

Lifestyle Changes and Adventures in 2025

Chris retired from Northrop Grumman on April 4, 2025. This created something new in our existence: no limit on vacation time. Louis now has to arrange entertainment for both of us. The first thing we noted was that Chris wants to play more board games: our most common diversion is to play one of the many Empire Builder style board games where both sides try to draw the most efficient set of lines connecting the various cities in the game, given the drawn cards with various products and destinations. Other recreations include Sudoku, KenKen, card games, Euro-games, and planning the next adventure.

At the end of 2024, we took another trip with our friend Dennis Smith on the Coral Princess from San Pedro down the western coast of Mexico and then through the Panama Canal, over to Aruba, and then for a week on Hollywood Beach next to Fort Lauderdale. On the ship, we had adjoining balcony cabins and shared the excursions of the trip. Dennis had also signed up for a cruise two weeks later on Silversea Cruises from New Zealand to Australia, since the timing was good, and for that trip there was no single supplement. He passed away at sea around January 1, 2025 and did not make it to Sydney. His niece came from Virginia to clean up the house and settle estate related matters.

Our other vacation sharing partners, Robert Livermore and Linda Sellman (usually going to Palm Springs with us, along with Tony Leal), moved to an assisted living home in Windsor, California, north of Santa Rosa. Then, they just disappeared. The retirement home says they are not there, but provided no information as to where they are now located. Robert did sell his house in Mountlake Terrace, north of Seattle. His sister and mother passed away a few years ago.

Our backyard swimming pool became unusable as the two layers of epoxy paint had decomposed over the years to a white paste sticking on all who entered. We then resurrected the pool by replastering and placing new blue/white/brown multicolored tile around the top edge for 10 cm and also on the steps. Some sections of the concrete deck around the top of the pool needed to be replaced as did the non-functional pool light and its electrical connection. Later in the year, the fiberglass casing of the pool filter had a leak and needed replacement. We did have a wonderful summer using the warm pool (about 35 degrees Centigrade = 95 deg Fahrenheit) from May to September when we were at home,

Another area around the house that needed improvement was the juniper bushes between the sidewalk and the street. Those bushes had been there since we moved in in 1984, and were now a fire hazard. Chris was especially sensitive to the skin irritation where she would brush up against the brush when taking out the trash or getting the mail. The bushes also prevented anyone from using the right side of the car when using the parking area on our side of the street. We finally paid the gardener to remove all the irritating juniper. Louis replaced the now vacant area with an assortment of flowering annuals.

Sometime in 2024, AMA Waterways announced a new river cruise on the Magdalena River in Colombia. Louis visited their headquarters in Calabazas and signed up for that river cruise about six months beforehand. As it turned out, there were some difficulties getting the trip available for customers, so our scheduled May date turned out to be the third actual trip from Barranquilla to Cartagena. We flew on COPAAirlines (Panama City) to Colombia with good results. Our first impression was in Barranquilla where the river enters the Caribbean. The river was really interesting, containing a huge amount of downstream floating water hyacinth. There was also a parade along the river with resident dance groups in local costumes. On the cruise, we had side trips in smaller boats to visit areas with homes above the river, water buffalo, and birds in trees like the CaraCara and kingfishers. We visited several different ethnic villages along the way. We took pictures of the dancing, trees, birds, iguanas and towns.

After the cruise, we spent a week in two 50-story hotels along the artificial beach in Cartagena. There were pay umbrellas on the sand along with sellers of food and clothing. Our view from high in the hotel was impressive, looking down at the city fortifications from 1600 and the naval base. We spent a day at the Cartagena Aviario about a hour away by taxi or boat to investigate the different species of birds on exhibit and the bird show. We also took a crowded speed boat trip to the old fortifications in the bay, along with the aquarium and snorkeling at the Rosario Islands resort area.

In June, we flew to Anchorage, Alaska where we rented a car (expensive in summer). After five years, we got to visit with granddaughter Seanna who was working at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center near Girdwood (where the Alyeska ski resort is located). She had just graduated from the University of Idaho. She showed us the moose, the porcupine, and the bears. We traveled together on the Phillips 26-Glacier tour boat from Whittier around Prince William Sound (infamous for the Exxon Valdez accident). Seanna is now in Finland above the Arctic Circle working with the reindeer. We then wandered off across the Kenai Peninsula to Homer, Alaska to meet with a fellow bridge player, Tony, who has a boat and likes to go fishing. We went fishing with him to a scenic cove on the other side of the inlet where the bald eagles fly and the Sockeye salmon jump out of the water. The seals were parked on some gravel bars in the bay. Unfortunately, Captain Tony took a small shortcut on the way back and got hung on one of those hidden gravel bars. The boat was well grounded and the tide was going out. Tony had visions of spending the night on the bay waiting for the tide to come in. Fortunately, he had signed up for membership in "Sea Tow". He called them and they came out in 20 minutes with a rope and large-engine boat and pulled our boat off the gravel in no time and at no charge. We limped back to the dock on the spit in Homer, but some boat repairs were needed. We visited some local places, some Orthodox Russian Villages, and watched the Peony Parade in downtown Homer.

We then flew back to Portland, Oregon where we visited with daughter Emily and Victor. They took us on a dinner excursion boat down the Willamette River where every dock had a 7-meter high tidal support column, and to the indoor 3D water-themed art museum in downtown Portland. We also rode on the Hood River Train up the hill to the pear orchard and went to the Bonneville Fish Hatchery. Chris went on three more fishing trips: one local trip was for rockfish/halibut from San Pedro; another was to the Channel Islands area for tuna; and Lake of the Woods with Marilyn. Our freezer is full of fish.

In September/October, Chris, Louis, and Ken Harinishi all flew to Haneda Airport near Yokohama in Japan. We all stayed with Andy and family in their home. We visited many places in the area over the next three weeks: Yokohama Ferris wheel, Cup Of Noodles Museum, Port of Yokohama, Chinatown, Soprano Opera performance at the Civic Auditorium, Tokyo Transit Museum, Urayasu Fisherman's Town, Tokyo Disneyland (the only *Beauty and the Beast* castle/ride in all of Disney), Harry Potter Museum, Maxell Aqua Park in Shinagawa with its dolphin and sea lion show. Andy then took us via Shinkansen to Kyoto where we visited the many temples and gardens there. There was an antique train ride down a canyon to a horse drawn carriage. We then went back to Yokohama in just two hours on Shinkansen. Then, there was Tyler's school Sports Day and his gymnastics class. Suzuna made Melina a colorful dress for her Tea Ceremony class. Organized activities in Japan all teach self-discipline and respect for others. Suzuna's friend from her Canada trip, Kayo, flew in from Tottori on a business trip and is now planning to stay with us in Calabasas over the winter holidays.

For November, Louis was wandering through the Vacations-To-Go website when he found a 5-day, 4-night cruise on the Carnival Radiance from the Long Beach cruise terminal. The total cost for two including the parking at the terminal and the gratuities was \$621. For that price, we could not just stay home. We enjoyed the shows, the dining, the hot tubs, and the day visit to Ensenada. The ship found a nice sunny ocean spot to cruise back to port slowly. My main complaint was the long distances down the ship corridors to get to some shows in the front of the ship from our far-in-the back cabin.