



A DIFFERENTLY ENABLED ADVENTURE

PUSHING THE LIMITS OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE



Readings:

From Carrie, in the book: In December, when we were planning our 2019 adventures, we came up with a focus of water. For Katrina, water is sacred. For me, water is access to activity. Focusing on water led to the Bible verse that we've celebrated during all these months. The verse frames all this adventure as a gift and a privilege from God.

Psalm 24:1-2 ESV: The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

A few short quotes about water from some other sources: From the Quran, from Surah an-Nahl: "And Allah has sent down the water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death..."

From UU minister Elizabeth Lerner Maclay: As drops of rain that find each other and build to become a track, a rivulet, a stream, a river, a sea, so are we drawn together; so are we fortunate to find each other; so are we bound together, on this shared passage toward an unknown ocean and eternity.

From Autumn Morning Star (Native American storyteller/musician): "When life places stones in your path, be the water. A persistent drop of water will wear away even the hardest stone."

From Sufi poet Rumi: "When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy."



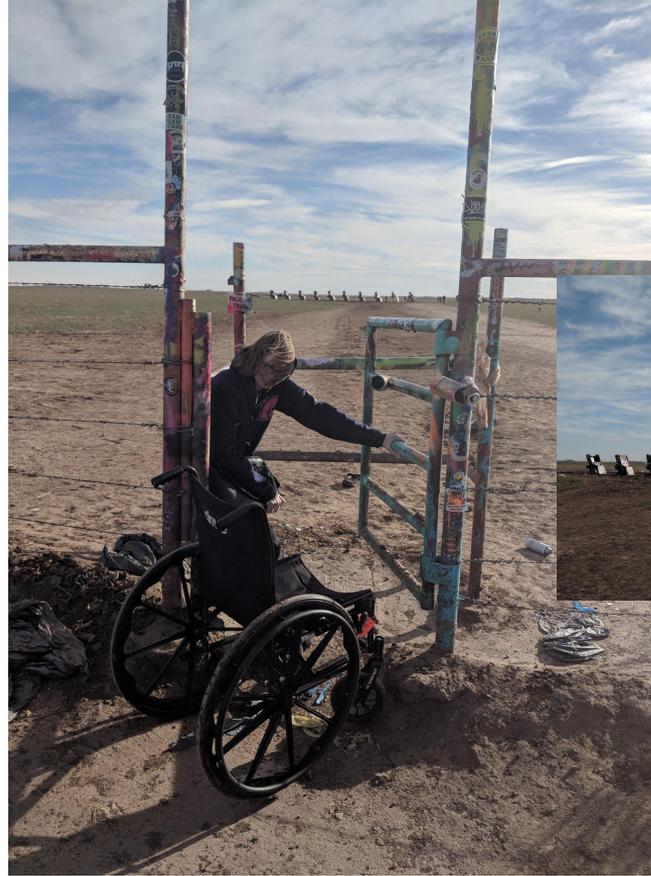






CADILLAC RANCH ON ROUTE 66 IN AMARILLO, TEXAS: KATRINA

Our road trip included several stops on the old Route 66, including the Cadillac Ranch. I commented that we couldn't get through the only entrance, a cattle gate. In my memory, Carrie demanded I get her out of the car. She wheeled herself to the gate, where she popped off her chair and pulled her butt onto the rails. Seeing her determination, I collapsed her chair and fit it through the gate to greet her on the other side. Done! The wheels collected a lot of mud, easy to wash off in the end. The trip was worth getting a little dirty.



CADILLAC RANCH ON ROUTE 66 IN AMARILLO, TEXAS: CARRIE

I often start these tourist stops trying not to inconvenience Katrina. I intend to do as much as I can myself and say “no” on things that would require much lifting or straining. But admittedly, I end up wanting everything, and Katrina delivers with generous (and able) willingness. You can see the Cadillacs far in the distance in the first photo. Katrina did push me clear out there. I got to do all the fun, even spray painting the Cadillacs, in spite of mobility limitations.



BOATING ON LAKE HAVASU, AZ:

KATRINA

Due to the hospitality of Don and Camille, we were able to go boating during the annual Lake Havasu balloon festival. We arrived at the boat dock buzzing with wows of exciting news that against all odds, Carrie was going up in a balloon the next morning. **Carrie had asked me how to create adventures in the face of resistance. We don't plan, I answered.** This edgy adventure found us. We would learn to let each adventure happen, like this happened. The practice was to be open to the adventure without expectations, without attachment. **Have faith in a vision and be persistent while allowing and opening to what unfolds. Being fully engaged in the experience attracts the adventure.**







BALLOON CHARIOT IN LAKE HAVASU



BALLOON CHARIOT IN LAKE HAVASU, AR: CARRIE

Balloons are pretty in the air, but I didn't really want to pay to go up in one. But, hey, we're here, let's find out how much. We found out it didn't matter how much; no ballooning unless you could stand. What?! Now I had to ride in a balloon. Katrina went into action, looking around for authoritative balloon people and initiating conversations about my woeful plight. One person led to another, and shortly we had a balloon ride scheduled the next morning. It would be with a paraplegic balloon pilot who sat in a special harness, and had room for two. Katrina and I both had turns. It was such a special ballooning experience that we were sky high and smiling for days.



LAS VEGAS: CARRIE

We made Las Vegas our last road trip spot because I wanted to go on a special zipline there called Slotzilla. This zipline is special because it accepts people in wheelchairs. We arrived promptly for our time slot on Slotzilla and got our wristbands. All systems go. Except one last form to fill out and, oh no, it asks if you have an ostomy. I do. Because of how much I wanted to do SlotZilla, I got the manager and negotiated from every angle I could. But no way around that ostomy. Was I in tears, shut down, crushed? Maybe a nanosecond. Instead I looked the manager in the eye and asked, "What else can I do this afternoon that is like this?" She consulted with her co-workers and someone came up with "There's ziplining off the top of the Rio Casino." Really, wow. Katrina and her GPS driving skills got us to the Rio Casino before dark. As time was running out, Katrina even used her GPS for finding the way from the parking garage through the massive casino to where the zipline started. We arrived and were quickly guided to a seat like a ski lift and buckled in. And zip we went. We started atop a 50-story tower, and cascaded more than 800 feet reaching speeds to 33 miles per hour. And then the backward zip up to where we pushed off. Ziplining, check.



CANCUN CARRIE JUNGLE BOAT CAPTAIN!: CARRIE

Yes, this little lady in the wheelchair is the one who throttled across the Caribbean, keeping up with the speedy guide boat. To be fair, Katrina was a good sport even though she would have preferred slowing down a bit. My instructions from the guide were easy: "Keep up with me." That's all the permission I needed to punch the boat to its highest speed. First we went through this jungle passage, and then out into the open Caribbean. To get to the big event, which was...



CANCUN CARRIE JUNGLE BOAT CAPTAIN!: KATRINA

Witnessing Carrie drive a boat was one of my most exhilarating moments of the year. I was surprised and then nervous that we had to drive our own boat to the jungle in order to snorkel. I'd never driven a boat. Once to the boat, Carrie boldly announced she would be driving the little speedboat. I had fun filming her shouting into the camera as she drove that after using a wheelchair for 20 years, and seeing herself as a 'wimp' most of her childhood, and with MS most of her adulthood, that at 63 years old she was driving a boat through the Caribbean jungle, FAST!



SNORKELING: KATRINA

“We truly do not know what the day will bring. That’s a good thing, Katrina. It’s a good thing.” Carrie said to me, noticing that I was beginning to flow with the spontaneous and unplanned. I like structure, a lot, but this year I kept relearning the lesson of staying in the moment. Like when I noted there were no seatbelts in the taxi on the way to the boat dock. Carrie made a sign of the cross, **“This is our seatbelt.”**

The young man Carrie followed to the coral reef saw how fast she drove, so must have assumed that she also knew how to snorkel. She didn’t stare out into the water for long. In she went.... Carrie said to me later with a spark in her eyes, *“People in Mexico assume you know how to drive a boat and swim. I’m not used to that. I’m used to being treated with kid gloves.”*





CANCUN CENOTES: CARRIE

Before Katrina and helper Jose had caught their breath, I found myself kayaking on an ancient mayan cenote. Wow, something I never imagined-- neither the crystal clear pool, nor kayaking in it. Helper Jose plopped down in my wheelchair for the duration. Katrina delightedly joined me in exploring the cenote, climbing on my kayak for awhile. After my life of getting driven around by others, I enjoyed taking Katrina for a boat "ride" two times in Cancun.



ATV AMAZING CANCUN PARK: KATRINA

To our knowledge, the ATV Amazing jungle park had never before accommodated a person with physical challenges. It was when Carrie started climbing up a ladder to the closest zipline that the manager of the park, Moises, decided to clear the six ziplines in the park of residents to give space for her request. Though Carrie can't put weight on her feet, she can crawl and so it was agreed that she would be given the choice to climb the steep ladders with the option to stop. She went all the way. The lead staff member, Michael Yodanis, suited Carrie with gear. Other crew members took turns traveling beside her on each line. As Carrie zipped down her first line, Michael turned to me with a smile bursting at the seams. With excitement in his voice, he shared that in his career as a coach, he encouraged people to let go of their fear. He wished others could witness Carrie embrace her adventure alongside her challenges. The twenty staff in the park knew of Carrie by the time she landed after the sixth zipline. It was her birthday, and so everyone ran to the base of the sand pit to greet Carrie and then pulled her to the nearby courtyard where they formed a circle around her to sing "Feliz Cumpleanos".



<https://youtu.be/F014uW7TJAs>

PARASAILING IN CANCUN:

KATRINA

This was the least edgy activity yet of the year, as Carrie put it. She transferred easily to the boat and the rigging, and up we went! I noticed staff members at each adventure seemed to expect I knew what to do with Carrie. I was more companion than specialist. Carrie explained that having an assistant and using clear language were important to accessing adventures. Organizations like the parasailing tour seemed more at ease when she brought an assistant. And, when registering for our adventures, Carrie told me to use the word, “transfer”. She could easily transfer from her chair. But what did transfer mean? On this day, a seasoned staff member with leather brown skin greeted us at check-in and strolled with Carrie and me down a long wooden dock to a boat, where she hopped off her wheelchair onto a seat inside the boat. When it came time to fly, she scooted her bottom next to the harnesses which lay on a flat platform of green astroturf at the back of the boat. A yellow chute was spread out by the crew. As the boat sped faster into the wide expanse of blue water and sky, the yellow chute filled with air to reveal a huge smile. Professional cameras were aimed at us to capture our every smile of excitement as the smiling chute lifted us up, weightless over the Caribbean where we spotted huge sea turtles and stingrays below. Because she could stretch her legs flat, landing on her butt was a soft conclusion to our Cancun adventure.



PARASAILING IN MAZATLAN, MEXICO: CARRIE

Headsets and instructions about pulling the proper cord to land got my rapt attention. Definitely more skillful participation demanded than on the previous happy face parasail.

The elegance of the crew landing me directly to my wheelchair was striking.
<https://youtu.be/Oq8um9Chgx8> Search Carrie Aadland on YouTube and the title: Up, Up and Away! Parasailing wheelchair to wheelchair



EMPOWERING WATER PLAY IN MAZATLAN, MEXICO: CARRIE

This was Katrina's day of strong swimming -- back and forth from yacht to shore keeping us supplied with kayaks and other water toys. At the end of this day is the only time I remember Katrina saying she was tired.

I delighted in seeing the kayaks Katrina drummed up for our use. Especially this day, when I was able to row around with dear friend Maria's grandchildren for their first kayak adventure.



BEACHES IN MAZATLAN, MEXICO:

KATRINA

Our room at the Playa Mazatlan overlooked a loamy beach of sand where Carrie and I met the athletic Jorge Luis Retana, a young man from Guatemala who lost a leg and foot in a train accident as a boy. After I spotted him on the beach, Carrie prompted me to go ask him how he maneuvered over the beach with his wheelchair. Jorge was having a picnic with two friends. He shared that his sports wheelchair made it through the sand as well as Carrie's, with the help of a friend winding the chair playfully backwards. Inspired by our conversation, I spun Carrie out to the beach so she could hear about Jorge's other traveling adventures.



BEACHES IN MAZATLAN, MEXICO:

CARRIE

A little wheelchair camaraderie on the beach--one place I don't often see others on wheelchairs. Even though we'd never met, Jorge and I talked animatedly about how fortunate it was to find ourselves on a beautiful Mazatlan beach that day. Katrina later put Jorge in contact with an athletic wheelchair factory in Guatemala which warmly invited Jorge into their fold.



ACCESSIBILITY TO RICK STEVES:

CARRIE

Don't believe my dog's innocent face--he almost blew the whole thing for us. When Rick first came out, Goliath growled loudly and stopped just short of sinking teeth into Rick's arm.

Currently, Rick Steves' vast array of European tours are not open to people using wheelchairs. He observes, "The creaky, cobblestoned Old World has long had a reputation for poor accessibility."

(<https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/trip-planning/travelers-with-disabilities>) However, accessibility is getting better and he refers travelers with mobility challenges to a company that leads specialized tours in Europe.

Rick Steves is a big deal in a lot of my circles and I left sky high on planning how to use, "I was talking to Rick Steves about that." A couple of months later in Washington DC I got my chance. Here I am in the aforementioned former workplace, Bread for the World with current director David Beckmann. Small world, David had gone to Guatemala with Rick last November, and he also knows Rick through Rick's Bread for the World involvement. To top it off, for some reason the computer screen in the bottom photo shows Rick and I engaged in the conversation we were having in the top photo. Synchronicity, yes.



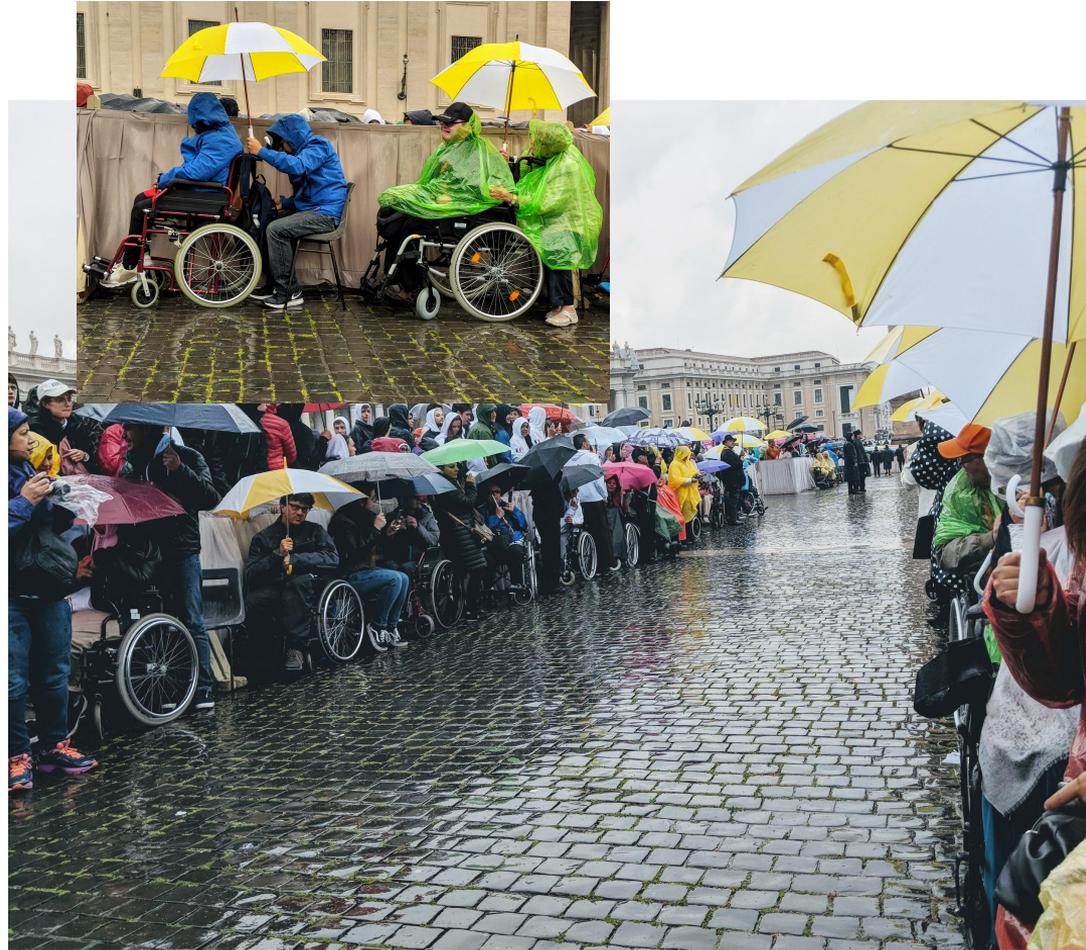
COBBLESTONES IN ROME: KATRINA

A cobblestone is defined as, “a small, round stone of a kind formerly used to cover road surfaces”. Whoever wrote “formerly” must not travel. In Rome the ancient pavers were a new challenge to navigate with a wheelchair. They look beautiful to my eye. But these roads made of stone took extra muscle. Even cars had to go relatively slow over the unpredictable terrain. In Rome the backroads were also smaller, which made the cars seem faster. I was full of questions. How have people with disabilities navigated these streets over the centuries? I felt almost giddy with the task of finding the easiest routes alongside cars and motorcycles, while hopping on and off the very inaccessible sidewalks.



IN THE FRONT ROW TO SEE THE POPE AT ST. PETER'S CATHEDRAL: KATRINA

Even our tour guide looked surprised when Carrie and I were whisked away by the Scottish National Guard to a special section of St. Peter's Square outside of the Vatican to hear Pope Francis address the people that April morning. Carrie was the very front chair facing the Pope. We were excited about this special treatment, until it began to rain. While many in the back of the square left, we had strict orders to remain in our seats. The handsome security guards passed out large yellow and white umbrellas, but still, everyone left soaked through.



IN THE FRONT ROW TO SEE THE POPE AT ST. PETER'S CATHEDRAL: CARRIE

Yes, the giddiness of being in the special “pope row” eroded in the pouring rain. No rain problem for Pope Francis-- he came up in his enclosed popemobile and sat under a heated canopy. During that long wait for his Popeship I remember that Katrina was hushing me and nixing my suggestions to liven things up. She was also afraid I would do something Lutheran like yelling “those Indulgences were wrong.” (I found out at the Vatican that day that those nasty indulgences helped finance Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. It's complicated.) Overall, I admit it was Holy to be in a special aisle for people who couldn't walk and were put near the Pope in hopes that we would receive miraculous healing by the man who millions still believe is Jesus' direct representative on earth.



ACCESSIBLE TOUR OF POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM WITH DARIUS: KATRINA



We found a raving review on Tripadvisor for an accessible tour of Pompeii and Herculaneum with a strong recommendation to hire a professional archeologist. Dario was worth every euro. We learned he gives free accessible tours one Sunday a month. We found that Herculaneum (seen here) had more accessible paths than Pompeii, whose ancient roads of huge boulders were really difficult in a wheelchair.

ACCESSIBLE TOUR OF POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM WITH DARIUS: CARRIE

Touring Pompeii, our second Italy event in heavy rain, I was crabby. I don't like to be wet in a wheelchair. However, looking at this photo, I see a gorgeous archeologist with a big red umbrella, my pink rain pants, two rain coats and boots I had just bought in Rome. Time to stop complaining and appreciate how well I have it in my wheelchair on paved paths compared to the folks 2000 years ago in Pompeii. Pompeii in its day was hardly accessible with its uneven stone streets and steep stairs. But like in so many places, I left grateful for the ramps and paved trails that have been put in since then, and for the nice people who got me and my wheelchair through even where there were not accessible paths.



THE AMALFI COAST, ITALY:

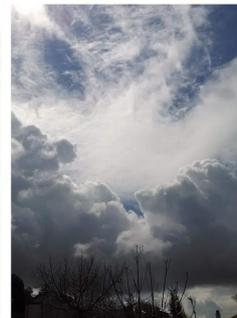
KATRINA

Carrie requested stopping along the Amalfi Coast to experience at least one of the small towns during our long winding drive (between our hotel in Sorrento and the tile studio in Luci D'Artista before Salerno). I wanted to get the drive over with, to get past all the near scrapes with tour buses around the tight turns. But in the end I was grateful for the pause, to take in the beautiful houses and places of worship hanging off the coastal cliffs. However, even the pauses were moments prone to adventure. Do you see the glint in Carrie's eyes? I never knew what to expect. What is she going to try now? I found myself negotiating ways out of what I perceived were dangerous moments, saying, "I don't think that will be in your best interest." But when I followed this strong willed woman, I often found myself exclaiming, "Wow! This was really fun!" We had chance encounters and saw magical places because of Carrie's tenacious spirit.



PALM SUNDAY IN MARA, ITALY :
CARRIE

A very serendipitous Palm Sunday church service in this Italian village. We drove around a corner seeking we weren't sure what, and came upon a Palm Sunday procession outside this church. We pulled over and were warmly welcomed. Someone gave us their parking spot so we could move out of the road. And others whisked me up a side ramp to the front doors and into the center aisle of the service in progress. Sometimes God's church gets it so right.





CRISTO REDENTORE IN MARATEA, ITALY :

KATRINA

I reserved the Pianeta Maratea Resort because of its view of the Cristo Redentore overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea, an appropriate location for Palm Sunday. We arrived in the middle of the night with the Cristo lit as a shining beacon. The resort was deserted except for the hosts. Carrie and I were the only ones in the huge dining room for breakfast. We were two of maybe six people in the resort of over a hundred deserted rooms and a hollow olympic size pool. I found the lifeless concrete building unsettling. The head of housekeeping took pity on me and created my very own "office", providing a desk and chair in a vacant ballroom with vast windows overlooking the Cristo. Here I wrote on the blog about our travels. Carrie and I had a tearful meeting in this office as we watched the sun set. We learned the next morning that Notre Dame had been burning in the night. Might we have picked up on this emotional calamity? Our tour of Italy had several such significantly intuitive moments. As a respite from the empty resort I often visited the Cristo. It felt refreshing to walk past goat farms and ancient stone chapels to this beacon on the hill. I became grateful of the quiet. I learned tourists would begin to fill the countryside the following week for Easter. It took some coaxing, but I convinced Carrie it was worth a closer look to drive up and visit the Cristo before we left the quiet mountain.



CRISTO REDENTORE IN MARATEA, ITALY :
CARRIE

I was told that getting up to see the Cristo Redentor statue wasn't accessible. I was delighted however to see the stairs. I'm very comfortable getting to places on my knees. On my knees, I didn't see the actual statue until I reached the step I'm on in the photo. It made for a holy vista. Many times I'm warned that something is not accessible. If I try anyway, I often find an alternate, and sometimes wonderful, way to experience things.



KAYAKING ON THE POTOMAC :

KATRINA

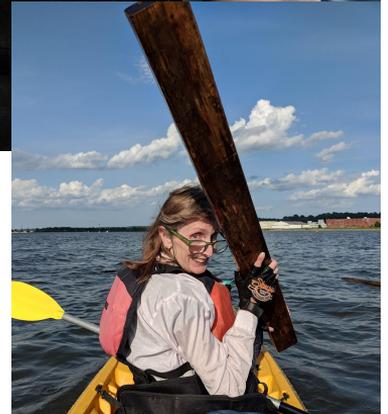
In the course of our travels I began to notice a consistent pattern within myself. Though I was the “adventure specialist”, I typically felt uncomfortable upon arrival in a new environment and hotel. But immediately after I got outside and explored the area I found miracles and synchronicities like: Route 66 Cafe across the street from our hotel in Rome, and now, the kayaking within a five minute stroll of our Watergate Hotel. After a long day of travel, Carrie often preferred to get active once we got settled in our hotel. My pattern of discomfort was probably because I was tired of pushing and lifting and navigating. But each time she insisted, like this occasion, I was grateful for Carrie’s spirit of adventure that said we immediately go outside the walls of the hotel and explore. This time we found an open dock along the Potomac with kayaks. The stairs to the dock did not deter her.



KAYAKING ON THE POTOMAC :

CARRIE

We rented the kayaks with no time to spare; they were closing soon. Good thing we pushed. A rainstorm that night closed the Potomac to all boating for the rest of our stay in Washington DC. My special needs dissipated in that kayak, clipping along with the very familiar DC skyline in the distance. Except as usual Katrina had my back, so to speak. She took the rear of the kayak when I got tired paddling. And a playful moment: Katrina did a double take when she suddenly saw this enormous plank I pulled out of the water.



WATERGATE HOTEL ART STUDIO :

KATRINA

I was discouraged by the rain in May while in DC until a friend reminded me to access my skills to create an art studio in the hotel. The rainy days in DC became an opportunity. I set up the art studio on our huge windowsill overlooking the Potomac. The setting of natural light and a large flat surface felt ideal. After a visit to the gift shop in the National Gallery of Art for additional supplies, Carrie and I spent many quiet moments each morning or evening playing with colors while overlooking the swelling Potomac.



ROCK CREEK PARK LABYRINTH IN WASHINGTON DC : KATRINA

Another perk of staying at the Watergate Hotel was being just a few minutes stroll from a park complete with a labyrinth. The first time I spotted it, joggers appeared to be using the center as a meeting place before their run. When I entered the labyrinth, the joggers left. One by one people of all ages and colors joined me. A young nine-year-old girl hopped off her bike and ran the labyrinth. Then an older black couple slowly entered together for their first time. Then a young man parted from his sceptical friend who looked on as he also started the path. I was excited when Carrie joined me one afternoon. I don't know if she had ever been inside a labyrinth before. It was one of the rare labyrinths I'd seen wide and flat enough for wheelchair users. Search Katrina Plato on YouTube and the title: Labyrinth Walk in Washington DC

<https://youtu.be/TZQyDoRgBq4>



BEACH WHEELCHAIR TOY IN LONG BEACH, WASHINGTON: KATRINA

I learned that the small town of Long Beach, Washington purchased three beach chairs for children and adult wheelchair users so they could have easier access to the beach. One of the chairs is kept at The World Kite Museum in Long Beach. The chair looks like a museum display, but once checked out, the chains come down and the chair comes to life with little effort. The kid in me leapt out with this light, easy to push chair. I made several short video commercials cheerfully pointing out the chair's accessible features while jerking Carrie back and forth in the toy as she maintained the role of the adult, calmly flying her peace kite. Search Katrina Plato on YouTube and the title: Beach Wheelchair Advertisement <https://youtu.be/OyKciPiW0c0>



OSPREY RAFTING IN LEAVENWORTH, WASHINGTON: KATRINA

In May we began our summer rafting adventures on the Wenatchee River. I had never gone rafting, and would probably still be dry if it weren't for Carrie's desire to go floating this summer. Carrie and I started with a calm Class I float in May, just the two of us with our young guide, Owen, on flat waters. I witnessed that Owen had an ease with the river and a similar confidence with Carrie as he encouraged her participation in the water. Next was a splashy Class III rapids in June with a full boat pictured here, and Owen again as our guide. Floating is very different than rafting, we learned. In July I kayaked through swirling rapids while Carrie enjoyed floating the river in a tube. The June splashy Class III rapids were my favorite.



OSPREY RAFTING IN LEAVENWORTH, WASHINGTON: CARRIE

I never thought I'd be doing this. I'm naturally wimpy with obvious accessibility issues. But, with Katrina along and the kindness of young guides at Osprey Rafting, here I am bouncing through class three rapids. At one point in our whitewater rafting trip, everyone had to get out of the river to walk around a dam. Not me, I got portaged alone in one of these big rafts. It took eight strong people to carry the raft overland with me in it. I kept thinking of Sacagawea having to dive into the river to retrieve things from Lewis and Clark's capsized boats. How I wish I could have given her a ride around the hard parts of her river journey.



PAUL MCCARTNEY'S INSPIRATION: KATRINA

Carrie and I learned that my two Beatle crazed sons, Samuel and Ben, were going to a Paul McCartney concert in July. We jumped on the idea to go with them. I rarely go to concerts, so this was extra special. ... Turned out selecting accessible seats in the colosseum required puzzling a maze of numbers. It all worked out! We got the tickets!

Watching Carrie sing was as much fun as Paul McCartney's light show.



PAUL MCCARTNEY'S INSPIRATION:

CARRIE

Yes, I did sing with Paul McCartney that night. And my voice came from deep inside my heart when he asked us all to scream at once to recreate the early Beatles days. Does anyone remember that?

I left inspired by what Paul McCartney is still creating and giving. The concert lasted two and a half hours without a break. At age 77, Paul McCartney was the lead singer on every song, played six different instruments multiple times, and entertained us between each song with first-hand Beatles' stories. I left willing to drop that I'm old at age 63. No, I have lots more to do.



KAYAKING AT HOTEL ATITLAN WITH RUDY: KATRINA

“Calm, Katrina, Calm!”, was the mantra this young man would say as he smiled back at me through his rear view mirror of his uncle’s truck while deftly driving the tight curves of Guatemala, so reminiscent of the Amalfi Coast in Italy. Rudy was our wheels and one of our guides, and most important, Carrie’s devoted Guatemalan assistant. Upon greeting us, he immediately took her chair from my hands. We simply would not have made it around Guatemala without Rudy. This generous and sensitive young man brought extra joy to my adventure. The two of us laughed and shared a great deal with the help of our Google Translators.



KAYAKING AT HOTEL ATITLAN WITH RUDY: CARRIE

We found out our hotel on Lake Atitlan had small plastic kayaks to use--woo,hoo. But, before getting too jazzed, I always need to ask "Is there an accessible way to the water?" They said no, there's a very steep ramp and lots of cement stairs. But, between me and my two able attendants (Katrina and Rudy), we made a way. The accessibility tip this time featured life vests used as knee pads. Adults don't have fat pads on their knees like babies. So when we crawl on a roof or in my case to get down stairs, padding for the knees is essential. To get to the lake this time, we took off our life vests which provided nice, thick padding for my knees.

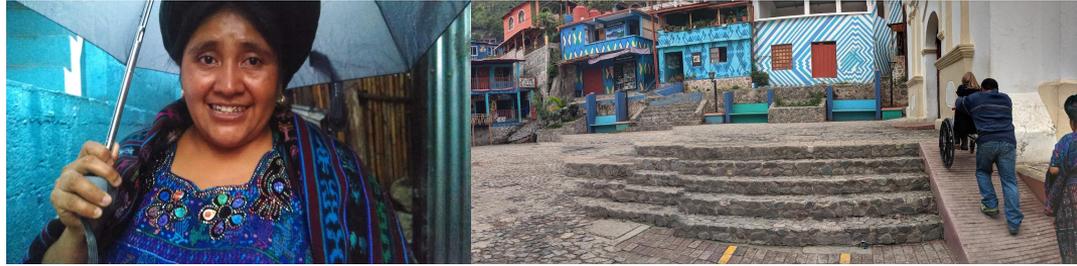
When we finally found ourselves on the water in kayaks, we were shining as bright as the sun on the lake.



JOURNEY TO SANTA CATARINA

PALOPO, LAKE ATITLAN: KATRINA

The local rooster greeted us as we passed water gushing out of pipes onto our path. **My favorite adventure in Guatemala was the trek to the home of Roxanna, the sister of a weaver, Laura that worked for my step mother.** When I inquired what sites Laura suggested Carrie and I see around the lake we were immediately brought into the family fold. Roxanna and her husband Moises came to visit us our second day at Lake Atitlan, and inspired us to visit their home. They lived in nearby Santa Catarina, a lake town painted with a 100 gallons of turquoise enamel to celebrate a village of generational weavers such as Roxanna and her sister. The family was eager that I experience their Temazcal, a Mayan sauna with healing rituals passed down through generations like their weaving symbols. A hard rain began soon after we arrived in their quiet village. While I sat in a pew at the Santa Catarina Cathedral introducing Roxanna to Google Translator her husband slipped away to start the fire in the sauna. When Moises returned he deftly wheeled Carrie up steep and slippery sidewalks to their home.



JOURNEY TO SANTA CATARINA PALOPO, LAKE ATITLAN: CARRIE

The steep walk up to Moises and Roxanna's house in a deluge of rain may be my most bona fide adventure yet. A challenge for everyone-- the men transporting the wheelchair, Katrina keeping the camera dry enough to take pictures, someone to clear the chickens from the path, and admittedly, the person riding on the wheelchair. I apologized afterward to Moises for putting him through this. He responded with a big "no problema" and said that I wasn't the first wheelchair to go up what I would call a broken, collapsed, and disintegrated passage which would have been condemned in any other setting. Don't forget it was in the middle the downpour.



AMIDI WATER PROJECT IN PACHAY: KATRINA

Rudy drove Carrie and me to a small village outside of Antigua, Guatemala where Ana Maria Chalí Calan and the women of Pachay bring sustainable living conditions to their village. At the base of the village road we picked up Ana Maria, the leader of AMIDI (Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas Para Desarrollo Integral: Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development). Rudy's truck pulled us up the winding rut and pot filled dirt roads to the tip top of the small village where we were warmly greeted by Ana Maria's daughters and other Mayan women and children from Pachay. The women were eager to speak with Carrie, to show her their fine building she had helped to sponsor. My favorite moment of our meeting was when two women plopped live rabbits and chickens on the table to illustrate their passion for their poultry business. The intelligence of Maria's daughters as they outlined their organic gardening methods was stunning to me. Just before the group photo, Carrie, a strong woman with the help of tough women, ascended the top of the building. After goodbyes, Ana Maria joined us on the ride back to the city where she intended to use the library to continue her research on advocacy for women's rights in Guatemala.



AMIDI WATER PROJECT IN PACHAY: CARRIE

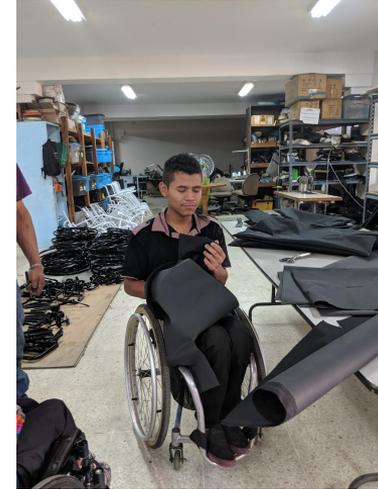
A few years ago, I learned of this group of Mayan women from Parade magazine of all places. They were featured because they were using Mayan traditions to build better lives for their families now. In 2018, their project was to bring water to their town for the first time ever. They had negotiated to purchase a spring up the mountain to provide water, they had a design with budget figures for a cistern and even....bathrooms! We went to see their water system now finished. A big part of the project was the cistern which opened on top of this building. I asked to see it also. It took a village to help me up the steep muddy path across the plank in my wheelchair, up the ladder, and finally getting pulled up to the roof. I can see that the “can do” spirit of the AMIDI women will carry them far.



TRANSITIONS FOUNDATION:

KATRINA

I would have stayed in Guatemala in a heartbeat to work for Transitions, the foundation co-founded by Alex Galvez. Alex explained to me that he was shot in Guatemala City when he was 15 years old. He was walking to a grocery store when a gang member aimed a gun at his head. Alex dodged that bullet, but the second went in his shoulder and out the other, severing his spinal cord in its path. Alex was found by American John Bell in a hospital sick from bed ulcers. John took him to Washington DC, where he recovered after two years, returning with John to found Transitions. The foundation also has a basketball team and serves a special needs classroom in Antigua. Alex, now the executive director, is proud that Transitions is run by Guatemalan citizens. I left inspired like many others to find the support his organization needs.



VISITING TRANSITIONS: CARRIE

Alex and the other wheelchair users at Transitions bravely face daily mobility challenges. Guatemala doesn't provide the type of social services offered in the U.S. and many adults, as well as children, are isolated at home if they can't walk. A wheelchair can make a great difference in opening up a life. Not only does Transitions improve lives through matching people in need with wheelchairs, it also employs mostly wheelchair users in its factory. And for fun? These guys are tenacious on the court playing wheelchair basketball.



SAN ANTONIO AGUAS CALIENTES

:KATRINA

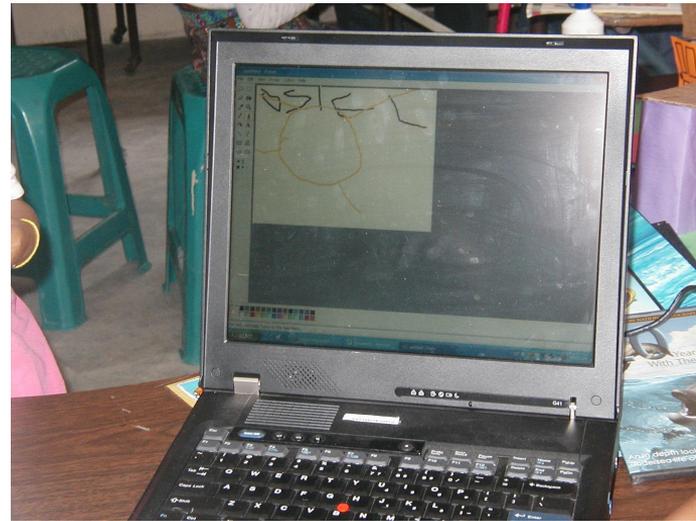
Alex seemed to know everyone. For example, collecting Carrie and me from our hotel, he drove us through Antigua's town square stopping to casually converse with a local supporter. Transitions is always looking for financial contributions for their projects which includes a special needs classroom outside of Antigua. The students we met had a variety of physical disabilities. I learned attendance is challenging because families tend to keep their children home to work for them. Transitions attempts to educate the parents as well as the community on the importance of an inclusive education.



SAN ANTONIO AGUAS CALIENTES

: CARRIE

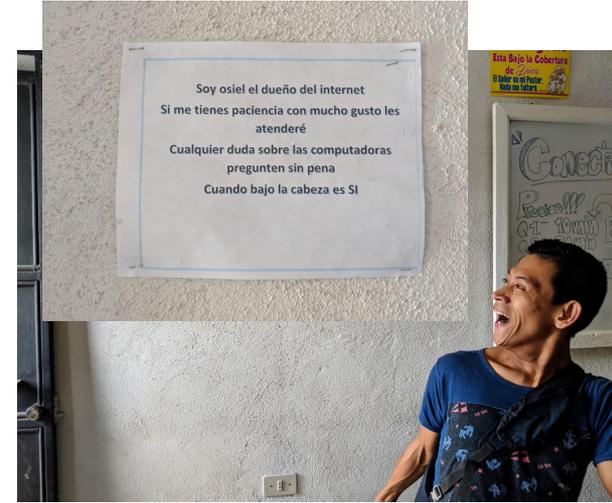
My story with Transitions' special needs school began sixteen years ago. I came across their website, liked a mission for kids and wheelchairs in Guatemala, and offered my support. They asked that I sponsor a student at their special needs school, Osiel. As I understand, Transitions found Osiel, age twelve, when he had been pretty much confined to his bed at home because he couldn't walk. Transitions provided a wheelchair and Osiel began attending their special needs school. After a year of sponsoring Osiel, I traveled to the school to meet him and take him a laptop I had been using. That was a popular thing to do-- all the students loved the computer, but especially Osiel. I was impressed that he immediately wrote his name so I could see it on the screen. Big hugs all around. I didn't go to Guatemala for many years and lost touch with Osiel.



OSIEL: KATRINA

It was inspiring to meet Osiel and witness what had become of Carrie's gift to that teenager many years ago. Osiel is now 30 years old and though he is not able to communicate with spoken words, he operates his own innovative internet cafe in the small village of San Antonio Aguas Calientes outside of Antigua. Rudy, who was also with us, brought my attention to a sign in the cafe that translates in English: *I am Osiel the owner of the internet. If you have patience, it will be my pleasure to assist you. Any questions about computers ask without embarrassment. When I lower my head is YES.* There is a short documentary film about Osiel made in 2017.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQWxKrY_Bfc&t=2s



OSIEL: CARRIE

I learned about a year before that Osiel had an internet cafe and happily started sending funds for his business. But, given how severe I remembered his disability, I couldn't quite feature Osiel's having an internet cafe. I was eager to see Osiel and his café on this visit so after seeing the school, we went to his business. There was Osiel, same contagious grin, but now 30 years old. I was very moved because although I still couldn't understand him, he was obviously a very accomplished young man. This brave guy, who can't talk nor control his very awkward movements, founded an internet cafe. Now that's a "differently enabled" triumph. No question why mom is smiling.



THE INFAMOUS COBBLESTONES OF ANTIGUA:

KATRINA

Carrie had warned me all year, when we were clunking through Rome, and weaving through DC's older streets, that I hadn't seen anything until I experienced the cobblestones of Antigua, Guatemala. We arrived at night bumping along in the truck to loud music, lights and crowds of people in the town square. In the days that followed, I walked the stone roads in the early mornings. I became fixated on the textured cobblestone street structure, and haunted by the question of accessibility. I began to keep a photo journal of the tiled markers throughout the old city. I was perplexed that the city deemed the crumbling sidewalks and cobbled streets accessible. Curiously, I didn't notice any other wheelchair users. And why in this modern age did cars bounce over streets in the oldest city of Central America? When I asked our local guide, he said the city council intentionally chose to keep the cobblestone to deter the fast pace of the much more modern and often violent Guatemala City. I prided myself in assisting Carrie over these stones without calling a local Tuk Tuk, an open air taxi. With the help of Rudy and our trusty tour guide Hugo, Carrie was able to play in the street life with us.



THE INFAMOUS COBBLESTONES OF ANTIGUA:

CARRIE

Yes, I want it all, don't leave me home when you go out, please. Rudy, whom you've already met, turned rickshaw driver in the colonial city of Antigua. Rudy is endlessly patient. I heard only "where next" as I led him on an hour-long wild goose chase. I just hope Rudy could stand up straight again after we left.

If it weren't for Antigua's cobblestones, we might never have met Hugo. Our first morning in Antigua, Katrina and I headed out to its main square. The curbs there can be an intimidating two feet above the street. A kind man saw us and came over to help Katrina lift me up. On the way back, he helped again. We found out this was Hugo, a tour guide, and we were blessed with his company during all the rest of our Antigua stay.







WENATCHEE RIVER FLOAT:

KATRINA

Upon returning from Guatemala Carrie and I continued our exploration of rivers with the wild Wenatchee in Leavenworth, Washington. We were scheduled to go on an easy float with Osprey, our trusted whitewater company, but they claimed there was absolutely no accessibility for a wheelchair because of rocks and steep banks. Ever persistent, we found a local access point. The company let us use their tubes. It was not as rocky and steep, and there were two nice men to help maneuver Carrie's chair safely to the water.



WENATCHEE RIVER FLOAT: CARRIE



My expeditions this year consistently seem to have “two nice men” to help. It makes for a friendly universe. I’m here also with long-time friend Nadine Sanders. She’s been with me on many trips including Guatemala and Mexico. Maybe more importantly, we’ve supported each other over many years to manifest the experiences and adventures we feel nudged to do. Tubing the Wenatchee River for example.



SKOOKUMCHUCK BOUNCE HOUSE AND OTHER FORMS OF ACCESSIBILITY: KATRINA



The goal was to float local rivers in Washington and Oregon in the warm summer months. We learned of many methods to maneuver to and from the water. The inner tubes became a vehicle for accessibility. Carrie discovered they were also perfect for crawling out of the river over long paths or in tight spots. It was when riding down the Skookumchuck River that Carrie got the idea to jump from a rope swing into a tube. I also witnessed Carrie's versatility, like when she used her flip flops for paddles to push water, and her knee pads to cross river banks.



SKOOKUMCHUCK BOUNCE HOUSE AND OTHER FORMS OF ACCESSIBILITY: CARRIE

Oh joy, truly a summer on the river, including many floats on the Skookumchuck and Chehalis rivers in my own hometown. I'm chuckling in this photo because it's my first time floating under this bridge, a bridge that I crossed over a few thousand times as a child in the family car.

Once on these rivers, I can paddle and steer like anyone. But the "once on the river" is the rub. Getting from the car into the river at various times has involved the following for my helpers. Rolling the chair on rocks, mud and sand. Getting scratched going through blackberry brambles. Steep uphill and steep downhill lugging floaties. Giving me piggyback rides, dragging me by one arm and carrying me in a two person shoulder seat. Someone then has to make the long trek back to store my wheelchair in the parked vehicle. For my helpers, this all gets repeated on the other end of the float.



WHIDBEY KAYAKING IN LANGLEY WASHINGTON: KATRINA

I simply love the marks wheels make in the sand. I have a photo album of twirls and circles and deep cut lines like these. It is never easy getting a wheelchair to the beach.

The rewards of reaching the water supersede the effort. We joined a tour of kayakers at Langley bay on Whidbey Island. Once on the water, we found ourselves restless to go farther than the large group. With the help of our guide Tabitha, we learned new strokes to go FASTER! We like to push our adventures, even in the water.



WHIDBEY KAYAKING IN LANGLEY WASHINGTON: CARRIE

It still surprises me each time I see a picture of myself in a wheelchair. Like, “What’s a lady in a wheelchair doing going kayaking?” Oh, that’s me.

Everyone at Whidbey Kayaking was kind and made sure I could go kayaking. Mostly they get on board after they see that I have someone, i.e. Katrina, who is majorly responsible for me. The kayak guides understandably like to have an able-bodied companion. And so do I. Katrina can always paddle when I get tired, navigate the way back, or drag me across sand, allowing for an edgier kayaking trip than it would be based on only my abilities.

We kayaked perhaps more than any other water adventure this year, in places as varied as Cancun in Mexico, Lake Atitlán in Guatemala, and the Salish Sea here in Washington state.



DECEPTION PASS KAYAKING:

KATRINA

The textured ramp gave Carrie access to what we agreed was our most rugged kayaking adventure to date. Once in the water, Carrie paddled in front as the power, and I managed our course with a rudder in the back. We were skeptical whether we would enjoy kayaking in the morning fog. We had never been to Bowman Bay at Deception Pass, so didn't know what lay ahead of us. No other human was on the water. I enjoyed the quiet mystery. Salty waves rolled under our kayak as large swells. Our guide, Matt, explained the swells were from storms that had once been active in the ocean beyond the Salish Sea.



DECEPTION PASS KAYAKING:

CARRIE

Driving up to Anacortes Kayak Tours that morning was sobering. We had kayaked the day before in bright sunlight among lots of buildings and surrounded by more than a dozen other kayakers. What we saw here was dense fog, nothing manmade and we were alone. Shall we go through with it? Before I could back out, our guide appeared, looked us over and apparently deemed us seaworthy. We were committed. First up in “real” kayaking was a new apparel item, cockpit skirts. So far, so good. Second consequential difference is that we needed both a power person and a steering person. (Katrina had done both before). Steering involves feet and so had to be Katrina. That put me as power person-yikes. Once we put in, we were in a glorious world of rough ocean, fog, and wilderness. It was enchanting. Our guide must have thought he had good material in his clients because he offered to give us the fairly rare opportunity to go near a cave that couldn't be accessed any other way. The risk? Get too close and get sucked inside, which was Katrina's worry. Not mine, the guide had showed me how to paddle backwards and I was ready at the bow for any quick getaway. So glad we didn't bail and instead had a genuine kayak adventure.



TOUTLE RIVER ROCK BED: KATRINA

This photograph is of a woman who just experienced the thrill of a new sport. It wasn't floating the Toutle, it was crawling the very long expanse of hot boulders from the river to the trail at the edge of the forest, which she also climbed. After mapping out the access points her friends and I played "Marco, Polo" to be sure our aim from the river bed to the forest trail was on point. We thought Carrie would be carried most of the way from the river. She had other ideas, as usual!!! (Check the *Toutle River float mobility* YouTube movie under Katrina,)



TOUTLE RIVER ROCK BED: CARRIE

Coming out of the Toutle River after our float, there was a long bed of boulders to get to the car. These likely weren't unfamiliar rocks to me. Growing up, our family had property on the Toutle River near this very spot. Our fun river play ended when Mt. St. Helens erupted 40 years ago. Hot mud overflowed the bed of the Toutle leaving our land unrecognizable and almost no river. The river is finally back enough to make a float possible. But there is still much less water and these very rocks I'm going over no doubt formed the river bed in front of where our cabin had been. Count the ironies-- over 50 years after we spent summers in our cabin on the Toutle River, i would be going over this same rock bed. And that 22 years after MS landed me on a wheelchair I'm still adequately enabled to traverse the rocks.



THE FAST AND FURIOUS WILLAMETTE RIVER IN ALBANY, OREGON: KATRINA

I became nervous when I saw the fast pace of the Willamette River. I had learned by now to be open to all possibilities, but I hesitated. The hesitation cost us time in the sun on a cold river in the late afternoon. We weren't from the area and I saw no one floating except a passing kayak. I called out for advice, "Sorry, we can't stop!", they yelled back as they whooshed away. I asked some locals wading on the shore. They advised not floating on the river. I called the Visitor's Center. They weren't sure. Okay, but here we were. I took in a deep breath, or two, and then remembering the email from the man at the local Visitor's Center who had never floated on the river. He suggested getting in at Hyak Park and out at Bryant or Bowman. Bryant to Bowman looked really scary swift. I decided on Hyak to Bryant because it was the shortest float. Once at Hyak even Carrie paused. But we went in to the vast, huge, fast river. That night we saw Amy, the woman from the Visitor's Center I had consulted by phone. We crushed each other with hugs because we had lived!



THE FAST AND FURIOUS WILLAMETTE RIVER IN ALBANY, OREGON: CARRIE

We agreed on an outing to Albany. We would go to the balloon festival for Katrina, and go on a river float for me. When the river didn't look as easy as we thought, Katrina went into mode of, "I'm going to make this work for Carrie.", which Katrina does, and she came through.

We had no wheelchair at the end of our float on the Willamette, so I crawled on floaties all the long way from the river shore to the parking lot (with Katrina lugging one after another). There we discovered, the Uber driver didn't show. This woman, Sarah, offered to take us to Katrina's car. When we got there, I asked Katrina for my wheelchair. Sarah, who had seen me come all the way unaided from the river, protested "you don't need a wheelchair." I enjoyed being perceived as sturdy-bodied.



NORTHWEST ART AND AIR FESTIVAL, ALBANY, OREGON: CARRIE

As noted earlier, Michael Glen is the pilot who has a special harness for wheelchair people to ride in. At this Albany event as he rolled over to greet me I had time to admire Michael's wheelchair skills. It's impressive that he always pushes his own chair himself. He has even taken the handles off the back of his chair so people absolutely can't push him!

With Michael present, I gave a plug for Katina to be on the balloon crew. "She would be a great addition to the balloon crew based on the adventure skills I've seen her use in action." He pointed to the lot where they would fly the next morning and said we were welcome to join them as we had done in Lake Havasu in January. Katrina took me back to Centralia, returned to the balloon festival, and helped Michael's crew in the morning. No doubt to me which adventure Katrina liked this year.





"WIMPS" NO MORE! : CARRIE

I commented to Katrina that we should end our escapades with a big splash. And so we did. Dropping off the rope swing into the Skookumchuck River was the most adventurous splash I've ever made. And, yes, with that letting go of the rope over mid-river, something heretofore in my life I wouldn't have even entertained, I've slayed my childhood moniker, wimp. In my mind, I'm now a "wimp" no more. Hallelujah, Jesus!



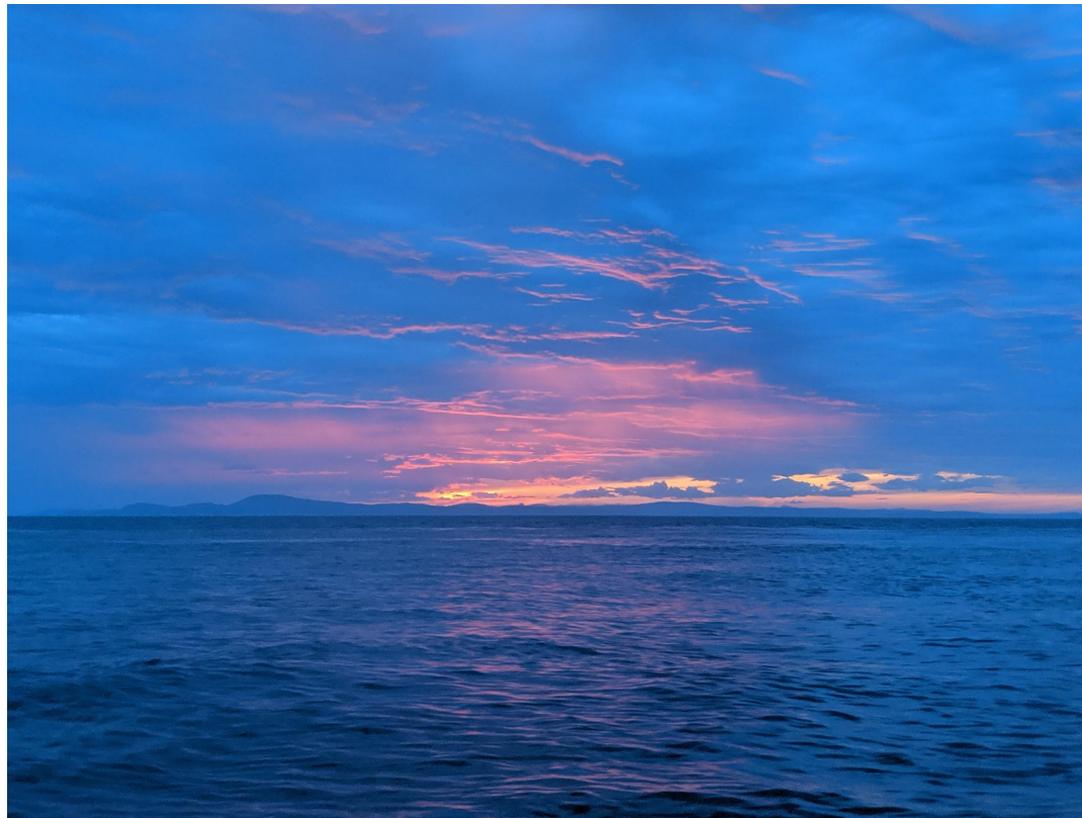
LAST ADVENTURE, DECEPTION PASS NIGHTTIME BIOLUMINESCENCE KAYAKING EXPERIENCE : KATRINA

It was overcast and gray when we arrived for the kayak tour near Deception Pass once again. The advertised sunset over the bay seemed unlikely. The guide very calmly gave us a floating tour along the cliffs while we waited for nightfall. And then, our group let out a gasp as we rounded a corner. The sky and water were lit turquoise and a changing sky of rose, orange, and purple met our eyes. The guide gestured for our small group of kayaks to draw close together. Collectively, we gazed at the glowing sunset in silence. I imagined the sky were lit with fireworks celebrating our year of adventures, a new set of colors going off with each drop of the sun below the horizon.

When dark set in so that we couldn't see our faces, we discovered more fireworks below the surface of the waters. We discovered a patch of glittering fluorescent life in from a bed of coral. Our oars became glowing sticks of magic as they swirled through the black water stimulating plants and small animal life to ignite their lights. We were curious explorers to the last moment.

“Have you heard what Carrie and Katrina are doing now!?”

It is something unusual, yet makes perfect sense if you know the two of them.



LAST ADVENTURE, DECEPTION PASS NIGHTTIME
BIOLUMINESCENCE KAYAKING EXPERIENCE :
CARRIE

A sunset kayak trip was a perfect last adventure for our year. Seeing this photo, and really all the photos of our adventures, I see our Bible verse for the year announced and completed.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.”

After an extraordinary eight months of travel now I go back to an also rich Centralia life. To paraphrase some Buddha “before adventuring, you chop wood, and carry water. After adventuring, you chop wood and carry water.”

Oh yes, and there is the book to craft...



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“To all who dream of exploring our world, it’s my hope that Katrina Plato and Carrie Aadland’s inspirational book will give you wings you never knew you had. Happy travels.” Rick Steves, American travel writer (More on Rick, pages 64-65)

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