



BACK ON TRACK

VISITING FRIENDS

Light drizzle is pattering on the roof of the RV. I have my day off. Its cloudy and uncomfortable - it's best to stay in bed. But a video call with granddaughter Lillien and her dad, strong coffee and the smell of fresh bread finally got me out of bed. It's Saturday in the Black Hills and I've finally found the time to start this newsletter. Beate is currently busy making beds in one of the log cabins and Henna is in her own trap: drying her fur. After the morning 5 mile walk with Mum she was soaking wet.

But the last few days we had fantastic weather. 75°F and sun during the day - cool at 58° at night and rain from time to time so that everything stays green and juicy. It's still quiet here; most of the tourists and our regulars won't be coming for a few weeks. Once more, time for us to enjoy the beautiful landscape here.





Spring is just beginning in the nearby State Park; the bison mothers proudly present their calves and roll around in the dry sand with relish, while the prairie dogs delight in the lush grasses of the prairie, which are finally green again.



STOP

- license and ID please -

The purpose of this newsletter, however, is to report on the multitude of friends we have made over the years here in the United States who, with their helpfulness, hospitality and kind warmth, make our life here so pleasant. They make our world very special, simply because they exist. And I want to tell about some of these great people.

F•R•I•E•N•D•S

It is mid-March. We finally want to be on the road again and explore country and people. Neither the big ALFA Rally in Yuma nor the big Alaska tour of our closest friends fit Beate and me into our plans for this year. But that's life: you can't dance at every wedding. So we say goodbye to our Yuma family. Great months spend with loved ones are behind us. The well-known group around Susan, Dale, Willie, Dave, Linda and Jeff is growing from year to year. More and more of our ALFA acquaintances have also acquired plots of land in Yuma. And this despite the fact that prices are skyrocketing. But the dry heat in winter and the excellent social contacts here attract more and more people to this part of the world. Our table is getting longer!



Again we say thank you to our hosts, friends - family members Susan and Dale for a wonderful time!





♥ A special gift; my friend Dale gave me 4 days
of his sweat to renovate my roof! ♥

In general, the willingness to help is simply unique. Whether repairing my awning, replacing my broken refrigerator, removing and installing an air dryer under the RV ==> my friends Dale, Dave, Sharon, Dwight and Jeff and many more were immediately there when the somewhat clumsy Rüdiger needed help. Or Susan, who sewed us new sun protection curtains for our tires or Richard, who gave me a new ladder for the RV. Thank you dears! You guys are just great.



Dave down under

Visits from friends, various invitations and celebrations, as well as activities in the nearby area made our time in Yuma go by quickly this winter.



Timo from El Paso



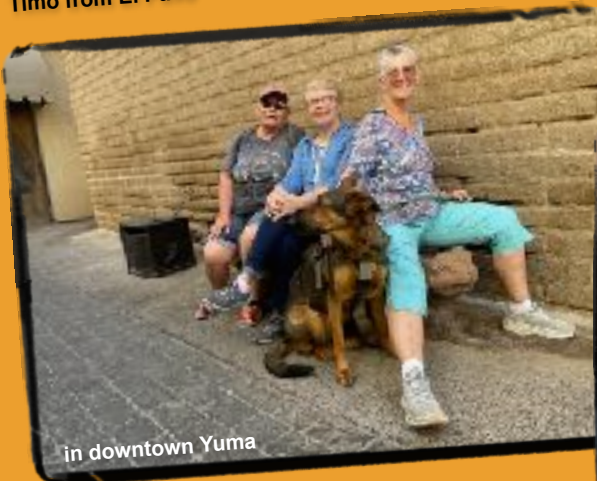
Jeff, always elegant



Happy Birthday Dave



gambling with Deb



in downtown Yuma



Movie Night

in Mexico
for food
and drugs



Once again we are lucky in disguise! Our fridge/freezer combination gave up 5 days before departure; after almost 20 years of perfect service. Instead of a planned farewell tour in our neighborhood, Beate and I rummage through various specialist shops to find a suitable replacement. An identical model costs over 2000 US dollars - we were not willing to pay that. So, a conventional refrigerator was needed, which, however, entails some conversion work on the mobile home. Good that this happens to us in Yuma, because here I have a selection of tools thanks to Dale, dry weather, active support to move the heavy device through a removed window and could also use material to install and remove the fridge. If that had happened to us on the way... Uh oh oh

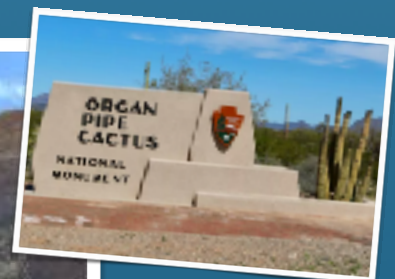


But before you start your journey, Berta is taken for an inspection. Oil and filter changes, lubricating the chassis and technical inspection should prevent problems on the journey. Bobs Diesel has been a trusted garage for years to perform this service reasonably cheaply. I can also inspect the underbody here while Berta is standing on the lift.

But let's get started. Our first destination is not too far away: the Organ Pipe National Monument. In all the years I've been here since 1977, I've never been able to make that detour to the Mexico border south of Phoenix. We find a beautiful free parking space in Ajo, a former mining town.



The green Sonoran desert is more like a bizarre forest full of cacti, bushes and wonderful carpets of flowers.





AJO



The remaining architecture in Ajo bears witness to the wealth of days gone by, when one of the largest copper mines in the world was still in operation here. Luckily, the city has not lost its charm, but attracts many tourists and snowbirds, especially in winter.



The journey continues to neighboring Tucson. We have often visited and appreciated this city in southern Arizona. This time, however, we want to meet friends and take a closer look at the adjacent Saguaro National Park. Here, too, we find a free parking space, which is not particularly well located and very crowded. Unfortunately also with contemporaries who probably live here permanently, do not take cleanliness so seriously and clearly exceed their 14-day limit. Apparently law enforcement is powerless here. After three nights we've had enough of it and moved to a regular campsite with water, electricity and sewage, no mess and significantly less street noise



Our first guest is John Kurz. The former Alfa owner is wintering in his new motorhome not far from Tucson and insisted on visiting us for a few hours. Always a blessing to be with you John. Thank you for coming.



Next we can say hello to Mary and Brian. The day before they were able to purchase property in Tucson. Congratulations on your new winter home. In the summer, both are drawn to their other property in the Rocky Mountains. In between, they travel all over the USA. Great talking and seeing you guys!



We move on and to the next acquaintances. Two Alfa owner couples have bought property with a building and parking space for their RV in Benson. This resort is very luxurious, members-only and offers a variety of community buildings, workshops and sports facilities... all of which are extremely well maintained. If I were a rich men



Sandra and Wayne not only spoil us with a great lunch, but also give us an extensive tour of this great resort in southern Arizona. Very dear thanks. SeeYa on the road!



The desert is alive and green! Unfortunately we are too early to see the cactus blossom. The wildflowers make up for it all the more.



Only a few weeks ago, Cheryl and Chuck are the proud owners of a wonderful campsite with the best view and lots of space. We surprise both of them, while renovating their new property. Nice to have met you. ❤️





Our close friends Winnie and Steve have their winter quarters at an private airfield, not far from Tombstone. When we last met in Yuma, they offered us to visit them there for a few days. Since our co-workers from Custer, Hope and Paul, also live in the area during the winter, we gladly accepted the offer.



Ron, Winnie and Steve's friend who owns this property, had no problem with us camping out on his property for almost a week. Thanks.

with tour-guide Steve on a hike



♥ Steve und Winnie ♥



Pork Roll
a specialty from Steve's
native New Jersey



what some have in the
garage



each 58 oz heavy



culinary highlight:
smoked and grilled
Tomahawk Steaks

Like Beate, Steve walks many miles every day and knows every inch and every stone here. So he took us on a great day tour through the historic landscape in the area. The destination is an old railroad terminal on the San Pedro River, that dates back to the days when the Tombstone mines produced a lot of silver. Fairbank is a "ghost town" and only a few buildings or their remains can be seen. But the landscape on the river is worth seeing and makes the hike a real experience. Thank you Steve!



The next day we meet Hope and Paul (our comrades from Custer) in Tombstone. Beate and I wallow in old memories: many years ago, Marshal Rüdiger kept order there and Beate turned cowboys' heads.



Wyatt Earp Days anno 2012



We say goodbye to two very dear people. Thank you for your hospitality. We hope that our paths will cross again soon. Stay healthy!



Our next stop is Old Mesilla on the Rio Grande. About 40 minutes from El Paso, this historic settlement has always been a magnet for Beate and me. Across Mesilla, colorful rows of red chilli peppers adorn homes and businesses, symbolizing Southwestern hospitality. Thick-walled adobe buildings that once protected residents from Apache attacks now house art galleries, restaurants, museums, and souvenir shops. We love to stroll through the plaza and imagine life as it might have been here many years ago. Mesilla's most notorious resident, Billy the Kid, was sentenced to death by county court but escaped before the sentence could be carried out. We did not find him.



Mesilla belonged to Mexico until 1854. The Basilica Minor of San Albino was built in 1852. Daily Masses are held in both Spanish and English.

Here we meet our friend Angelica, who not only introduces us to her new husband but also insists on inviting us to a grandiose Mexican lunch. Taste and portion size are gigantic! Muchas gracias!



For years, Angelika and Beate have looked after charitable projects in the USA and Mexico. We hadn't seen each other for years, so there was a lot to talk about. A guided tour of their new house in Las Cruces rounds off the nice afternoon.

It's time for us to get to El Paso before the rush hour hits us. Because we have to go straight through with Berta. Alfa owners know El Paso is RV torture.



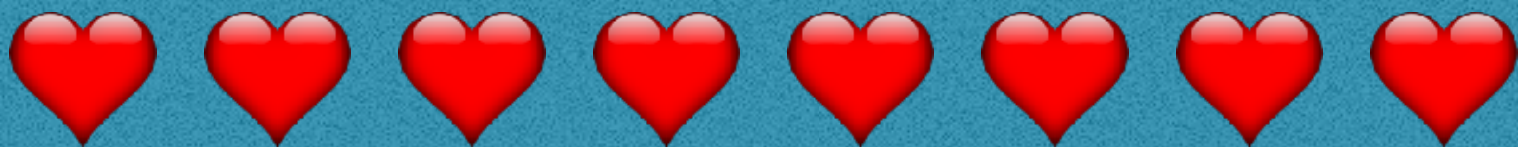


F•R•I•E•N•D•S





F•R•I•E•N•D•S



An entry on Facebook by me and a circular from Heinz Alexander to all ex-servicemen still living in El Paso announced our coming. After 14 days in El Paso we can look back on great encounters with more than 58 friends and acquaintances that we have met here since 1978! Thank you all for the great hospitality, the numerous invitations, the hours full of memories and your numerous visits to our campsite! What a great time in the Sun City!

We will have a special memory of the visit to Rick Smith's grave. The companion from the old Gunfighter days died far too early last year. Visits and good conversations with his wife Linda and daughter Michaela brought him back to our memories again and again. His nickname "Sergeant Major Wheat Beer" came from the fact that Rick had been serving wheat beers at the Fort Bliss Oktoberfest for years. His pool parties with whiskey and cigars are unforgettable. R.I.P. my friend! You are missed!



EASTER 2023



Linda Smith



the Alexander family



Timo, Victor and Anakin



EL PASO 2023



our patio was usually well frequented ...



... or we enjoyed the numerous invitations



Brigitte and Garry's beautiful garden



on beautiful west side of the big city



El Paso then said goodbye with a gift:
rear-end collision with hit-and-run

As always – time flew by. We say thank you to all of you for coming, the discussions and the time together with us! Special thanks to Heinz Alexander, who once again provided excellent all-round support. El Paso, we'll be back! Everyone stay healthy and kind to us.

LILLEN



Memories of the USA vacation 2022



our princess is now 6 and going to school



soon she will be able to put
grandpa down on the floor-mat



Our little one is growing and thriving. Going to school in August. Beate and I look forward to embracing her again in September when we will be visiting Germany again for a few weeks.

TEXAS STATE PARKS



Enough of wind and sand - we follow the Rio Grande south. On the way there are beautiful state parks that are not only very inexpensive, but also in nature reserves that are worth seeing, have very large parking spaces and have a network of hiking trails that we love so much. These state parks are the only state lands that are largely free to roam. Everything else is private land and therefore entry is prohibited! And our name is not Jeff V. who ... Otherwise there are only small parks in larger cities to stretch your legs. But who hikes or walks in Texas?

Seminoles State Park



From our site it is still 2 miles to the Rio Grande. On the other side of the river is Mexico. We've come at just the right time: the cacti are in bloom!



Falcon State Park



We pretty much have the state park to ourselves. A few anglers can still be found, because here the Rio Grande is dammed up to form a large lake and offers fantastic opportunities to land fresh largemouth bass (up to 8kg) and catfish (up to 15kg). We limit ourselves to a refreshing dip in the water and numerous hikes along the shore.

Everywhere, remote-controlled camera systems, searchlights and sensors on mobile towers bear witness to the major problems with illegal immigrants on the southern border of the United States.



SOUTH PADRE

GULF OF MEXICO



The sea has finally the Gefekes back on the beach. We stop in the tropical climate of South Texas. South Padre Island is off the coast and offers an almost endless sandy beach. We've never been here before, so there were a lot of new things to discover. But first a dip in the Gulf, which quickly led to severe sunburn on my stomach and shoulders (as a resident of Arizona, you don't need sunscreen 😞) and enjoy lots of fresh fish. As soon as we arrived, we decided to extend our stay by a week. It's just great here: inexpensive and spacious, right by the sea, under palm trees and Elon Musk wants to launch his rocket in the immediate vicinity for the first time! Great to be free and flexible. That is why we do not make any reservations in advance.





Our Arizona Girl Henna is with us at the open sea for the first time. As if she knows nothing else, Henna immediately belongs to the beach, water and waves. An ideal playground for our still very active lady dog.

The weather: extreme humidity, which coats anything that is slightly cooler with a film of water. Everything sticks and is wet. Even in sunshine. Our air conditioners in the RV works like a juicer. Gallons of water run out of the devices every hour. Outside we can only stand it on the beach with a pleasant sea breeze.

The most violent tropical thunderstorms, some with tornadoes, then bring a little cooling and fear!



SPACEX

Dave Volker and April Svan live not far from our campsite. Both also own an ALFA motorhome and many meetings in Custer, Yuma or Quartzsite make them part of our closer ALFA family. Dave, a retired US Air Force colonel and Vietnam War veteran (flew B-52 bombers) is considered the undisputed expert on all flying things. Of course, when he offered to give us a personal tour of the SpaceX site, we didn't say no.

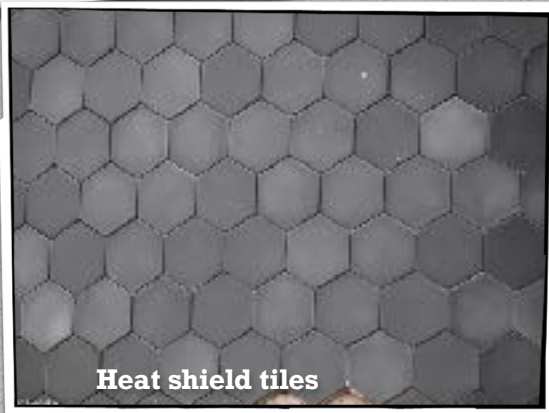


Unbelievable, the day before the start we can almost get to the launch pad. Bigger and taller than the SATURN V rocket we saw years ago in Huntsville, Houston or Cape Canaveral. Enormous. And while we are "walking around" and taking pictures, liquid nitrogen is being pumped into the tanks!? On our way to the site, countless tankers had overtaken us on a narrow country road, making us dizzy.





Dave and April not only show us the launch pad directly on the beach, but also guide us through the assembly site, the many test stands and the living and working areas of the employees. The facility, named STARBASE, is located on the extreme southern tip of Texas, right on the ocean and just a mile from the Mexican border. It really doesn't look like high tech here, but rather resembles me to grain silos with an adjacent steel works or a refinery.



Heat shield tiles

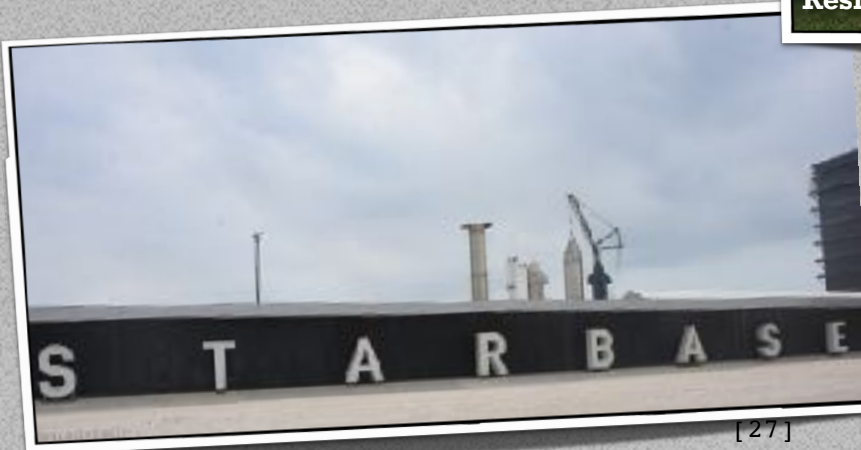
We are both impressed and amazed at how close we can get to everything. As I said, the next day there should be another attempt to start! And with Dave we have all the information firsthand. He even knows the serial numbers of each stage and prototype!!



Testing, welding and building is everywhere



Residential Park of Engineers



Dave and April didn't let themselves be taken away from this historic start and parked their ALFA motorhome right on the edge of the restricted area. Right next to employees of the SPACE X company with their multi-million dollar telemetry and camera equipment.



Thanks Dave for the great tour



We will watch the start from our campsite if it takes place. Technical problems or the weather can still throw a spanner in the works.

Both photos are from the day before without sea fog. Dave is almost a mile closer. My telephoto lens gives a slightly different impression.



What felt like 20,000 people gathered overnight on the beach at our campsite! The best wife in the world had the brilliant idea of loading our jeep with chairs and then parking it right in the front row overnight. The plan worked out perfectly. Not only did we not have to carry the chairs: we had a box seat! Right next to the CNN TV truck. We knew this Texan reporter, Ed Lavandera, from many reports in the past. That was an advantage. The mobile phone network was totally overloaded and therefore unusable. Thanks to CNN we now had a direct connection to the SPACE X command center to be informed about the status of the countdown etc. Hopefully the weather and technology will play along. We didn't want to miss the historic start while we're in the area! Fingers crossed..... but sea fog ...



we wait - visibility is poor - can hardly see the launch pad





20. APRIL 2023



08:33 HOURS



Then the time has come. The incredible power of 33 Raptor engines erupt. Not a bang, but a deafening crackle (like a string of explosions) can be heard. As the tip of the rocket breaks through the smoke and sea fog, the crowd of 20,000 cheers. A "go - go -go" accompanies the rocket higher and higher. YES, the sky dog Elon Musk did it, the rocket keeps climbing higher and higher. Pure goosebumps for me. What an experience. I'm electrified. WOW - what a moment to witness - tears of happiness - goosebumps - heartbeat 180 - this old Air Force Missile guy is fascinated like never before!

When we can no longer see the rocket with the naked eye, it is detonated. We learn later: several engines failed and the planned trajectory was not achieved. The entire vehicle went into a spin!

For us it doesn't matter. The start was breathtaking and will be remembered forever. I can only advise everyone, if the opportunity arises, to be there once in a lifetime!

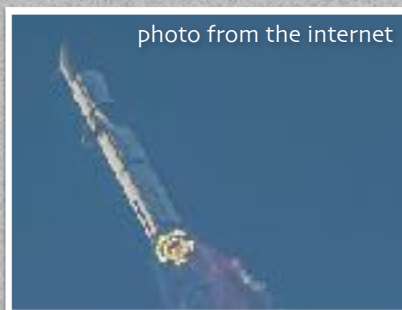


photo from the internet



As beautiful as the coast of the Gulf of Mexico is, we're needed in Custer. The season will start there soon. So hoes in the tar. We continue our journey and stop at another Texas State Park, Choke Canyon south of San Antonio.



Again we almost have the state park to ourselves. A shady spot right on the water. Here, too, we could endure it for a longer time. The wild animals come within a few feet of us.

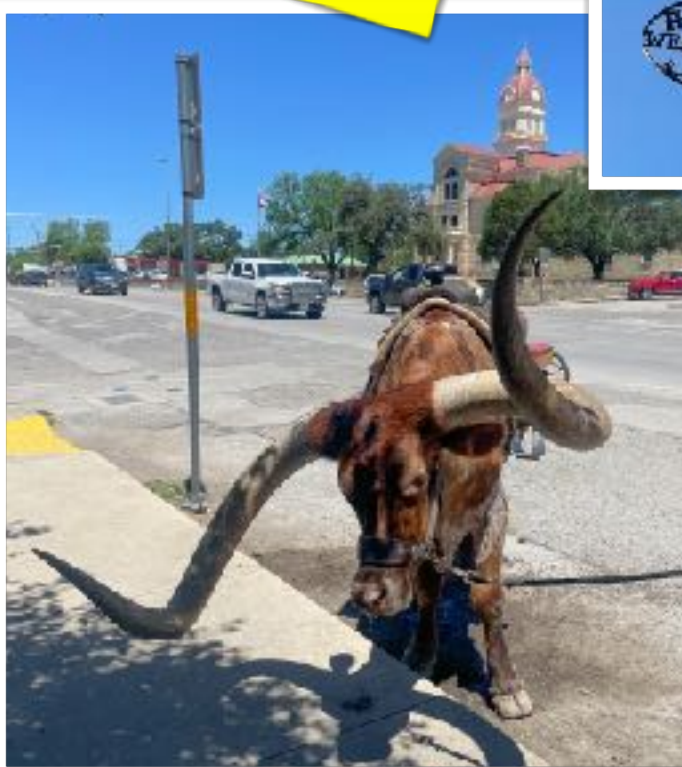


We're stopping in the Hill Country. ALFA friend Ray lends us his driveway for a few days and treats us to his famous French toast with bacon and strawberry cream cheese. A delight! He lives in Pipe Creek, not far from Bandera, the cowboy capital of Texas.

Thank
You!



The crowning glory was an authentic Texas fish fry at the Bandera Catholic parish. Yummy!





From Pipe Creek we visit our Custer friends Helen and John, who own a beautifully situated house on a golf course in nearby Kerville. The park-like garden merges directly into the green of the golf course! A private restaurant high up on a mountain, a swimming pool and some tennis courts complete the comfort of the residents here. The amazing hosts then give us a private tour of Kerville and take us to the Cross of Kerville, a beautifully landscaped park above town. Thank you guys - love ya!!!!

Yes, and then we get visitors from Germany in Pipe Creek, or rather from Ingolstadt. Monika and Siegfried are currently visiting their daughter in Austin and made a day trip to see us! Oh how great, after so many years, to be able to hug these two lovely people live and in color again! Great conversations about the good old days, a stroll through Bandera and coffee and cake together with Ray - the day went by far too quickly. Thanks for your visit. We really enjoyed the time with you!



great joy about the gift
from Germany

BROWNWOOD STATE PARK

WILDFLOWER PARADISE

And the next state park is on our list. We only chose this one, located in the middle of Texas, because friends from 2004 El Paso times found their home here in the immediate vicinity. We are overwhelmed by the landscape.



The wildflowers are in full bloom and we're bathing in them. As far as the eye can see, the ground is covered in these brightly colored flowers. We can't get enough; around every bend in our path it looks even more beautiful... It's not just Henna, who is in heaven!





Patty and Steve have found their dream property above the lake and are enjoying the view from a magnificent terrace. Several thousand square feet of land, workshops and garages make the property a real ranch! Since a beef had just been slaughtered, the master of the house immediately serves a Texas BBQ with 2.5 lb heavy T-bones! And again we are spoiled. We returned the favor the next day with homemade German Leberkaes. What a life! Thank you for your hospitality!



THANK YOU

our huge site at the State Park

CEDAR HILL STATE PARK

OASIS IN THE MEGACITY

Even in the large metropolitan areas there are always oases of nature. One of these is in the metropolis of Dallas/Fort Worth and is called Cedar Hill State Park. Lots of water, forests and hiking trails, an old farm from 1840 and more than 350 RV sites on 8 square miles make us forget that we live in the midst of 6.6 million people. One of them is our son Sebastian, who we will be having with us again for a few days. Conversations, hikes and mom's cooking lure him out of his apartment in Dallas.



LAKE ARROWHEAD STATE PARK

WICHITA FALLS

Our last Texas state park takes us near Wichita Falls. After the Tactical Training Command (formerly the Air Force Missile School) left El Paso, we found a few old friends here who work in administration, military chaplaincy and a trucking company. We haven't seen many of them in 20 years. The reunion was all the nicer!



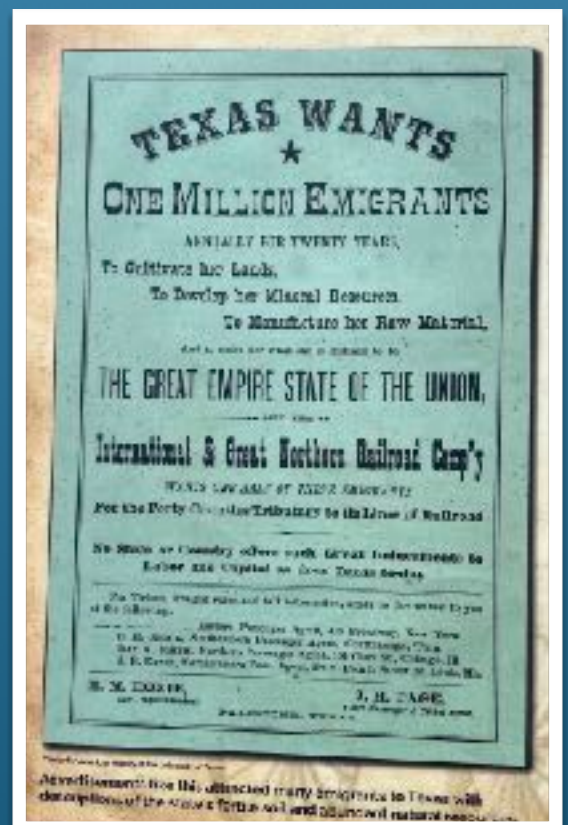
We were able to meet the Ebert family just before they moved back to Germany. All the best to you and a clean new start in Germany! Will not forget the great time with you in Custer! 🤗🤗🤗



the female administration with civil entourage;
Elke and Roland Altgassen
Katrin and Manfred Gatys



our pastoral assistant from our El Paso time
Hermann Lachnit



how times change

We leave Wichita Falls for Kansas and cross historic Route 66 in Shamrock, Texas. However, this US highway is no longer uniformly referred to as Route 66 and is no longer passable. The remaining sections of the route, formerly known as Mother Road or Main Street of America, are now a magnet for tourists and nostalgics. Beate has another reason: she received a computer program/app for her iPhone from her son Sebastian for Christmas. This enables her to virtually walk Route 66. Since Christmas 2022, Beate has been hiking 4 to 6 miles a day with Henna. On her cell phone she can track where she is running and which attractions are nearby. Her daily workload is counted towards the total length of Route 66 of 2448 miles (Chicago - Los Angeles). Every few hundred miles she even gets a postcard that documents her progress and totally motivates her.



am very proud of my team

Today, July 20, 2023, both have hiked about 60 percent of the total distance since Christmas. They'll be in Albuquerque in a few days. They want to arrive in Santa Monica / Los Angeles for Christmas!

At the latest when you meet such vehicles on the road, it is time to flee. These armored things belong to the crazies who look for tornadoes and then drive into them to collect data!!! Yes, the area we are in right now is also known as Tornado Alley. In fact, on the same evening, the heaviest thunderstorms are brewing and terrifying us.



Finally, we find a free city park where we spend the last night of our trip to our summer domicile. You can stay here in a beautiful location for up to three days. We even have running water, showers and a sewage disposal connection. Thanks McCook for this hospitality!

So dear ones, we're back in Custer. More friends and acquaintances are waiting for us here.
But more about them at another time!

Beate and I are rich. Rich in friends and acquaintances who make our lives here so wonderful.
No money in the world can replace that. We are grateful and proud at the same time. Family
and friends ==>> What more do you need? Thanks.

F•R•I•E•N•D•S



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That's it again!

Already 2913 days on the road.

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