

*A stimulating recap of our retirement adventures by RV through the US, Mexico and Canada; Our Virgin Island bare boat charter with family; two cruises around Cape Horn; cruise to Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Germany, Russia and Finland; navigation of the Panama Canal and a visit to England, Wales and Scotland.*

## **LIFE AS WE LIVED IT: BOOK 3**

by Patricia Burns

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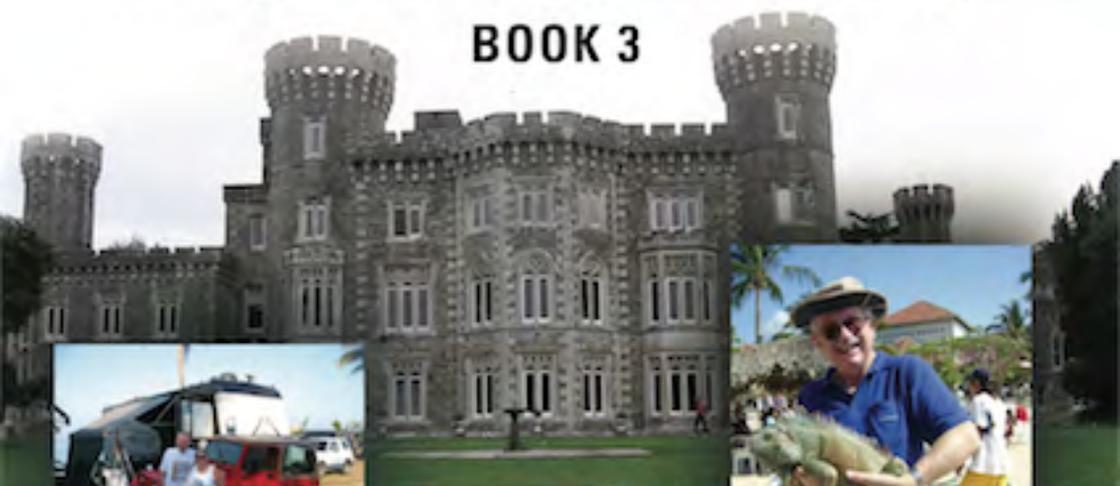
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# Life As We Lived It

**BOOK 3**



**Patricia Burns**

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As promised, the RV was done late Sunday and we were glad to get out of El Paso on Monday and into Saint David from whence we plan to depart on our trip into Mexico. We are going in a caravan with a group that we will join in Nogales on Saturday morning. It is no big journey but it will be an adventure on rough roads at least the last 14 miles into the RV resort.

In preparation we spent the week doing laundry, cleaning and preparing for our adventure. Ken packed and organized spare tools and parts, installed a safe in the RV, added a lock on the gas cap of the car, cleaned both the coach and car and reorganized his "basement". What a busy buddy!

Perhaps, by now you are wondering what life is like when we are on the road or in our nomadic lifestyle? Well, there are different levels of RV life. There are Gwelda (first class) parks, medium-priced parks and parks with minimal facilities with water, electricity and sewer. When one really wants to enjoy America's natural beauty, there are camping places in National and State Parks. Though some of the National and State Parks that we have visited have had water and electricity, most are primarily dry camping (outside toilets, cold showers and bare-bones amenities)

Our coach is self-contained. We have most of the comforts of home, i.e.; refrigeration, microwave/convection oven, television (satellite) and cell phones. We turn on our generator, power up the batteries and, zippo, all of the conveniences of home. Our coach carries 100 gallons of water, two holding tanks, hot showers and a queen bed. If we are on our way from one destination to another, it did not make sense for us to stop, connect and go to all of the trouble of setting up camp only to fix a bowl of soup, watch the news and go to bed. However, after our trip to Canada I laid down some "travel law". No more than 300 miles per day - roughly translated depart by 10 AM and stop by 3 PM. This kept us alert to RV facilities and helped us plan our travel and overnight stops. .

We depended on our membership in a RV resort association which had 26 different locations throughout the United States. The Association's business plan is similar to a time-share. Most of the parks provide extended services and amenities but some are rustic.

As recreational RV'ers, our membership provides for us to space our travel to coincide for a week or two in one of our member resorts. During these stops, we catch up on chores that may get skipped in daily travel, do our deep-cleaning and just relax before going on to our next destination. We have visited 12 of the 26 resorts to which we have membership privileges though it is rare for us to spend more than a few days at any site.

When we are on the road we tend to stop at parks that extend special rates as a result of our membership "affiliations" and many do not meet the requirements for a "Gwelda park". However, these are usually one night stops and we rarely leave the coach during these stop-overs. When we are in an area that we want to spend some time, relax and enjoy the surrounding area, we seek a park that has the amenities of a good park but not always do they meet the standards of a Gwelda Park.

To refresh your memory, our dear friend Gwelda Haselman has more stringent guidelines than we do when choosing a park even for an overnight stop for both security and social reasons. Thus, we have come to evaluate parks as a Gwelda park, medium, normal and just "okay". A Gwelda Park emphasizes security, has the latest in amenities, a clean and well maintained club house, a good reading library, immaculate laundry room and privacy. These resorts tend to be pricey and while I like the comfort and luxury of these "upscale" resorts, I do not find them cost justified for an overnight sleep over. Thus, we were slow to choose the upscale parks unless they were particularly desirable for location, convenience or the entertainment value of the area. (We rarely choose a five star hotel either. Ken' Scottish ancestry is a problem.)

Our destinations for extended stays tended to be membership or affiliated parks. We used the web for our bill paying and business-related functions. Terri scans our mail at home for things that require our attention and, as necessary, forwards mail to a park to hold for our arrival. Our overnights were always budget-oriented with a simple place to pull off the road and rest. We have even been known to spend a night in a roadside rest (where permitted), Walmart

parking lot (Walmart is extremely accommodating to RV'ers), Elks Lodge (Ken is a member) or similar RV accessible parking facility.

Perhaps you are wondering who our fellow travelers are? Mostly, retired people from all walks of life. Someone recently observed that the professional retiree with a four million dollar estate and the retiree with a few hundred thousand dollars in their 401 K have one thing in common. How much does it cost and what am I getting for my money? When we retired, our income was no longer based on our ability to produce but rather, we were beneficiaries of a "fixed income" that depended on our money management skills. The retiree is constantly alert to "how much do I have?" and "how much will I need?"

Advanced planning for one's retirement helps because it is critical that retirees gear their lifestyle accordingly. In our explorations around the country, we have met retired school teachers, professional people, military, government employees and business owners. We have met people with small van conversion vehicles and those with ultimate million dollar rigs such as the Prevost. Our common bond is travel and a shared wanderlust. I have been surprised at the number of "full timers" that are on the road. These are people who have sold everything, invested in their RV and taken to the road. They are modern day gypsies who have saved to enjoy life in their retirement.

To me one of the most interesting observations of RV life is the "old boy" network that flourishes within. Common "getting-to-know-you" phrases run from "How do you like your \_\_\_\_ (name of coach - in our case Allegro)? What kind of motor do you have? How many miles to the gallon? From there, a full background analysis covers the rig, where they have been, where they are going, how long they have been RVing, past life, career(s) and whether they are full-time or part-time. These conversations can evolve from sharing refreshments or just a friendly stop by or "howdy".

In our club parks where people are apt to be residential for a week or so, there are planned activities, BBQ's, Bible study, arts and crafts as well as pools, Jacuzzi's and exercise rooms. It is neither "poverty oriented" nor class distinct. The resorts were filled with

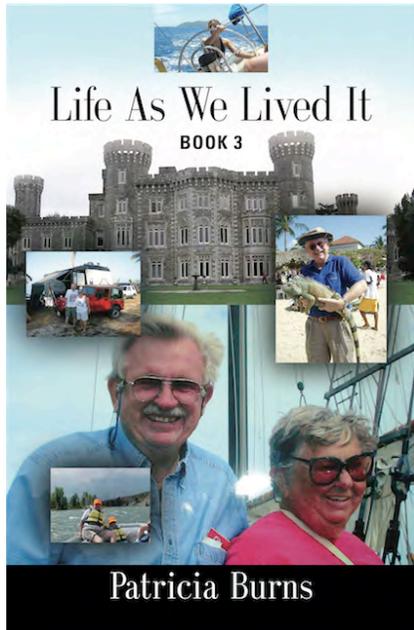
nomads satisfying their curiosity about their country and fulfilling their urge for travel. Most of them were examples of the good people that have worked all their life to reach retirement and reflect the values of America, as we knew them in our childhood. I never saw a single "mooning" or bare bather. But then, I didn't look either.

RV travel is interesting, you meet all kinds of people and there is no shortage of stories. It is neither the "be all to end all" nor distasteful. It is a way of life and, like life, it is what you want it to be. When we were on the road, I enjoyed the travel and comradery but I looked forward to going home and catching up with the family amid the comfort of my adobe. I enjoyed planning a cruise or our next travel adventure to a foreign country or another resort of distinction in a desired locale. Suffice to say, I had no urge to be a full-timer.

On Friday the 20th, we arrived in Nogales, Arizona for our trip into Mexico. There would be 18 rigs in our caravan. We were directed to the Walmart parking lot where we dry camped for the night. Saturday morning, we met with the "wagon master" (caravan leader) and "tail gunner" (brings up the rear) for our preliminary briefings and completion of paperwork.

That completed, everyone climbed into their respective toweds and headed 20 miles to the port of entry where we completed our Mexican paperwork for our entry and travel into Sonora. Two fellow travelers rode with us as we fell in behind the wagon master at 10:30 AM. Once our paperwork was completed we proceeded back to the designated rally point sans wagon master who waited for everyone to complete the process. As we came through the Mexican town of Nogales, we misread a sign and followed a road through a Mexican neighborhood that we soon discerned was not the USA. We returned to the highway, convinced that our attempt to save time had probably made us the last to arrive back at the rally point. We arrived back at 1:30 PM, a full hour or more ahead of all the others.

After lunch, we met for a group meeting and discussion of our travel itinerary, exchanged our dollars for pesos and met our fellow travelers for the next seven days. There were 42 of us in total,



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