

Off to Alaska on the vacation of a lifetime

Just over two weeks ago my husband and I returned home from vacation. Because we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary this year, we decided more than a year ago we would take an Alaskan cruise this year.

I checked with people who had lived in Alaska as to the best time to go, and late July/early August was the recommendation. We then turned things over to a travel agent, telling her we wanted to sail from Seattle and return there. We wanted to take the train to Seattle and have an extra day there to do "tourist-y" things. It all came together, and we had a wonderful trip.

We saw and did some wonderful things while on the cruise. We learned about the temperate rain forest that covers much of the area where we had ports of call. We chose excursions that gave us opportunities to see glaciers, whales and totems. We learned that the glaciers are receding, saw a group of dancers who keep the Russian heritage alive in Sitka, watched a carver work on a totem and observed that the natives are held in high regard. We of course heard and saw some funny incidents during our tours of the cities where we stopped.

Juneau was our first port of call, and it was there we walked a distance to see Mendenhall Glacier. That was amazing to me, realizing it was at least 10 miles deep. There were pieces of ice floating in the lake from a large chunk that had broken off the day before. It was streaked with blue which shows up clearly on photographs.

The next day we sailed into Glacier Bay and saw more glaciers; again I was in awe. In the 1600's the glaciers advanced to displace some of the native peoples and covered all the water where we sailed. Then the glaciers began to diminish to where they are now. A few advance, but most recede.

We stopped in Sitka and had a marvelous tour guide. She talked about the Russian history and integrated it with the thriving community that Sitka is today. This town can only be reached by sea or air. I found a nice gift shop but missed the quilt shop. I contented myself by saying I might have missed the tour had I found the gift shop.

Our planned excursion in Victoria, British Columbia, was canceled because of not enough people signing up, so we went off on our own. The city is truly beautiful. Flower pots hang from poles downtown, the lawns are so evenly manicured I imagined someone on his knees trimming with tiny tools.

The scenery throughout the entire trip was truly awe-inspiring. People were fascinating, and the service while we were on the ship made us feel like royalty. The food was wonderful; I made a point of trying some new things. I "found" a couple of really spicy items, but most of the selections were wonderful.

I also enjoyed the many people we met. We talked with teachers, laborers, retired persons and children. Each had a story, and we never tired of hearing others' stories.

We were ready to be home by the time we got off the train and made it back to Norton, but it was a fantastic trip, and we'll be glad to share some of our stories with you, if you ask about the trip. It was a wonderful celebration of 50 years together.

Life is Good
Rita Speer



Time to get rid of the stickers

Monday was Labor Day and that's what we did. We labored. Me in the yard; Jim on the storage facility we're building.

This summer I have been waging a one-woman war against all things "stickery." Texas sandburs, or goat-heads as some call them and those grass stickers that get on your socks, your shoes, pants legs and especially your fingers. Jim does his part too by spraying, but eventually, you have to get up close and personal and literally pull them by hand.

I save all the old chicken and calf feed sacks to hold just such dangerous debris. The sacks are made of a light-weight plastic, but they are strong and nothing gets through them. Each week I have at least one sack, packed as full as I can get it, waiting for the trash men.

My nephew, Brian, and I have that in common. We share a disdain for these thorny plagues. In fact, about three days before his accident, he came to our house for lunch. When he arrived I was outside pulling an outcropping of sandburs along our side yard and he pitched right in. We talked and pulled sandburs, eventually working our way around the entire yard.

A little side note: Brian's recovery

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



from his injuries is progressing rapidly. He has a long way to go, to be sure, but he is beginning to walk (using a walker) and every day he improves. The first time he said, "Hi, Mom," and "Hi, Dad," to his parents, was especially exciting. He will be transferring to a rehabilitation center very soon and we have every expectation that he will completely recover.

Maybe not this summer, but by next I will have to return Brian's favor and help him pull stickers at his place.

I wonder if I could get the mayor of our little town to declare a "Get Rid of Texas Sandburs Day" and have everyone in town, all on the same day spray, pull or dig out every sticker in town. I'm afraid that's the only way to ever eradicate this menace to society. All it takes is your neighbor neglecting his yard and depending on which way the wind blows, yards in all directions

will be the beneficiaries of these unwelcome guests.

If I'm not careful my neighbors will think some of my flowers are unwelcome guests, too. I have cone flowers and hollyhocks that have become quite prolific. The cone flowers have spread all over my perennial flower bed and I've decided I'll have to dig some out. The hollyhocks blew in on the wind and planted themselves on the east side of our yard, right next to a flowering pear tree. They seemed happy there, so I left them. Every year there are dozens of little hollyhock starts, which I dig and transplant or give away.

This year, I took a five gallon bucket to the cone flowers and cut off every dried flower head which contained hundreds of seeds. Did the same thing with the hollyhocks, but that only took two five quart pails. Hollyhock seed pods fall apart where cone flowers are solid, spiky, and take up more space.

Please don't anyone buy cone flower or hollyhock seeds, send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope and I will gladly send you enough seeds to propagate your flower bed, your neighbor's flower bed and his neighbor's flower bed and.....well, you get it. I have a lot of seeds.

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Do you remember when...

Ever hear of digging prickly pear cactus out of a pasture for 50 cents an acre?

I hadn't either until longtime Phillips County resident Max Schick told me his story.

Schick was a boy of 10 back in the mid '30s when the U.S. government paid people to rid their grass of prickly pear cactus. He and his older brother toiled for two years on his family's 65-acre pasture to rid the land of these sticky, nuisance plants threatening the western Kansas short-grass prairie.

Extremely drought-resistant, the prickly pear cactus was thriving during the drought of the Dirty Thirties crowding out the grassland and food supply of cattle.

There's a bit of untold irony here as well, Schick says. Some of the grass survived only because the cattle couldn't reach it because of the cactus spines and stickers.

"Back then, the cactus hills dotted the pasture like fly specs," Schick says. "They were everywhere in the pasture."

On his family's farm, located approximately seven miles northeast of Logan, Schick and his brother dug the cactus out of the ground with a shovel. They couldn't afford gloves and were always fighting the little red stickers that broke off the plants and became embedded in their clothes and skin.

Insight
John Schlageck



Every night when they finished digging cactus, the two boys would go down to the pond and try to wash themselves clean of the prickly pear cactus.

The Schick brothers dug from breakfast to dinner and from dinner until supper time. After about two days of digging, they'd go out with a team and wagon and load up the cactus and haul it into the farmstead and throw them in a rick or stack.

"You had to dig each plant out of the ground and then take 'em clean out of the pasture," Schick says. "At the bottom of each cactus was a little bit of a root, about as round as your little finger and a couple inches long. If you didn't get the root and all, the cactus would sprout and grow again."

When the brothers finally finished their prickly pear excavation project, their uncle and grandfather received payment from the government. The sum of approximately \$32.50 was considered a gold mine back then, Schick recalls.

"I didn't get anything, my brother kept it all," he says. "I was just trailing along for the fun. At 10 and seven miles from a town we only went to three times a year, what did I need money for?"

Young Schick has no regrets about the two years of his young life spent digging prickly pear cactus out of his family's pasture. He prefers to look at this period in his life that made him appreciate what he did have.

It was also during this time he discovered a treasure that still holds his interest 75 years later.

"I can remember it like it was yesterday," Schick remembers. "It was along about 11 in the morning and I was pretty tired from all that digging. There he lay in a low spot in the pasture a few feet from a cactus I was workin' on."

That's when the Phillips County farm boy saw his first arrow head.

"It was about two inches long and worked on both sides," Schick says. It was made of flint with a round, good point - a real beauty."

Since that day many years ago, the Phillipsburg resident still collects, trades and admires his Native American arrow heads. He's walked many a mile and worn out the knees on more than one pair of coveralls in search of his passion littered across the High Plains prairie.

At the spry age of 86, Schick reports he's "doin' fine."