

POSTCARDS FROM PAST PARKS



SUMMER 1972: Driving from Quebec to Boston. Suzy and I slept in the Rambler last night on the side of a deserted road in the middle of Maine. No cars passed in the night, but a big moose moseyed by early this morning. Today we made it to our first national park ever—

Acadia, with its spectacular rugged shoreline. Great campground with a bottle of wine and neighbors playing Neil Young's new *Harvest* album. Big kids loose in a big world.

SUMMER 1973: Heading back to Baltimore with Suzy's little brother in tow. Camped last night near the bottom of Shenandoah National Park at the best site ever. Sat on the rocks on one mountain ridge looking across the Shenandoah River at a second ridge as the sunset turned the mist a deeper shade of blue. I feel like I lived here once and I will live here again.

SPRING 1978: A perfect day at the prettiest place on earth. Had a picnic in Yosemite Valley on the meadow near the Tuolumne River with waterfalls roaring on all sides. Our new daughter smiled as our old Golden Retriever Gretchen jumped in the river. Welcome to the best of our world, Baby Kate.

SPRING 1979: Drove from Berkeley to Yosemite yesterday with Suzy's parents. It was evening all afternoon. It was snowing and it was going to snow. Took a solitary walk as a blue day dawned on fresh snow in Yosemite Valley. Among snowy mountains the only thing moving was a wolf that watched me from afar. This place must have been paradise before we arrived. (My apologies, Mr. Stevens.)

SUMMER 1979: Gretchen and I are looking for America on our drive from Berkeley to D.C. Arrived late at Grand Teton National Park, but found a camp site high up beside an ice cold lake. After a midnight swim, Gretchen kept me awake all night huddled up against me in the tent shivering and grunting. Today she snored loudly in the back seat as I made the long haul down from the mountains through Cody and on to Spearfish, with a spectacular detour to the Devil's Tower.

SUMMER 1993: We are at one of the coolest places we have ever visited: the Maho Bay tent campground on St. John in Virgin Island National Park. Clearest water, brightest colors, most lizards ever. Red Stripe anyone?

SPRING 2000: Four years ago Suzy and I took a sad trip to Rocky Mountain National Park after dumping freshman Kate off at Colorado College. Now I'm here alone at the YMCA Camp waiting to help move our new college graduate home to Texas. This morning I drove in the dark to Moraine Valley and took a seat high up in the rocks. A herd of elk grazed beneath me as the sun rose slowly over the mountains. The sky changed colors in every direction.

SUMMER 2001: This morning we left Badlands National Park on a narrow dirt road heading to the Pine Ridge Reservation. A big, old buffalo stood in the middle of the road: "None shall pass." We waited him out under a shade tree then drove on to the cemetery for the Sioux victims of the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. Buried with them at that sad place is a Native American activist killed in a protest there in 1973 after returning from a tour of duty in Vietnam. I cried.

WINTER 2002: We have had an exciting three weeks. First the USS *Arizona* Memorial, then a stay on the deserted island of Molokai, then a journey to the Big Island and Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, with its stunning lava flows. I will remember our whale watching trips off Maui the day I die; after that I hope to return here as a hump-back whale and entertain the tourists.

SUMMER 2005: Took the early animal-watching bus into Denali National Park this morning. Doesn't matter much—the sun never really goes down. Suzy was the champion animal spotter on the bus. We saw a grizzly stalking an elk, but it gave up and went looking for groundhogs instead. You can't always get what you want, but I have always wanted to be in Denali and I am finally here.

SUMMER 2006: Back at Glacier National Park, which we visited with Kate fifteen years ago. It's still stunning, but the glaciers are receding rapidly. I'm no expert on the science of climate change, but it scares me that this will soon be known as the National Park Formerly Known as Glacier. Going to the sun, indeed.

SUMMER 2010: We are on a whirlwind park tour with friends from Norway—Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, and the old lodge on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Suzy drove into Zion today. In a car full of 61 year olds, she is 62, the magic age to buy a senior pass: everyone in the car gets in free to every national park and monument. Time to retire.

Thank you!

All of us at *Houston History* wish to thank Blue Bell Creameries and The Heritage Society for sponsoring our ice cream social to launch our spring issue, "Tickle Your Taste Buds." The historic setting at The Heritage Society Museum and Sam Houston Park transported the guests back in time where they enjoyed delicious (and unbeatable) Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream with their favorite toppings. A great time was had by all.

Houston History supporters enjoy Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream in the Duncan Store at The Heritage Society at our April 2012 launch party.

