in the Union. This was incredible. The driving was going well, the sightseeing going well too. I had seen two friends and invited myself to a BBQ. As I mentioned, every few days I'd spend at least four hours planning the next parts of my vacation. I also want to stress that, out of all the activities I did each day, most mornings and nights I'd spend praying on my laptop. At night, in the Motel 6s, I'd often listen to music on the OontZ Bluetooth speaker Roger gave me. I'd listen to music while lying in bed, checking Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Each night I'd also send out an email about what I'd done during the day along with photos. I gave very little thought as to when I actually went to bed and I didn't really worry about when I'd get up. It all worked out quite naturally. When I woke up, I'd start drinking Diet Coke in my room and start praying or doing other things.

On Day 16, which was a Monday, I drove to Oklahoma City. Earlier on my trip, I was thinking of cutting out this portion of my trip in favor of just visiting Miami, Oklahoma in the northeast section of the state. Yes, Miami! But when it came time to drive, I easily made it all the way to Oklahoma City. I was treated to views of more hills in the Kansas landscape, but this time there were very few trees, if any, and the hills were covered in just grass. It was a beautiful green landscape, sometimes spotted with herds of cattle. The other thing

I noticed, on my trip, is that there aren't really any pine trees. I didn't see pine trees anywhere west of Ohio except once I drove into Oklahoma. The drive to Oklahoma was uneventful. I think, at this point, I was also starting to get much better sleep: longer duration and not waking up as early. But it literally didn't matter when I went to bed and when I woke up. At this point in my trip, I think I had pretty much planned out the rest of what I was going to do and where I was going to stay. One fortunate side of my mass travel emails is that my Mom read all about my Motel 6 woes and offered to rent me a nice hotel room. So, when I got to Oklahoma City, I stayed in a very nice Holiday Inn Express, which my Mom paid for. It. Was. So. Nice! Compared to Motel 6, it was like going from the deep south to Europe. The bed was so comfortable, and there was a proper desk with outlets and a comfortable office chair. It was great.

My first full day in Oklahoma, I was feeling kind of down and maybe a little depressed. Maybe I was lonely, I don't know. I lamented to my friend, Chris van Leer, but then got on my way. Throughout various parts of my trip, I'd call friends to pass the driving time, or whatever. But, for the most part, I didn't really mind being alone. This was strange, because I am very extroverted. On this day in Oklahoma, I went to Brahm's and got a milkshake. Brahm's is an ice cream and fast-food chain that came recommended to me by the illustrious Ken Schatte. I kept seeing Starbucks and was so tempted to treat myself to Starbucks, but most times I didn't feel like pulling over. I went and visited the Memorial Monument and Museum, which documented the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995. Tim McVeigh, a domestic terrorist, blew up a big part of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19. He was majorly deluded about many things. He was executed in 2001 and left behind inscriptions of Invictus poem, which indicated he felt he was the master of his own fate. In reality, he was deluded. The Monument consists of two large walls facing each other, a shallow pool of water and outdoor, decorative chairs for each of the 168 victims of the bombing. I also saw the museum, which had a lot of multimedia exhibitions explaining what life was like for the people that died and those left behind, as well as what it was like to try to excavate people from the rubble while also preserving an evidence site. Tim McVeigh was caught pretty quickly, as well as two other people involved. I believe it was two people. Anyway, it was quite interesting, and the Monument was very photographic.

After viewing all this, I returned to Holiday Inn Express, took a nap, then went for a massage, which wasn't quite as good as my Iowa massage. Then I just goofed off a lot. Even though

I did things, I spent a lot of my time goofing off or praying or other things. It was so comfortable in that Holiday Inn Express that I never returned to Motel 6.

I don't remember at what point I did this, but I prepared the next part of my trip by renting two independent motels for my next two stops: one in Branson, Missouri and one in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Pretty early in my trip, I bought almost \$100 tickets to see the play Jesus in Branson, MO. The tickets were non-refundable, so I was kind of locked into this plan, though other parts of my vacation had been flexible. Chris van Leer had heard of Branson, and wanted me to photograph all the tacky things I saw there. Branson is a hotbed of tourist activity. I kept seeing ads, even on the rugs, for the Dolly Parton Stampede Meal. I almost went to it just seeing all the ads for it. There were amusement parks and water parks and other things to see in Branson, none of which I was interested in. I was there to see a play about Jesus. My EAP Counselor, from Mississippi at Raytoonin' suggested this play to me. I rented a room at the Rosebud Inn. I figure, with a name like that I couldn't go wrong. It was pretty much just okay though. A step up from Motel 6, but nothing special. I remember there wasn't really a proper desk there, so I had to use a round table as a computer desk.

The drive from Oklahoma City to Branson was gorgeous after I got off the major highway. I followed a major highway east bound, but then cut down to Branson through a state road. This part was absolutely beautiful. I guess this road cut through the Ozarks, so there were lots of hills and valleys on the roads, and they cut through rock mountains. Again, like in Kansas, I could see the highway miles ahead and swoop down low to then crest their peaks. It was just so beautiful. When I got to Branson, there were long, windy roads going through the Ozarks. Even though the man-made buildings and attractions were corny, the area was not. I bedded down for the night in the Rosebud Inn and then, the next day, went to Panera for lunch. I was totally amused that something as plain as a Panera could be found in Branson. I also bought more groceries.

At night, I went to the play. It was phenomenal. The scenery in the play was so stunning and well done. Trees looked real. Everything moved around as the play was going on. There were live camels and horses and birds and other animals used in the play. The acting was phenomenal. Before the play started, I talked with the people in the row before me. They were very friendly. I forgot to mention that although I had purchased the tickets way in advance, I wasn't able to reserve an aisle seat, which I felt I needed because I go to

the bathroom a lot. The night before the play, I complained to my friend Bill Schade about this, thinking they probably didn't honor my request for an aisle seat. But I called and found out that, not only was I in an aisle seat, but I was about 10 rows away from the stage! It was just so awesome. The play covered the whole life of Jesus. The theater had a huge bundle of LCD screens behind the stage, which they used to generate the background to the scenes, as needed. I think I was most impressed by the scene where Jesus walked on water and called Peter to Himself. There were huge waves on the LCD screen, but then the actual scenery moved up and down too, like the sea. It was so realistic, and the sets were done awesome. I know I haven't described the play too much, but it was phenomenal. The part where Jesus prayed in Gethsemane was fantastic, with the devil's voice taunting Jesus and red lights flashing. But then Jesus died on the cross and lightning struck everywhere, by strobe lights. Jesus came alive again. I don't know. I don't know how to describe it, but the whole thing was very thrilling. I actually bought a DVD of the play's performance, and I am willing to let you borrow it if You'd like. The play was totally worth the almost \$100 bucks. I bought a lot of other merchandise too. I never needed to go to the bathroom and my seat was great because they were doing social distancing so there was nobody sitting right next to me.

The next day, I drove from Branson, Missouri, to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. I got up early that day and drove to a nearby gas station to get ice to pour over all my Diet Coke, which I drank enroute to Arkansas. The GPS took me all these different back roads and stuff that cut through the Ozarks. It was hard driving because I had to concentrate a lot. Eventually, at probably around 8:00 Am or so, I got to my next Motel, the Trails Inn. They were gracious and let me rent my room even that early in the morning. Probably another God thing. I went and saw the Thorncrown Chapel, which was a fancy chapel made of walls of glass so you could see the outside from the inside, and vice versa. My Mom recommended it. It was quite nice, but overpopulated with camera wielding tourists like me. However, I did get to sit inside the chapel and read a bit from my pocket Bible. But I will admit feeling raced to get out of there. I returned back to the Trails Inn and took a long nap. This motel didn't really impress me, but it was still better than Motel 6. Eureka Springs, with much tighter roads than Branson, was another touristy kind of area. I survived on my own food, even though there were plenty of what looked like good restaurants nearby. I really am not a tourist.

In the evening, after my nap, I went to The Great Passion Play, which was hosted in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. This marked my seventh Midwest State I wanted to visit and my goal was accomplished: seven new states! The auditorium for this play was huge, and slanted way down. Being a big guy, it was hard to get up and down from my seat. I was a little concerned about the quality of this play when I saw all the buildings that made up the play's scenery. There was a town square, and upper room, a Pharisees chamber and lots of other things. But the buildings all looked kind of run down and dirty. But of course, I should mention that the tickets to this play were only 1/3 the price of the Branson play. So, I guess you get what you pay for.

My Dad wanted to go see a Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany that happens once every 10 years. I was thinking: what is the point when this Great Passion Play runs every single year. But the scenery was so run down. It made me wonder what the quality of the German play was like. Nevertheless, it got dark and I couldn't see all the dirt on the buildings. The play started at 8:30 and ran until 10:15 or so. It took a little while to get used to this play because all the dialog was overdubbed and the actors just mouthed the words. I was a little bummed by that, too. However, I suspended my disbelief and enjoyed myself. This play focuses on the last week of Jesus life. It was pretty entertaining and thorough. It showed Jesus whipping the temple merchants and washing the feet of the disciples in the upper room and all the other details about Jesus' passion. It was kind of amazing, because this was an outdoor affair. At one point, it started raining a little bit, but with the rain came lightning and thunder, which added to the action happening in the play! The part where Jesus came out of the grave people applauded. It was entertaining.

Then I went back to the Trails Inn to sleep. I did a lot of Christian stuff on this vacation. I guess it is where my heart is, as I feel Christian stuff is very entertaining and heartwarming to me.

The next day, on a Saturday, I drove to St. Louis, Missouri. I had to backtrack that curvy route from Eureka Springs, AR to Branson, MO, but then I also got to see those beautiful views in the sections of hilly roads. I just cannot express how beautiful the view from those roads were. I got to St. Louis no problem. Even though I did so much driving, I feel that God kept me safe from accidents because it is not my time yet. I am very aware of the fact that it is not my time, which is also why I was never afraid of COVID-19 like others were. I always wore my mask out of respect, but I did not fear

COVID-19. I did fear getting into an accident on my trip, but my fears were unfounded. This night I stayed at the Drury Inn, which was another upscale hotel. I stayed there for four nights.

On the night I got into St. Louis, I slept 11 hours! It was fantastic. I went to Church at Pathfinder, an LCMS Mega Church recommended by Mt. Calvary's Pastor E. However, it really wasn't a Mega Church, but seated around 200 people. It was very flashy. The worship music was like a concert with a fog machine and blue lighting. The Pastor gave a good message, but not as impressive as the Potter sermon. He spoke about how a wife should submit to her husband and a husband should love his wife. While I believe this is true, I think it is rare that a wife submits to her husband, even in Christian marriages. I find the verse from Genesis that says a wife's desire is for her husband, and he will rule over her, to be truer. Even the most well-intentioned wives seem to feel they know better than their husband. But this is just my jaded view. I was thinking about how I'd have to deal with this from my wife if I ever get married. Of course, husbands probably don't love their wives properly either, but I don't know. I didn't really like the topic of the sermon, which was supposedly about how ancient wisdom from the Bible still applies today. I was thinking the Pastor didn't have to choose such a hard Scripture to prove that. Anyway, at the end of the sermon, I got my photo with the Pastor and then took several photos of the building, which was huge.

The roads in St. Louis were generally two lanes wide with a crossing strip. This made traffic flow better, but there were a lot of lights in this city. I thought that Fargo had the best traffic setup of all the places I visited, but Fargo lacked any kind of flare of interest.

After Church, I drove downtown to see the Gateway Arch, which is the Arch that represents the Gateway to the West. I figured the best way to view this Arch would be from Illinois, from which people would be entering the West. So, I just randomly got off the highway in Illinois and started driving around until I got near the Arch. This was a little easier said than done. I actually found that the part of Illinois east of the Mississippi River was actually very depressed and dilapidated. I was surprised by this, because it is so close to St. Louis, which is built up and a beautiful city. In Illinois, I did discover a nice park and got a stunning photo of the Arch with an America flag underneath it. Then I drove to the Missouri side of the Arch and took more photos. I really captured it well, but then again, I guess it is not hard to photograph a big monument.



With the remainder of my day, I went to Salt + Smoke for St. Louis Ribs BBQ. I was rewarded with a delicious meal. I think this was the best meal of the trip. Those St. Louis ribs were so good, smothered in sweet sauce. I was really impressed by Salt + Smoke. After this day, I think I felt vacationed out. I went back to the Drury Inn and they gave me three complimentary alcoholic drinks. I had rum and Cokes. They also offered a free dinner, but I only went to it once. As the day closed into evening, I started poking around on my phone while lying in my bed. I bought some tickets for the tram to the top of the Gateway Arch that were like \$15 bucks or so. But I must have started thinking about how I have very little money and would be returning to poverty after my trip. In reality, this didn't happen, but it was the way I was feeling. I have never really been all that successful in my financial life because of bipolar disorder. I also wasn't looking forward to returning to my botched Raytoonin' situation (I am on a medical leave).

The next day, Monday, I started to feel really kind of anxious for the first time on my trip. It was caused by the fact that I knew I would have to return home soon to the demons that taunt me in my home. The vacation had been so free and fun loving until that point. I slept in late and then went and got my third massage.

I should mention that although my vacation was 28 days, going sharply from place to place and doing so much during my vacation made me feel like it was much more spread out. Even though it had only been a week since my last massage in Oklahoma City, it felt like two or three weeks ago.

Anyway, this massage was okay. I was also using much better beds and desk chairs, so my back was feeling better at this point in my trip.

I was feeling kind of bummed though, and a little anxious. When I went to St. Louis, Pastor E had sent me an extremely detailed list of things to do. One of them was to see a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game. So, a week or so out, I bought tickets to the game. During the day, I wasn't sure if I really wanted to go, but I did. I try to just let God lead me in things, and let Him do things through me. Prior to the game, I went to the top of the Gateway Arch, which was interesting because the elevator car had to rotate while going up the side of the Arch. The elevator car was actually this small round cannister that seated four or five people. Because of COVID restrictions, I got the car to myself. There were eight cars in total. The cars took four minutes to get to the top, and later, three minutes to get down. While going up and down, all

you could see were the stair cases in the arch. It was really tight quarters. But at the top, the views were great. I snapped photos of the depressed Illinois side, which included the shadow of the Gateway Arch on the Mississippi River. The St. Louis side looked beautiful with all the buildings. I also saw Busch Stadium, where the baseball game would be played. They only allowed 10 minutes at the top, so soon I was headed back down in this metal contraption.

I walked over to the ballgame and found my seat. It was close to the first base line. We were treated to a win: the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Florida Marlins. The Florida Marlins are now called the Miami Marlins, but I was going with outdated memory, so I called them the Florida Marlins. Anyway, St. Louis beat them 4 – 2. There were fireworks at the end. The game was interesting and fun, but I couldn't relax. I don't know why, but I was really scared someone would accidentally pour beer on me and then laugh. This didn't even remotely come true, but I don't know. My fears. I moved from my seat two different times, finally settling on an aisle seat that didn't have anyone adjacent to me. I was watching the female usher, who was probably a decade older than me. I noticed she didn't feel uncomfortable being around all the drinking, so I tried to draw courage from that. Anyway, the game was good, and I got nice photos, but like the Fargo BBQ, it is not something I'd probably do again. I got back to my hotel safely, though the route was confusing with lots of twisty turns for this exit or that exit in the dark. There were so many people pouring out of the stadium. That was kind of impressive but unnerving at the same time. It seems like a lot of people drink at ball games and I didn't feel completely safe even though nothing bad happened.

On my final full day in St. Louis, I went to the LCMS Headquarters. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, is headquartered in Missouri, obviously. I had vain hopes of getting my photo with LCMS President, Pastor Harrison, but I couldn't even get into the building, even though I think he was actually in Texas. I had emailed him and called his office asking for a photograph with him, but nobody got back to me. I also left him a comment on his Facebook post, but he didn't respond to that either. Oh well: I tried. The LCMS Headquarters was big, but I couldn't learn much about it from the outside. It didn't seem like there was really anything to do there.

Then I went to Concordia Seminary, where Pastor E got his divinity degree. He told me a lot of things to do there, like visit the library, visit the chapel, the bell tower and the park. I did all those things, but couldn't get into the library

because it was closed. It was a pretty small campus and all the buildings had the same architecture, so they all looked really nice. They were made out of light tan bricks or stone. I was able to get inside the chapel for a look around and some photos. Finally, I went over to nearby Kaldi's Coffeehouse and got an iced coffee to enjoy in the park, like Pastor E suggested. It was fun, but I felt kind of rushed. I am not really a tourist and it was my last day of the major part of my trip and I was starting to feel anxious, like I mentioned. But I am very glad I saw Concordia Seminary, a place of ministry training to the lovely LCMS Church.

I returned to the Drury Inn and went to bed around 5:00 o'clock, after having one last meal of St. Louis ribs at Salt + Smoke.

I was debating what to do on the next part of my trip. Enroute home, it was a short detour to the Ark Encounter, a museum that had a life-sized replica of Noah's Ark, according to the Biblical accounts of what God told Noah to build. I kind of felt it would be good to see, but the entrance was \$50 bucks and the parking was \$10 bucks, and I'd have to rent a motel for two nights to really see it. I was getting kind of concerned about money, so I was reluctant to pull the trigger. I was also vacationed out and didn't know if I'd really enjoy it. So, I hemmed and hawed about it. On Wednesday, I woke up around 5:00 Am, and decided to start driving home. I still wasn't sure about it though. I didn't feel like going, but I was looking for God to give me a sign. Then, while driving, GPS rerouted me exactly southbound to where I'd have to go to see it! However, I didn't feel that was enough of a sign, so I finally skipped it completely and continued driving to Pittsburgh, where I stayed with two friends: Bill & Kris, a married couple that I know.

I was driving for 11 hours straight, and when I got to Pittsburgh, I was just in time for spaghetti dinner! Bill & Kris were good hosts, but I guess I wasn't really ready to see people again. It was so different than flying solo for most of my vacation. Also, they were both working. I stayed with them three nights. The first night I slept so long that I didn't wake up until 2:00 PM. The second night, Kris heated up a Pittsburgh specialty: pierogies, which are dumplings made with potato and other things, like cheese and sauerkraut. They were very good. My third day in Pittsburgh, I woke up after 15 hours and then went to Panera for a little while. I was really suffering with the realization that my vacation was finally over. I told Kris how I was afraid of the demons awaiting me back home, but also explained that for some reason, I really wanted to go home. After the dinner of

pierogies, I went to bed right away (Thursday). For my final night in Pittsburgh, we had pizza. Then we prayed together and I tried to go to sleep, but this time could not fall asleep until like 1:00 Am (after two nights of getting 15 hours of sleep). I felt kind of uncomfortable spending time at their home when they were both working, and Kris works from home. I don't know. I guess I just wasn't really ready to be with other people, but Bill & Kris were cool and let me do what I wanted. I was really worried about the demons back home: the demons of mental illness. I would also have to face financial reality.

On Saturday, after I woke up, I packed my car and drove home at 10:00 Am. It took 12 hours. I was treated to nice views of downtown Pittsburgh with the three rivers and all the bridges. It was kind of interesting, because the last vacation I went on, in October of 2019, before the pandemic, was to Bill & Kris' in Pittsburgh. And then my first stay with friends on vacation after the pandemic was also with Bill & Kris! On the way home, it was raining. The drive was pretty uneventful, but the closer I get to home, the more impatient I get to be home. In St. Louis and after, I kind of had this feeling that something would go wrong with my car. I should mention that I used my personal vehicle, a 2007 Honda Fit, for this vacation. The car turned 200,000 miles old on my first day of the trip! However, I had the car mechanically inspected to ensure it could make the trip. I got new tires, brakes, serpentine belt and an oil change. However, the mechanic must not have looked close enough at the exhaust, because, as I drove through Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, the muffler fell off! Well, it kind of got disconnected, and started dragging on the ground. I was talking with Roger when this happened and I noticed that my exhaust was louder and it sounded like my Bluetooth phone had static. In reality, this was the muffler pipe dragging on the ground. I called my mechanic, who graciously answered even though he was on a vacation with his wife, and he told me to tie up the part that was dragging. So, I pulled over and looked and I saw that the front of the muffler was dragging along the ground. Because of this, I was able to pull the muffler off the rubber parts holding the back of it and put it in my back hatch. My exhaust was loud the rest of the ride home, but honestly, I was so thankful that this happened on my last day of driving and not somewhere in between, while on my trip. It really didn't upset me at all that the muffler fell off. I really try to view more things as from God, even if they are inconveniences. After I pulled the muffler off, I talked to Art Rankis on the phone. He calls himself "The Delivery Boy." It was nice that he called to check in, though I had to call him back because of the muffler fiasco.

I got home at 10:00 Pm at night and said hello to my housemate, Roger, then went to bed. It felt really weird to be home. The weather had been kind of hot in Kansas and then all through St. Louis. But thankfully, at home, I could fall asleep even though I hadn't installed my AC unit.

My vacation was over, 5,721.6 miles and 28 days later. What a tremendous blessing from the Lord!

The next part is a little silly, but also kind of sweet. As I mentioned, I wasn't very happy to be home, because the demons of mental illness awaited me, and a sort of financial reckoning. The finances turned out to be fine and I had some financial padding. But I really wasn't ready to be home. I wanted to document my trip in an Etoonin' (which I am finally doing here over two weeks after my trip ended). As I mentioned, I try to let things spring up from God. Well, in order to really feel all the feelings I felt on the trip, I decided to go to a nice hotel in Marlborough on Sunday night, the day after I arrived home. I wasn't sure this was such a great idea, but in the end I did it anyway. I ended up staying two nights (Sunday and Monday) at a Hilton property that was very, very nice. In the end, I wasn't able to really complete the Etoonin', so I gave up for a more opportune time. However, when I first got situated in the hotel, I felt really, really good, with the AC blowing on me, the sun coming through the window, the comfortable desk chair. I started praying to God by typing my prayers into my laptop, and the most amazing thing started to happen. I started to cry as I prayed, and I just poured out all the ways I was thankful to God for the amazing thing He had done for me in sending me on a 28-day trip just because I wanted to go. I was so, so grateful! It felt so good to realize just what God had done for me and how gracious He had been to me. It felt like a pure act of worship to thank Him, through tears. That might have even been the best part of the trip because I have never felt so grateful like that before, and God has sent me on some amazing trips. It really was a trip of a lifetime. As Paul Noland wrote me, I was going on a trip that most people would never be able to take.

After this prayer, I started working on the Etoonin'. I have tried to highlight just how fortunate I was to have every moment of this trip, but I don't think words do it justice. I spent two days working on the Etoonin' in that Hilton hotel, but really did not even come close to finishing the documentation. I actually stopped around 5:00 Pm the next day and just lay in bed, incredibly sad at my return to reality. It was then that God spoke to me and reassured me and guaranteed me that He was healing me of all the hurts I have

known. It was precious to hear his voice.

In the following days after my vacation, I decided to get a part-time job at Hobby Lobby. I did this on Tuesday after I left the hotel. I had my application already filled out, so I drove over to Hobby Lobby and passed on my application. I got an interview the next day, and, at the end of that interview, the Store Manager offered me the job. I was very psyched about how quickly that happened. But, when it came time to start the job, I had to humble myself as I realized I went from a high paying Raytoonin' job to a minimum wage retail job. I should also mention that I had paid a \$3,000 tuition payment to ICON Collective for a music class. Unfortunately, I had to back out of the class and get my money back. It was a disappointment. Later, in the weeks after my trip, I did my budget for July and saw that I probably could have still afforded the class, but I think it is for the best that I wait until the fall to try and take the class. For whatever reason, Raytoonin' just isn't working out, though I will probably try to work there again when the employees return to the office. Hobby Lobby didn't work out either: I quit after one week.

Even though I wasn't able to finish my vacation documentation right after my trip, I worked on it slowly as the Lord allowed me and finally, thankfully, I got it done! I hope you enjoyed reading about my trip, but the main reason I wrote all this is to remind myself of all the Lord did for me on my fantabulous vacation.

So that is the story of my Midwest 7 State Tour and I pass all the thanks and the glory along to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

~James A. Bures, 7/6/2021 – Edited 7/17/2021

In addition to my thankfulness to God, I am very thankful for my Father, Charles Bures, who essentially paid for my trip. He gave me a \$5,000 check this year. At the time, I used it for living expenses, but got reimbursed for these when Social Security paid me 5 months of back pay they owed me. So that money was then used for this trip. But, essentially, it was my Dad who enabled this trip to happen. If he hadn't given me the \$5,000, I would not have been able to take this glorious vacation. I am very thankful for my Dad, and his generosity toward me. Praise the Lord Jesus Christ!



# Daily Summary

## Day 1 - 05/23/2021 - Sunday

Today was a Sunday. I packed up one day before planned and drove from Marlborough, MA to Buffalo, NY. My daily night stays in Motel 6 began! My car also turned 200,000 miles old today. I had it thoroughly inspected and did needed repairs before I left (new brakes, tires, drive shafts, serpentine belt).



## Day 2 - 05/24/2021 - Monday

Today I visited Niagara Falls in the morning, and then continue driving to Elkhart, IN. The Red Coach Inn is a restaurant right next to the Falls that I like to park at. It is metered parking and a short walk to the Falls. I highly recommend parking there! I've been there twice so far.



## Day 3 - 05/25/2021 - Tuesday

Today I completed the drive to Des Moines, Iowa, the first of seven new states I'll see. Iowa is so beautiful! The whole ride in to Des Moines was covered with luscious rolling farmland. There were at least 50 wind turbines. I admired how Iowa was not afraid to spoil views to remain energy independent. Over 50% of their power comes from wind turbines.



Day 4 - 05/26/2021 - Wednesday

Throughout my life, I eat at Panera quite frequently. I started off this vacation going to Panera in Iowa and North Dakota, but after that I found myself doing other things. The women I saw talking at Panera gave me a feeling of warm friendship amongst Iowans. Then I got the best deep tissue massage I've ever had! It was simply awesome, with the masseuse digging her elbow into my lower back. I needed a massage after the long car ride out.

After that, I went to the Living History Farm. It is farm and town recreation of 1876 Farm Life in Iowa. I got to speak to the blacksmith and learn about the history of this region. For instance, John Deere produced tilling plows, pulled by horses, that can plant two rows of corn. The same equipment in today's farms can plant 48 rows of corn. I found it interesting how the blacksmith said that the people of 1876 thought they had it so much easier than the original settlers in the early 1800's because the land was already cleared of trees, and people had built the houses and there was railroad service. I thought that was amazing. Imagine how people are going to feel about our society in 100 years, even though we think we have it made now with Google and smart phones and whatnot! I also learned that, before anesthesia, the most common surgery was amputations, and that people had to just deal with the pain with no anesthesia. Crazy!



Top Left: Panera for lunch

Top Right: Living History Farms

Btm Right: the Blacksmith

Btm Left: my first dinner out!

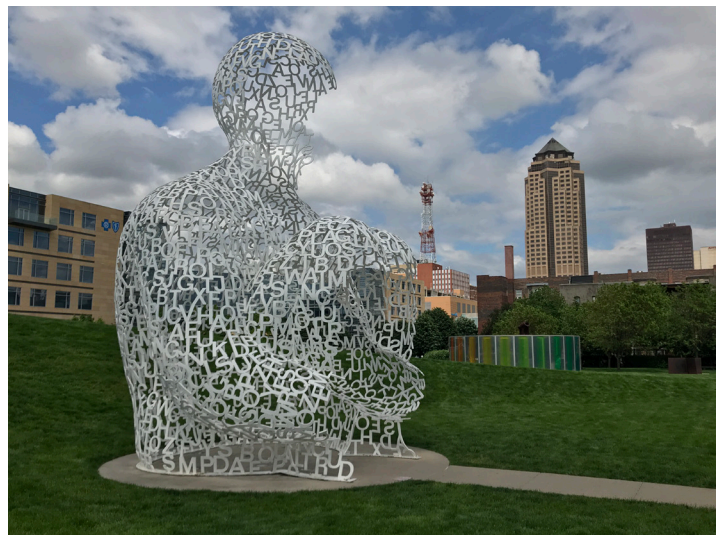


Day 5 - 05/27/2021 - Thursday

Today was mostly a planning day. I took about 4 hours to flesh out the rest of my trip and figure out logistics. It was a cloudy and rainy morning anyway. I enjoyed the organizational challenge. I also successfully invited myself to a Memorial Day BBQ in Fargo, North Dakota! That is one of the benefits of being a card carrying Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod member. My Pastor, Pastor E, spoke on my behalf to the Fargo Pastor. That sealed the deal. Then I drove to downtown Des Moines. It is a small city with some older buildings and some modern buildings. It looks quaint. The Des Moines State Capitol is particularly beautiful. I captured it here with the sun shining on it. It has such a lovely gold dome:



At the recommendation of Chris van Leer, I saw the Pappajohn Sculpture Park. This was a multimillion dollar project with funding from a variety of sources. It has a lot of crazy sculptures in it:









### Day 5 - 05/27/2021 - Thursday - Continued

After visiting the Sculpture park, I ate at the Americana Restaurant. I wanted a taste of local fare, but ended up with this delicious hummus plate for only \$7. In the restaurant, a woman talked to me once overhearing I was from Boston. This solidified my impression that Iowans are friendly.



### Day 6 - 05/28/2021 - Friday - Minnesota

The drive to the Land of 10,000 Lakes was again set with the beautiful, rolling farms of Iowa. I took the 4.5 hour trek from Iowa to Minneapolis, MN. I had trouble sleeping and was really tired. I napped in my Motel 6 before I met up with a friend named Bethy that I know from the Odd Todd TV Chat Board 15 years ago. We went to the Mall of America. I am not usually impressed with consumerism, but this mall was something else. It had an amusement park inside! It was huge: at least four stories tall and probably half a mile long. We went to dinner and she treated, that was nice.

I noticed that most people in Minnesota still wore masks, whereas in Indiana and Iowa, people didn't bother anymore. I am betting this goes on party lines.



### Day 7 - 05/29/2021 - Saturday - Fargo, North Dakota

After a very refreshing 10 hours sleep, I drove 235 miles from Minneapolis, MN to Fargo, ND in 4.5 hours (that is 52.222222 mph). I saw these signs along the way (see left). I also captured the view from my Motel 6. This was probably the nicest Motel 6 I stayed in. ND marks state 42 out of 50.



## Day 8 - 05/30/2021 - Sunday - St. Andrew's Lutheran Church

Today marks the start of my second full week of vacation. I went to bed last night at 7:00 PM and woke up at 4:00 AM.

The first thing I did today was go to Church. I am part of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, which has Church locations all over the U.S.A. When I travel, I like to visit various LCMS Churches and get photographs of the Church and photos of me with the Pastor. Today is no different.

Church was quite amazing. I had emailed the Pastor a few days ago, when in Des Moines, to see if I could join someone's Memorial Day BBQ. Today, I met the man who volunteered: Joe Franklin. He seems like an accomplished nice guy. I also met the Pastor, Reverend Clark Jahnke and the Associate Pastor, Reverend Adam Harvala. Pastor Jahnke is a good natured man with a quick wit. The service was really good. It was interesting to see how it was different from my home Church in MA. The Gospel reading was from John 3, which contained my life verse, John 3:16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have Eternal Life. A life destined for Heaven need not rely on being more good than bad, but relying upon Jesus' completed work of forgiveness on the cross. One of my favorite parts of the service is the confession: a reminder of how sinful I am, how rebellious my heart is toward God, but then come the blessed words of forgiveness for all that.

The thing with COVID is winding down. The mask mandate is being lifted in most areas, though some people still wear masks. At this Church, we did not have to wear masks. An interesting part of the service came at the beginning, when the Pastor said to show each other a sign of God's peace. So I started shaking people's hands. This is the first time I've been able to shake a person's hand in over a year! I was wondering why some people didn't extend their hand to me, and now I realize it was because they are so used to caution.

After Service, I firmed up details with Joe Franklin to join his daughter's graduation party. I expressed my trepidation at interrupting a family event, but he said I was welcome to come from 2:00 - 4:00 Pm tomorrow. Also, Pastor Adam's son said I was welcome in Fargo as long as I was not a Patriot's fan. Whoops! He said, "Well, at least you are wearing purple." Purple is the color of his team, the Minnesota Vikings.

After Church, I went to Panera for breakfast and some computer time. When I got there, I realized I forgot to pack my mouse, and I had my trackpad disconnected, so I thought I'd have to go back to the motel and get the mouse. But then I remembered that I had packed an extra mouse in my computer bag! But then that didn't work. But then I remembered that I packed an extra battery in my computer bag! That did the trick. I thought it was so nice how God spared me the trip to and from the motel again just to enjoy some computer time. I was amazed.

Then I drove to downtown Fargo and poked around. I got a photo of the famous Fargo Theater. It is registered as a historic site by the United States Department of the Interior. Downtown was quaint and nice, like a Florence, MA, for example, or some older mill town. I noticed a lot of the places had neon signs, which worked well together. Then I went grocery shopping and now I am resting. I got several calls from my friends.







#### Day 9 - 05/31/2021 - Memorial Day

Today I mostly rested. I only got six hours of sleep last night. I went to Chick-fil-A for lunch.

Then I went to the cookout at Joe Franklin's house from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM. It was actually a high school graduation party for his daughter, so it was really nice that he invited me. I gave his daughter a card with a gift (cash). I came in and there was a bar run by his son. Joe asked me what I wanted and I almost wanted a Bud Light, but then I saw that he had Guinness, so I ordered a Guinness. This made him very happy, as he just discovered Guinness after visiting Ireland in 2013. He said, "Wait, do you want a black and tan?" Of course! So that was a nice start. It was a lot of family, and I was pleasant to everyone. One older gentleman told he experienced depression, so I felt for him. It was a little awkward, as Joe's sister point blank asked me what I was doing there. And, you know how family is: some people didn't seem happy there.

I had some of the food and it was a very good spread. The event was held in what looked like an open garage. It was very well done. I wasn't prepared for how people would advise me to do this or that touristy type things. It seemed like everyone had suggestions where to visit. The teenagers there were very respectful. I spoke with Pastor Jahnke, who was there with his wife. That was a nice conversation. I also spoke to a retired Deacon, Ken, who asked how I had so much time to vacation.

I am glad I did that. God really blesses me, and the body of believers in general. I did not take any photos of the day.



Day 10 - 06/01/2021 - Tuesday - Travel Day

I slept from 7:00 Pm to 6:00 Am last night: great sleep! I am thankful for everyone's prayers for sleep and safe travels.

Today I drove from Fargo, ND to Sioux Falls, SD. As I was driving, I just felt so grateful to God that He brought me to North Dakota. I had such a good feeling in my heart. The speed limit in ND was 75 mph! And when I got to SD, the speed limit was 80 mph! It was a little unnerving driving so fast, but I made record time to Sioux Falls. I got to Sioux Falls around 11:30 Am, and headed directly over to the Sioux Waterfalls in the center of the city. They are beautiful: a real treat to the locals.

Since I made such good time and was feeling good, I decided to continue driving to Omaha, Nebraska. Here the speed limit was a more modest 70 mph. However, I-29 goes down to Omaha in Iowa, not Nebraska. I am staying in a Motel 6 in Iowa, so I have not technically been to Nebraska yet. So I could not claim my 43 state today: shucks!





Day 11 - 06/02/2021 - Wednesday - Omaha Museum Day

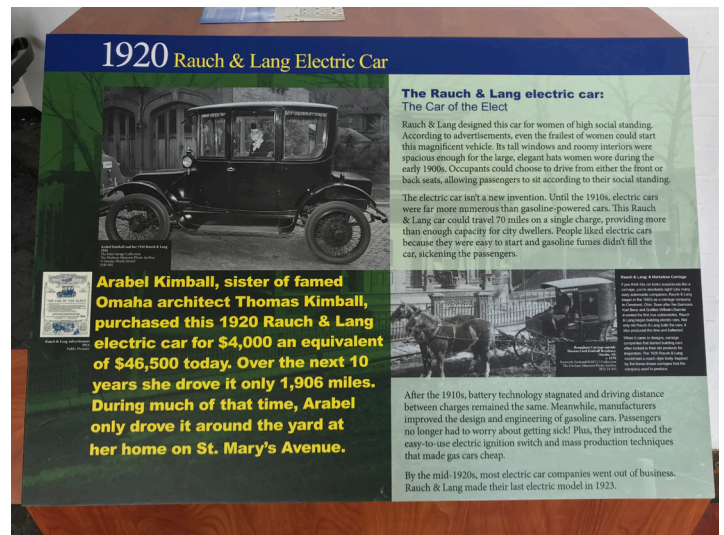
Last night I slept 8.5 hours. Not too shabby. Please keep praying for good sleep.

This morning I switched Motel properties so that I could have an easier escape from the city tomorrow. Omaha is nice, but I haven't decided if I like it or not. One thing I do like about it is how hilly it is. I love hilly cities like Seattle, Pittsburgh and Omaha seems to have the same amount of hills.

Then I went and saw the Durham Museum, named after a generous benefactor. This museum was in an old train station. It had a few trains as part of the museum. The bulk of the museum was dedicated to the history of Omaha. It was very interesting.

After this, I went to the Mormon Trail Museum. This was free! I didn't even realize that until I left. It detailed the history of the Mormons getting kicked out of Illinois and how Brigham Young led the Mormons to settle in Salt Lake City. I really love the Mormons, so I enjoyed this. It sounded like a very hard move for the Mormons, as they were underprepared and forced to leave in winter.

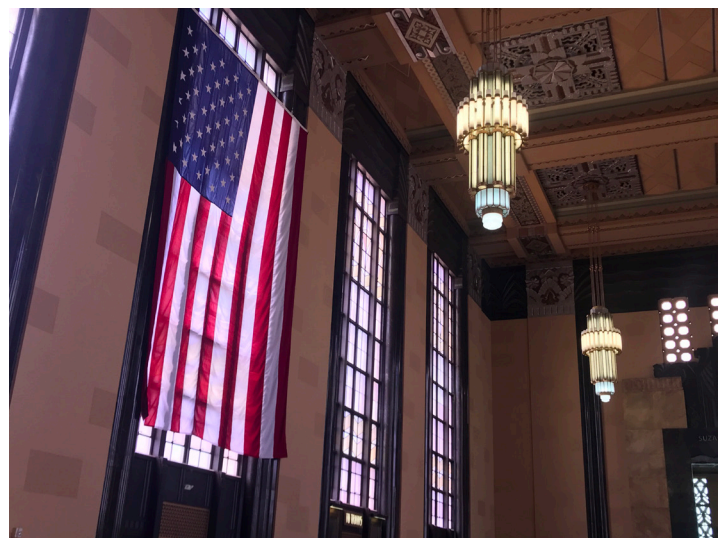
Then came a 1.5 hour nap and finally an Omaha Steak for dinner!



Electric cars were actually quite popular in the early 1900's. They were less dangerous to start, which made them attractive to women. Then the world pushed gasoline powered engines with an automatic start (instead of a crank) and gas cars caught on.







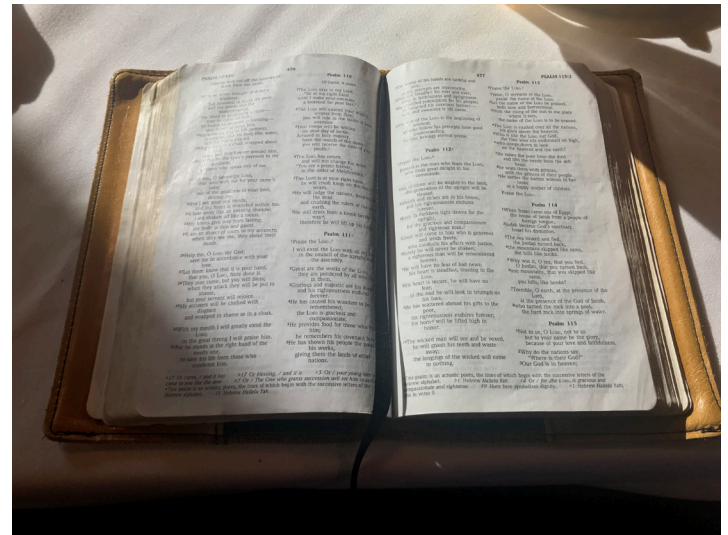
The Mormon Trail Museum (below) detailed how the Mormons moved from Illinois to Salt Lake City after much persecution. They were forced to leave in winter and it was very hard. This museum showed the determination of the Mormons to pursue a better life. There was an outpost in Omaha that allowed Mormons to prosper by supplying frontiersmen with supplies. The Mormons were forced to leave in winter, and at some points, they encountered mud and it was really tough to get carriages through. They were allowed to make a temporary outpost somewhere (I forget where) and the museum focused on that a lot too.







The first people to move had oxen and wagons like this, but that was living large for the Mormons. Many more had to travel with hand carts. These people largely had to get rid of most of their possessions and start completely new in Salt Lake City. Eventually there was train service which took the travel time from 75 days (hand cart) or 90 days (oxen wagon) to three days. The Mormons generally had to sit in the front of the train where there was smog. This was because those were the cheapest seats. Brigham Young chose the location of Salt Lake City because there was nothing there that would attract others. They truly could start fresh. These Mormons learned about irrigation and that really helped the settlement in Salt Lake City. They build a temple that faced the one they left in Illinois.



## Day 12 - 06/03/2021 - Thursday - U.S. Center Chapel +

I got 12 hours of sleep last night! Praise God! Today consisted of four things, which resulted in a lot of photos:

1. Stations of the Cross - 14 Sculptures of Jesus on His way to the cross
2. Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln, NE
3. Driving from Omaha, NE to Smith Center, KS
4. Visiting the U.S. Center Chapel in Lebanon, KS















Runza is popular fast food in Nebraska. They make their own bread. Their signature is steak 'n' cheese. Below are photos of the Nebraska state capitol in Lincoln.



I don't think I really like Nebraska. I am not totally sure, but it didn't really impress me. I like everything I did there, the museums and such, and I liked the hills of Omaha, but the rest of the state was just flat farms. I dunno. Just my first impression, I guess. I also didn't like the traffic in Omaha. I saw huge backups during rush hour (but thankfully never got caught in any of them).

I drove I-80 West and then took state roads (65) down to Smith Center, KS. Again, lots of flat farms in Nebraska. There were also a lot of cars and trucks on I-80, much more than I saw in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. It wasn't as nice driving with all the traffic.

But on the back roads, I crossed into Kansas and almost immediately two things happened. One is that there were no more cars: I was pretty much driving on the road alone. Second is that the land became much more hilly and beautiful. Below is an example. I was totally rewarded with lovely views. Because of the fact that the road was straight AND the road was hilly, there were some hilltops I could see 5 miles of road from. It was just so beautiful. I think I like Kansas just based on this fact. The drive down through Kansas was so rewarding. I only came this way to see the Geographic Center of the Lower 48 States, which took me a total of 6 hours of driving out of my way. But I was totally rewarded by the views I saw. I'd totally do that ride again. My only sorrow is that I will probably never drive that way again.





The Buckshot Inn



And, in Smith Center, I found this quaint Motel. So much more life to it than Motel 6. The Buckshot Inn.

## The U.S. Center Chapel

And finally, I visited the U.S. Center Chapel at the Geographic Center of the Lower 48 States. I took a lot of photos of this chapel so you could really get a feel for what it is like. It was very small, maybe 9' x 12' inside. I took a lot of photos, but also read Scripture aloud and prayed that God unite our country and heal our land from division. I thought Art might appreciate the thorough documentation of this Chapel:













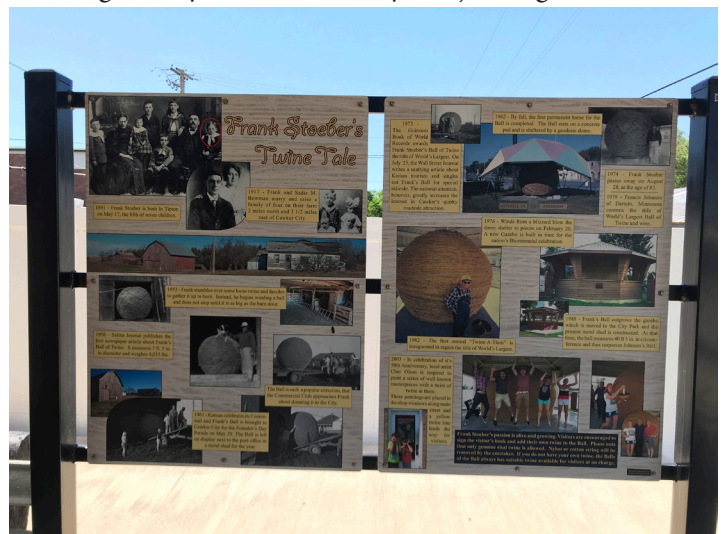


Day 13 - 06/04/2021 -  
Friday - Travel Day

## The World's Largest Ball of Twine

I was also fortunate to learn that I was about 30 minutes away from the World's Largest Ball of Twine! So I went and check it out. This is what it looks like. I really only drove that 30 minutes because I knew it would really please my brother to show him that I saw it. In fact, he enjoyed my photo of it so much, he was moved to offer to pay for one of my dinners at a Kansas City Steakhouse! What a nice reaction. Kansas remained a very beautiful place in the countryside.

Now I am lodging in Kansas City and tomorrow (Saturday) I am taking the day off to do laundry and just veg out a little bit.







Day 14 - 06/05/2021 - Saturday - Day Off

Last night I got 11 hours of sleep! I was a little glum today, but it kind of wore off a bit as the day went on.

Can you guess by this Mahomes photo where I am?

I took today off after several days of travel and museums and whatnot. I planned my things to see in Kansas City. I also went to dinner at Jack's Stacks BBQ with Erika and her husband, Lincoln, and son, Tyler. They send their love to all of you back in New England! Dinner and conversation were delightful.

I also did my laundry and grocery shopping. I am so tired of Motel 6, LOL. This one is particularly slummy.

Tomorrow I will go to an LCMS Church in the morning and then play it by ear from there. I want to go to the WWI museum and IHOPKC (International House of Prayer, Kansas City) tomorrow.

My back is really hurting. Please pray that I can find a good massage on Monday and that my back feels better.

I feel so blessed to be on this trip. I will leave you with this quote from the amazing Paul, "You are on an amazing trip that few people ever take."



Day 15 - 06/06/2021 - Sunday - Church Day +

I got 9.5 hours of sleep last night, and felt well rested: praise God!

Before I forget these key details, today I went into downtown Kansas City, and that is actually in Missouri, so as of today, I've visited 45 United States.

Also, because of my complaints about Motel 6 in my last email, my Mom graciously offered to pay for a night in a much better hotel. Thanks, Mom!

Anyway, today started with Church at a local LCMS Church (Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod). I have documented the Church well in photos below with people who like detail, like Art, in mind. I find it fascinating what different LCMS Churches look like. This Church Service seemed unique from other LCMS ones because they pretty much got right to the service without the liturgy. There was a baptism, and then the Sermon, maybe with just one worship song to start. The Sermon was particularly awesome, and hit me right where I needed it. The Pastor shared his sermon with a local Dentist whose hobby is pottery. This Dentist, Rick Hammel, likened different parts of spinning a clay jar to how God is the ultimate Potter and our hearts and lives are His clay. The potter would give a little bit about the pottery process, while actually making a pot on stage, then Pastor Russ would chime in with Bible verses and how it related to God as our Father. The whole service was just so touching: I was in tears the whole Sermon. I can't do it justice, but the impression I walked away with is that hard years of my life (2012 in particular) were parts where God broke down my heart and recreated it better than I could have done myself. It also related to something I've been thinking lately, and that is that I am God's to do what He wants with. He gets the final say, not me.







Then I ate a salad at a local Panera. You might be surprised to hear that I haven't been going to Panera much on this vacation.

After that, I drove into the city to visit the Crown Center. I love sending out Birthday, Anniversary and Thank You Cards, and so I am a big fan of Hallmark, whose main offices are in Kansas City. Next to the Hallmark Gold Crown Store was an art exhibit featuring a very created and well known Jewish cartoonist and card designer, Saul Steinberg. Here are a few of his pieces:





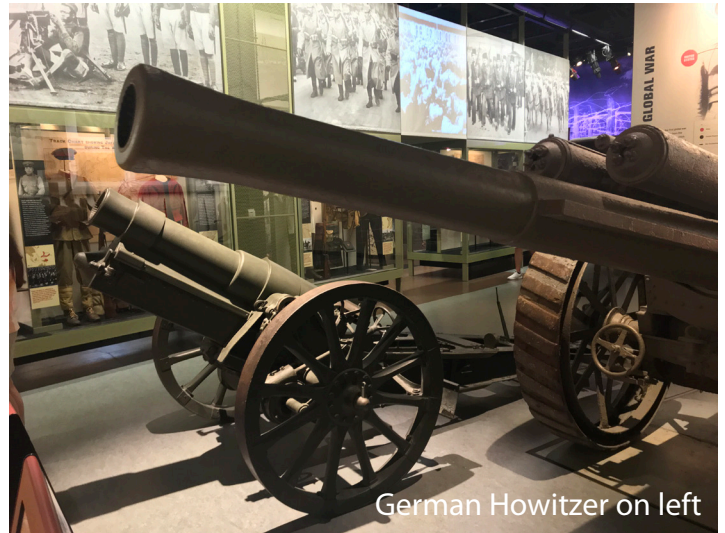
Finally, I went to the WWI Museum, where I learned that it is not very well known why WWI happened. It seems a confusing series of treaties countries had with each other to help defend each other. The war started when someone assassinated a prominent leader. It is interesting, the assassination was actually called off, but word didn't get to the assassin in time, so the murder went ahead. There had been a long period of building lots of weapons and new ships and things like that, which created an arms race. So it was like a powder keg in a dry room. The war also seemed to relate to class divisions, and people wanting more socialism in their countries. The war started in 1914, I believe, with the US joining in 1917. The great war ended on 11/11/2018 at 11:00 Am. The battle conditions were very poor. On the Western Front, series of trenches developed and the line of battle remained the same for long periods of time.

I highly recommend the movie "1917" for a taste of what WWI was like. It isn't a very bloody movie.

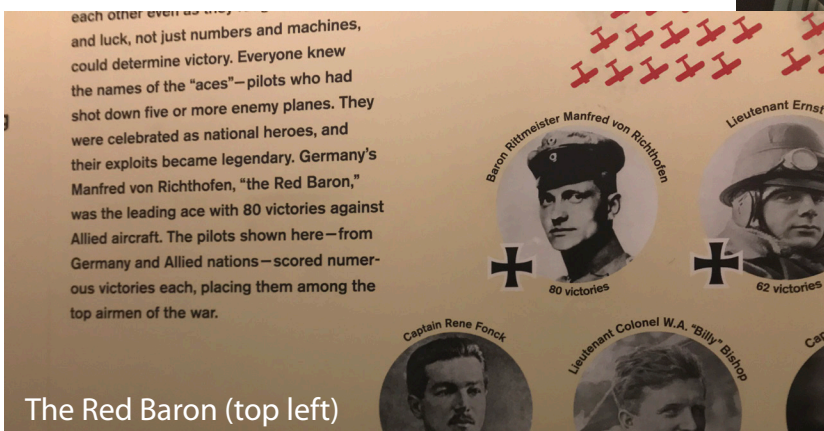
Here are some photos of the memorabilia stored in the musuem...



French Revolver



German Howitzer on left



The Red Baron (top left)

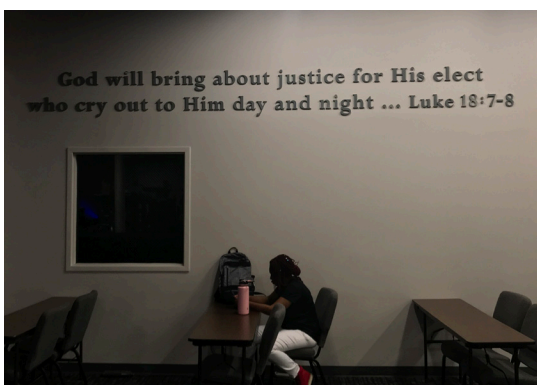
WWI saw the rapid development of the airplane. The airplane was invented in 1903 by the Wright Brothers in NC, but the war accelerated the development of aircraft and their use in the war. The "Red Baron," featured in Peanuts cartoons, was a German pilot who won 80 air battles.





I had dinner at Slap's BBQ. It was delicious with a nice view of the building downtown.

Then I went to IHOP! The International House of Prayer. This is a Church started in 1999 that features worship bands playing 2 hours sets 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They do this to cry out to God for our world in the style of Old Testament round the clock worship. I guess the idea is that they really want to seek God. The service basically consists of a band playing the whole time, sometimes in worship and other times in intercession (praying to ask God to intercede in our world), along with spoken prayers or Bible passages. I saw one hour of each type of music. It is basically like a kind of mellow live concert. It is very charismatic, if you have ever been to a charismatic Church. There weren't very many people there.



I spent two hours at IHOP. It was interesting, but not my cup of tea anymore. But it is a one of a kind attraction if you are ever in Kansas City, MO. If you are really interested in seeing what Charismatic services are like, you can get a taste at the Metrowest Bridge, in Natick, MA.



Day 16 - 06/07/2021 - Monday - Heaven!

Well, today was a very good day. My Mom, who read about the Motel 6 slum nights, treated me to two nights at Holiday Inn Express! It is like going to Europe after living in the deep south. Thanks, Mom! It is just so, so much nicer, more comfortable, cleaner and better.

I got 8.5 hours of sleep last night: I'll take it. I was excited to wake up and get going. I drove from Kansas City, KS to Oklahoma City, OK. It took about six hours. I drove through Wichita, KS, but couldn't not see any buildings comprising a downtown. What I did see seemed rather dilapidated.

Because of reaching Oklahoma, I am now at 46 states visited!

I think I'll be staying in Holiday Inn or something similar until the end of my trip.

Here is what the beautiful, comfy bed looks like:



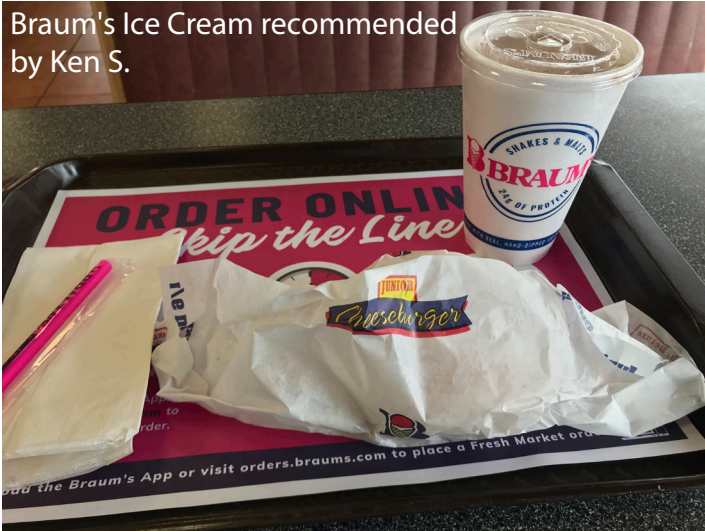


Day 17 - 06/08/2021 - Tuesday - Oklahoma City

Today was a little more low key. I relaxed at my hotel and then went to the Memorial Monument and Museum. It details the background and the particulars about how Tim McVeigh killed 168 people in the Oklahoma City Bombing on April 19th, 1995. He was totally misguided.

After this, I took a nap and got a much needed deep tissue massage on my back.

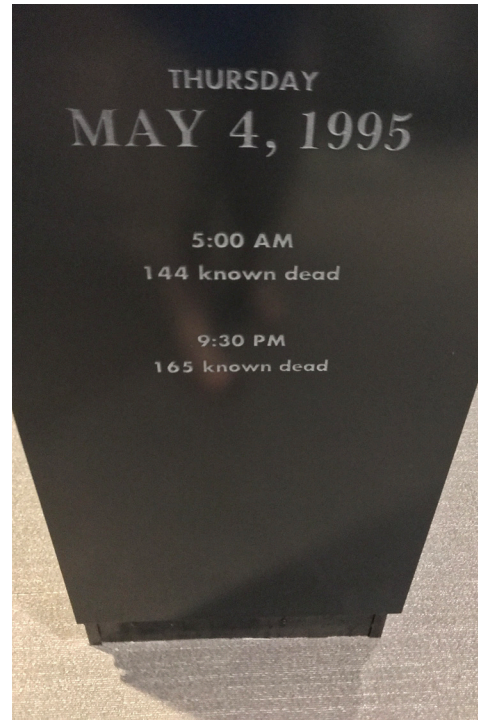
Braum's Ice Cream recommended  
by Ken S.



The Memorial Wall









### Day 18 - 06/09/2021 - Wednesday - Pause

Well, I have nothing really to report. Today was a driving day, and I took no photos. I drove from Oklahoma City, OK to Branson, MO. It took about 5 hours. I was treated to really nice views through what I think are the Ozarks in Southern Missouri. There were hills where I could look down and see the road crest 2.5 miles in front of me. It was like Topsfield, MA, but better. I checked into my Motel okay. I was a little cranky, but thankfully my friend Bill spent a little time listening to me and "uncracking" me.

I slept 10 hours last night, praise God! And I checked out a little late and just enjoyed the downtime in the morning. I am going to be in this area for two more days, then I go to St. Louis, MO. I will relax there a little bit before making the trek back home. Tomorrow night I see a play called, "Jesus." With a Name like Jesus, it's got to be good.

I am still at 46 states until I go to Arkansas for the Passion Play on Friday. Thanks for following my trip!

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### Day 19 - 06/10/2021 - Thursday - Jesus

Today, I saw the play, Jesus, at Sight + Sound Theater in Branson, MO. It. Was. Phenomenal! It was truly amazing. It was extremely professional with astounding sets and props and acting and singing. My words cannot do it justice, but it told the complete story of Jesus: his life, his death and his resurrection, all so that all who believe in Him can have Eternal Life.

Some days I just love being a Christian because of how God blesses me with the Christian stuff.

Photography was not allowed during the production, but below is a photo of the cover art. I bought a DVD of the performance, and the first person I am lending it to is Paul N. from the Home Group.

There was other schlock in Branson, MO, but even though it was requested, I did not photograph it: sorry!

Mad props, also, to the illustrious Reverend Clyde D. Talley. Thanks for all your kind words to me!





Day 20 - 06/11/2021 - Friday - The Great Passion Play

Today I drove back roads from Branson, MO to Eureka Springs, AR. I picked up the final 7th Midwest State in Arkansas! So now I have been to a grand total of 47 states: praise God!

In this vacation I have seen these new states: Iowa, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

I drove to Eureka Springs to see The Great Passion Play, which takes place at night in an open air auditorium. This Passion Play depicts the last days of Jesus life and the first days of His Resurrection. There is an open air auditorium with 4,000 seats on a sloped auditorium. From there, you can see all the buildings they've used to recreated Jerusalem as well as Golgotha and other important sites. So this is all sitting out in the open. It is huge!

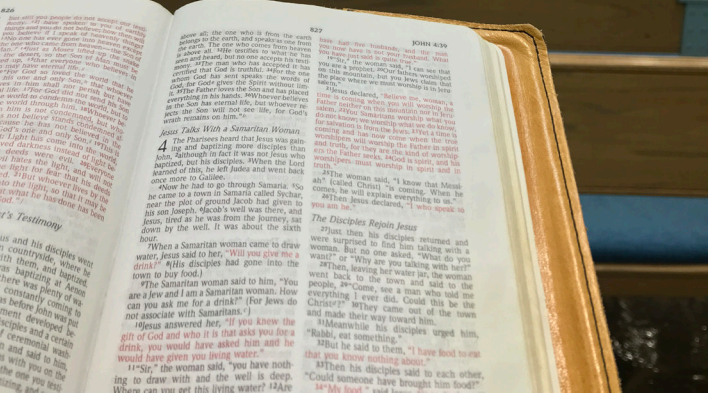
The play was a little hokey in that they used pre-recorded voices instead of the live actors and actresses voices. But it was very well done and told the story of Jesus' last days perfectly. It was so inspiring when Jesus came out of the tomb alive again! Everyone clapped. It was worth the visit, but didn't compare to the Jesus play I saw yesterday. However, it was less than 1/3 the price, too. It is the most popular outdoor play in the world, I think, and features music recorded by the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

It really told the story about what Jesus has done for us. I was thinking of Art R. when the play was done, because Art always speaks openly about what Jesus has accomplished for us and how life is all about Jesus. Jesus died and rose again so that we who believe in Him will have Eternal Life.

I also share photos I took of a chapel in Eureka Springs, called Thorncrown Chapel (see <https://thorncrown.com/>). It was designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright: E. Fay Jones. My Mom recommended it.









# The Great Passion Play

My Dad wants to go see the Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany, but perhaps he doesn't know that there is also a Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas! I went to it and enjoyed it. Here are a few photos...







The Resurrection!

Day 21 - 06/12/2021 - Saturday - Drive

I drove from Eureka Springs, AR to St. Louis, MO today in about six hours. It was pretty uneventful. I was treated to various beautiful views in the Ozarks.

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Day 22 - 06/13/2021 - Sunday - LCMS + Arch

I got a stunning 11 hours of sleep last night: ahhh...

My first full day in St. Louis had me go to an LCMS Mega Church. It was quite the experience. Then, I went and photographed the Arch. Thankfully, my car was not towed from my illegal parking. And finally, what would a trip to St. Louis be without some St. Louis ribs?



Pastor Dion Garrett - he preached on the applicability of the Bible in today's day and age...





These first two views of the Arch is from the Illinois side, so you can see the true Gateway to the West:



The rest of these views are from the St. Louis side:







And now I can just be honest: I think I am vacationed out!

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Day 23 - 06/14/2021 - Monday - Arch + Cardinals

Last night I got plenty of sleep and today I got a rejuvenating massage. Then I went to the top of the Gateway Arch! That was exciting. I was put in a very small cabin / elevator to get to the top. The view was wonderful from up there. Finally, I got to see the St. Louis Cardinals play the Florida Marlins. You'll have to read below to see who won...









# St. Louis Cardinals Win!!!



38

**Marlins**  
4 MOUND VISITS REMAINING | 29-36

|                  |      |
|------------------|------|
| 2B Berti         | .208 |
| CF Marte         | .342 |
| 1B Aguilar       | .268 |
| SS Chisholm, Jr. | K    |
| RF Duvall        | 8    |
| C Alfaro         | .262 |
| LF Sierra        | .242 |
| 3B Díaz          | .152 |
| P Floro          | .000 |

**EXIT VELOCITY**  
**81 MPH**

**JORGE ALFARO**  
0 - 3

2nd-- Fly Out, 8  
4th-- Strikeout  
6th-- Fly Out, 9

| PA | AVG  | H  | HR | RBI | OBP  | SLG  | OPS  | BB% | SO%  |
|----|------|----|----|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|
| 91 | .262 | 22 | 2  | 9   | .319 | .369 | .688 | 3.3 | 30.8 |

10:15 PM

|           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | R | H  | E | LOB |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|-----|
| MARLINS   | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5  | 0 | 4   |
| CARDINALS | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |   | 4 | 10 | 0 | 7   |

**Cardinals**  
4 MOUND VISITS REMAINING | 32-33

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| RF Edman       | .264 |
| CF Carlson     | .265 |
| 1B Goldschmidt | .248 |
| 3B Arenado     | .277 |
| LF O'Neill     | .291 |
| C Molina       | .274 |
| SS DeJong      | .168 |
| 2B Sosa        | .268 |
| P Reyes        | .000 |

| BALLS | STRIKES | OUTS |
|-------|---------|------|
| 0     | 0       | 2    |

1120 AM  
**KMOX**  
The Voice of St. Louis  
98.7 FM

**Spectracide**

A PROUD ST. LOUIS BRAND



## Day 24 - 06/15/2021 - Tuesday - LCMS Attractions

Well, this is probably the last real day of my vacation. It is my last full day in St. Louis. After this I will make my way home. I will probably still send out updates, but I don't know if I'll have many photos. I am going to visit friends in Pittsburgh, so if they let me share a photo of them, I will. I am kind of bummed my vacation is almost over. Except for the past two days, I have been able to live in the moment and totally enjoy it.

I am sending out my update early today. I photographed a lot of Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod stuff. First is the LCMS Headquarters. I tried to get in, but they are not open to the public, so I had to leave. Then I photographed Concordia Seminary, the LCMS Theology School. This was really neat and the architecture was very nice. Everything had a very unified look.

### LCMS Headquarters:



















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#### Day 25 - 06/16/2021 - Wednesday - Pittsburgh

Last night I went to bed at 5:00 PM CDT, and woke up today at 4:30 AM CDT. This enabled me to drive from St. Louis, MO to Pittsburgh, PA in eleven hours of daylight. It was 650 miles at 59.5 mph average (it would be faster if I didn't use the restroom once an hour). I am now halfway home.

I am staying with some friends, Bill + Kris, for a few nights. Kris made us delicious pasta. These two are the first people I've stayed with after the pandemic, and they are also the last people I stayed with before the pandemic.

#### Day 26 - 06/17/2021 - Thursday - Pittsburgh

I have been sleeping 15 hour nights here in Pittsburgh. I am lamenting the fact that my vacation is almost over and that I have to return to the demons back home. Being on vacation has been so nice: I totally just lived in the moment. I hope to summarize it in an Etooinin'.

Last night my friends in Pittsburgh treated me to a real nice meal of pierogies, which are a Pittsburgh treat. They are dumplings made out of potatoes with things added in, like cheese and sauerkraut. They served them with melted butter mixed with onions. They were so delicious!

#### Day 27 - 06/18/2021 - Friday - Pittsburgh

For the past two nights I've gotten 15 hours of much needed sleep: recovering from all the travel. I am somewhat anxious to go home, but will try to make it home tomorrow (Saturday). I went to my old stomping grounds, Panera, today and then came home and had a fabulous pizza dinner with Bill & Kris. We prayed together in the evening.



### Day 28 - 06/19/2021 - Saturday - Home Sweet Home!

Well, my epic Midwest 7 State Tour is officially over. I arrived safely back home at 10:00 PM today (Saturday, 6/19/2021). I thank the Lord for blessing me with such a wonderful trip, and thank you for all your prayers for safe travels and other things.

The ride home was mostly uneventful, except that my muffler fell off when I was in Wilkes-Barre, PA. Even though it was a setback, I remain so thankful that it happened at the end, the very last day, of my trip instead of some other time.

This trip brought me 5,712.6 miles around 16 states (MA, NY, PA, OH, IN, IL, IA, MN, ND, SD, KS, MO, OK, AR, WV, CT) and seven new states: Iowa, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas).

I used up 168.86 gallons of gasoline, which cost a total of \$503.87. My average was 33.9 mpg.

My average rate of speed was generally around 55 miles per hour (which includes stopping about once an hour to stretch).

I spent \$4,397.17 or \$157.04 / day. Well worth the price, in my opinion, to see seven new states. I started with Motel 6 and ended with Holiday Inn Express and the Drury Inn, a huge step up in comfort. I have one dollar of cash leftover.

My favorite states were Iowa and Kansas for the sheer beauty of them. (OK was OK.) My favorite meal was St. Louis Ribs in St. Louis, MO. My favorite day was the day I went to Church and they had the potter making a pot and talking about how God fashions us. I cried that whole sermon. I also liked the Jesus play a real lot in Branson, MO. I guess I did a lot of Jesus type things, but I also enjoyed the museums as well. The Living History Farm, in Iowa, and the Durham Museum, in Omaha, Nebraska, were quite interesting.

The most courageous things I did was attend a St. Louis Cardinals game alone and invite myself to a Memorial Day BBQ.

Well, that's it for me. Thanks for tuning in and, in a way, traveling with me. It was a joy to have you follow along: thanks for that.

May God bless you, and may God bless the beautiful U.S.A.

# Thank you for reading!

## The End