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636.532.3216 ... WWW.JOYBECKNER.COM

classical realism, from hounds to humans

NEWS OF JOY :: VOLUME SIX, NUMBER ONE :: FEBRUARY 2010



Winter Light - Don Casper Photography

Join the Beckners on our Journey to San Miguel

DAY ONE - THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2009 - It is 8 am, and we are headed south for Las Bovedas, at Calvario #8, the little apartment we rent in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. The temperature is 34 degrees F, with a thick overcast sky as we venture down I-44. Ice cycles cling like white icing to the sides of the cliff walls through which the highway wends. It reminds me of my Mom's dribbled chocolate icing along the top edge of pink peppermint flavored frosting on her tall, freshly baked angel food cake.

The morning light reminds me of a Japanese painting of soft focus layers on distant hills, much like Don Casper's foggy photograph. By 2 pm we are in Oklahoma, and Brian promises Edgar and Sophie that they have only two and a half more miles until they can "rest". It is 42 degrees, and the "Welcome to Oklahoma" rest stop has a 5-6" thick, beautifully edged Napoleon brown marble counter top over fine, light oak cabinetry. This is VERY NICE! "Rested", we resume travel toward tonight's goal of Sherman, TX.

We roll into Sherman, TX, and the La Quinta at 5:10 pm. The wind is biting cold, and 35 degrees. A gentle rain is falling. Later we drive a block to Johnnie Carino's to have a glass of Chianti and our favorite dish, Italian Pot Roast. There is enough left over for Edgar and Sophie to enjoy for breakfast.

DAY TWO - FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2010 - HAPPY NEW YEAR! 7:43 AM. Bright sunshine streams across US-75 as we head south toward San Antonio and Laredo. It feels warmer than 24 degrees. At 8:34 am, we are in Dallas where oaks downtown still hold their green leaves and traffic is easy.

NEW BRAUNFELS, TX, 1:46 PM. 58 degrees. We lunch with friends Kris Westerson and her sweetie, Chris. Kris is the newly retired director of American Women Artists and will be sorely missed. Our new director, Debbie Leeuw, is highly qualified as the former director of Texas Art Gallery. We'll transition well. I am going on my third or fourth year as treasurer of the group.

Getting into Mexico - our way

4:09 PM. The air is so clear that we see distant Mexican mountains. We are on FM (Farm to Market) Road 1472, and we are within 3-4 miles of International Bridge III at Columbia, where we cross into Mexico to get our papers: we pay \$44 for our visas and \$29.00 for our car license. Only two persons are in line in front of us. Columbia is 15-20 miles west of Laredo in the middle of nowhere. It is cool inside the big modern building, and I wish I were wearing my vest.

5:15 PM. Business complete, we return to the US on the same bridge that overlooks the beautiful, bamboolined Rio Grande. The light reminds me of a Nancy Bush painting. Vendors sell snacks and windshield wiper blades as heavily laden vehicles with license plates from Illinois, Indiana, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, California, Nebraska, and Missouri, wait to return to the States. An international dog, an older black bitch with a white face and paws, crosses the bridge. A little red car backs up back into the States. Brian tells me someone is waving at me; it is pretty young girl with her many siblings in a Toyota from Tennessee. Illinois might outrank Texas plates this time! It is 5:50 and the sun is just starting to set. We inch forward in line. At 5:57 pm we are in the States for the night.

It is nearly dark when we arrive in downtown Laredo at the casa de cambio to get pesos. The exchange rate is in our favor: \$13.00 pesos to \$1.00US dollars. Edgar tells us he needs to piddle and Brian finds a spot to stop for him.

Did we tell you about the Chinese place last year? On the way from the cambio to the hotel, we passed an attractive place that appeared to have good food because they were so busy. We decided to give it a try and when we got there, everyone wished us good luck. It turned out to be a casino! We went back to the restaurant by our dog-friendly hotel of choice, the La Quinta by the airport.

DAY THREE: SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 7:30 AM. - We are on our way! We find our way to the only lane that was not marked for buses or AVI (whatever that is) and cross International Bridge II in downtown Laredo. Above the lane, it says No Declaro, Nothing to Declare, or something to that effect. Across the bridge, we cross rows of topes (speed-bumps) that, in this location, are constructed of steel half bowling balls imbedded across the road. They successfully slow traffic. After we cross, we see military men and a personnel carrier with a 50mm machine gun on top. Drug lords beware! We are not stopped for inspection. One down! After more topes, we immediately turn left on a narrow one way street through a very Mexican neighborhood, and follow this maybe a quarter mile through two Alto (Stop) signs, and then turn right on the four lane loop road around Laredo. Fog hangs over the trees above the Rio Grande. It is 42 degrees. We pass rows of Yonkes - junk-yards filled with old automobiles that are barely hidden from view and small shops that are not open, punctuated by a single place selling handsome back yard play ground equipment.

After 113 miles of cuota autopista, the equivalent to our interstate toll roads, we stop at a favorite Pemex travel stop for Brian to get a latte. In the immaculate restroom, I am reminded of the fragility of most Mexican public plumbing by a basket full of paper, yes, TP! We are in a desert valley. Think about it. On the road again, we drive through mountains covered in beautiful green vegetation including century plants, opuntia cactus and Spanish dagger yuccas. It is beautiful. Brian's ears pop.

We listen to NPR about the history of pitchmen, Click and Clack, and then, on Fresh Air, Terri Gross reviews Rosemary Clooney, and top 2009 TV shows. I love XM radio! We must be flipping between satellites, because Click and Clack are on again.

Over a mountain in the valley ahead is Monterrey, city of dust and smog. We enter another cuota circling Monterrey. Brian drives moderately at 75-80 mph, and Mexicans pass speedily. We come upon a vehicle we saw at the border: a black SUV with a trailer. So? Upon passing this vehicle, hazy sunlight reveals red glitter in the paint, but the most memorable thing about this vehicle is in the small trailer that has a steel frame lined in plywood: an upended, vertically packed ATV, and a motorcycle. Can you imagine two front wheels of an ATV up in the air, coming toward you? Baaah, baaah -- a shepherd tends his sheep next to the turnpike!

Outside Monterrey we discover a new cuota to Saltillo. Nice! Vibradores slow traffic before the tollbooth. Vibradores are smaller than topes and can be compared to a washboard. The new cuota is beautifully designed and very smooth. A car passes us at a good 100mph! Overhead bridges connect dirt roads for folks to get from point A to point B. Beyond Saltillo, at 10:40 am I notice what appear to be casas de pollo, long low metal chicken plants. Brian says, "Tyson is here."

GREEN NEWS! While there are still plastic bags littering the countryside, there are far fewer bags than in past years. Brian says that in one city here, plastic bags are banned. YAY! Leafy green trees and pines appear happy to have had plentiful rain.

11:05 AM - We are in the anti-plano, the high desert, between the Sierra Occidental (west) and the Sierra Oriental (east) mountains. It is 54 degrees. On the other side of a tollbooth, a farmer sells oranges and garlic from the back of his truck. We are in a valley of dust devils, but today, since there is no sun, there is no lift to create them. Outer "roads" of the cuota in the countryside are usually axle-width wide dirt roads. A couple is herding goats on one such road. Other places we see cows grazing next to the highway. One cow found the grass greener in the median. Mexicans race silver Chrysler minivans past, and a Passat passes us -- and -- the minivans! I know Brian likes to drive fast; he knows that one never knows when a cow, horse, or a slow something will suddenly appear in front, so he keeps it down to 75 to 80 mph.

Three or four hours from SMA, it is 63 degrees and the purple blue mountains contrast with the green landscape, where more rain than usual has fallen for this time of year. Mexicans whiz past us! Most traffic heads north through this forest of yuccas and mesquite that is thriving in what appears to be sand. Brian invites me to shut this down after 18 hours of typing. My eyes agree!

In San Miguel

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2010. We arrived yesterday at about 4:30 pm and



63+/- degrees. We greet our friend Charlotte with hugs, her requested peanut butter, and parts for her elderly Volvo. In turn, she provides frozen, raw food for the dogs, toward payment for her Bouvier des Flandres pendant. Light sprinkles become light rain. Edgar and Sophie do NOT want to get their feet wet. What's new? We learned that there has been no frost and that is why everything is so green.

We hire Charlotte's friends who own a taxi, to take all our stuff to Calvario #8, our home away from home. Brian drives my Suburban to a parking garage across town to keep it out of harms way. And, after my lugging most stuff back to the apartment, Las Bovedas. Brian arrives and helps with the rest. He asks if I would like some wine, (Why not?) and walks a half block to Wine Styles for a bottle of Argentinean red. We are thrilled that our landlord set up the wireless modem that I'd left with him last year. Yay, Ernest! Occasional fireworks explode in the distance. Sixty Minutes is on. Sophie is sitting on the chair next me. At 8 pm we walk to El Pagaso for a light dinner of tortilla soup and huevos benedictinos. By 9:30 or 10, we are in bed, fast asleep. We sleep twelve hours. Tomorrow we will exchange currency, buy groceries and go about living in San Miguel.



*Left: Entry at Calvario #8
Staircase in Las Bovedas
Brian Beckner
Photography*



January 16, 2010 - Los Picachos, mountain overlooking San Miguel de Allende - Photo by Manuel Pesquiera.

JANUARY 16, 2010: The first fifteen days here have been *much* colder than usual. Every day has been a turtleneck day with three-four layers over it. As a matter of fact, on January 14th, we had sleet in town, and snow fell for the first time in many years on Los Picachos, a nearby mountain.

FEBRUARY 4, 2010:

We awakened to a waterfall coming down the circular iron staircase into our bedroom. A clogged drain on the roof caused water to overflow the threshold of the door leading to the roof. We had four days of rain. SIX inches fell in those four days, and so far this year, San Miguel has received EIGHT inches of rain! The average rainfall in February here is .05 inches! We were lucky; around 200 residents were evacuated for fear of flooding, and the dam for the presa, lake, overflowed, flooding areas below. This is the storm system that moved northeast and dumped all that snow on Washington, DC.!

I feel sorry for the rained out vendors at Candelaria, the huge, weeklong flower show that greets spring the first week of February. NO ONE was out, due to the rain, not even Ernest who usually cannot resist buying many, many plantas! These lilies are from Candelaria several years ago. This year, I got my flower fix from paperwhites I'd brought.

I am *glad* to see sunshine again!



Edgar

JULY 29, EDGAR had an ultrasound from which we learned that he has two enlarged adrenal glands. We hope he is not headed for Cushing's disease.

NOVEMBER 4, EDGAR received an acupuncture treatment to help relieve what appeared to be an arthritic condition in his hips. Our "wunder-vet" thinks he has no arthritis. Yay! Edgar will have acupuncture again, Dec. 4, and should be a new man afterwards. He is 13½ years old. Mid-December, he twisted his back while playing with his niece Sophie, the temptress. Well, he is not exactly a new man, but after two more acupuncture treatments for his wobbly rear end, his attitude is good, and he is holding his own. Edgar is stronger after having walked on cobblestones for more than a month!

Sophie

AUGUST 18, SOPHIE was scoped in an attempt to discover why she has been losing hair. But, it took her blood work on December 28 to discover she is in the low end of normal for thyroid function. When we return home, we will address this fully as it's too risky to experiment with extra thyroid here. In this 2007 photo, she has a glorious coat. It is my goal for her to have this good coat again.



More...



LABOR DAY. During our weekend with the Society of Animal Artists at Rolling Hills Wildlife, in Salina, KS, we took a side trip to truly discover Lindsborg, KS, a charming little Swedish community off I-35, just 20 miles south of I-70. The Birger Sandzen Museum is located there. The museum was "CLOSED" on this, our second try, to see this impressionistic painter's work. However, we discovered the work of National Geographic photographer, Jim Richardson, who happened to be in his and his wife's Small World Gallery at 129 Main Street. Lindsborg is a town of many delights, especially when Jim's wife called and found the Sandzen Museum would open at one pm! After lunch, we reveled in the almost Van Gogh-like paintings of this Swedish master and small bronzes by fellow Swede, Carl Milles.

OCTOBER 9-12 - AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS (AWA) NATIONAL COMPETITION AND MEMBERS SHOW: SOUTH STREET GALLERY, EASTON, MD - The show was beautiful and sales were quite respectable! A friend and I demonstrated two sculpting techniques, and a student told me I was a good teacher. ;-)

OCTOBER 20 - DACHSHUND CLUB OF AMERICA (DCA) NATIONAL SPECIALTY, FREDERICK, MD - Here we met new folks and enjoyed seeing old friends and a long time collector even came! I showed Edgar (DOB 5/14/96) and Sophie's breeder, Tim Callison, showed her (DOB 3/25/00) in The Parade of Veterans. We enjoyed dinner at two diverse seafood restaurants: May's, www.maysrestaurant.com. Since the 1950s, eclectic souls dined at May's in everything from suits and ties to T-shirts. Crabs are piled high, and beside each table is a 5-gallon bucket for shells. Dutch's Daughter Restaurant, www.Dutchs.info, is the place for fine dining. After two weekends in Maryland, my desire for crab cakes is satisfied. YUM!

OCTOBER 24 - HOME, WHAT'S THAT? I AM OH-SO-GLAD TO BE HOME.

OCTOBER 29 - THE USA FIDEM XXXI CONGRESS AND EXHIBITION COMPETITION

"Inspiration" in bronze, my first medal, has been accepted in this international medallic art competition. FIDEM stands for Fédération Internationale de la Médaille d' Art. Works will be displayed from June 15 - August 29, 2010 at The Tampere Museum, Tampere, Finland.

"Inspiration" is also available in Pewter, as an ornament.



NOVEMBER 2 - I DISCOVERED POMEGRANATES!

I love pomegranates, even if it is a labor of love to retrieve the red ripe juicy seeds. I adore Chiles Relenos en Nogada, which is a deep green mild Poblano pepper stuffed with a mixture of ground beef and raisins, and covered in a crème sauce that is sprinkled with pomegranate seeds. The colors of the Mexican flag, it's as beautiful as it is delicioso! Do I ever respect the person who has to procure all those seeds! I can hardly wait to go to Bugambilla for Chiles en Nogada.



NOVEMBER 16 - AN ENVELOPE ARRIVED FROM ALLIED ARTISTS OF AMERICA. It held a letter stating that "Sweet Roll" SS had earned the Lindsey Morris Memorial Prize in their 76th annual exhibition. Later, the president called to say that the piece had sold!

NOVEMBER 22 - ON THE ROAD AGAIN! We headed for Loveland, CO to check finished metals, deliver them for patinas, and pick up pewter ornaments! All this, before driving to Grand Junction to visit with Brian's soon to be 89-year-old-mom, Jeanne. She is so spry she fired her doctor, loves her new one, and was shoveling fluffy snow this morning when I called her! We are very lucky she is doing so well.



DECEMBER 10 - WALKING ON BUBBLE. As I was packing orders for customers, Edgar and Sophie startled themselves: pop, pop!

DECEMBER 23 - 26 - FRIENDS FROM LOUISVILLE VISITED. First stop, on Wednesday, our St. Louis Art Museum. After lots of sleep, Thursday, we saw "Up in the Air" up close and personally, about five rows from the big screen! Actors were foreshortened with large legs, and large jowls from our sitting so close. Christmas afternoon was somewhat surreal ... almost like a Coen brother's movie; Brian wanted to drive to show them our snow covered countryside and Betsy wanted coffee. The only place open was Hardees. Except for three others patrons, we were alone. Brian ordered French fries. Weird. He made Osso bucco

for dinner. It was a good visit with Betsy and Gerald and we look forward to seeing them again in San Miguel. We met about five years ago at a Super Bowl party in San Miguel. We learned we had a mutual friend, Anne Crockett, who was a breeder of standard smooth dachshunds. She was one of Betsy's teachers, and we knew her through dog shows. Brian always helped her with her crates. The world lost Anne too early, at age 69, I believe. What a small, small world.

New 1:6 scale bronzes



"So Good to See You" Long
"Sunnyside Up" Long
"Lord of the Couch" Smooth
Don Casper Photography

COMING IN JUNE: "So Good to See You" Wire & "Dreaming of Tomatoes" Long. Both 1:6 Scale

MARCH 1 - APRIL 11, 2010, See "Big Heart," in the 24th Annual Art Show at the Dog Show, Wichita, KS. Please check www.artshowatthedogshow.com for two locations of the show.

JUNE 7 - 11, 2010, Gordon Setter National Specialty, Island Grove Park, Greeley, CO.

JUNE 15 - AUG. 29, 2010, Fédération Internationale de la Médaille d' Art, FIDEM XXXI Congress and Exhibition, The Tampere Museum, Tampere, Finland.

OCT. 9 - NOV. 9, 2010, American Women Artists' Master Signature Exhibition, Southwest Gallery, 4500 Sigma Road, Dallas, TX 75244-4503. Phone: 800-272-9910. www.swgallery.com



"Big Heart" Mel Schockner Photography

Fun Stuff!

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE NEVER SEEN A WHELPING -- I haven't either, here are a couple of links to Claire Mancha's last two whelpings. Enjoy these two beautiful births: <http://goodwood-oregon.com/VelaHutiProcess.htm> & <http://www.goodwood-oregon.com/ScoutBrianProcess.htm>

A friend is one who knows you as you are, understands where you've been, accepts who you've become, and still invites you to grow. We hope you have a job, if you want one, and if you do not have a job, we wish that you will be able to get one soon.

It would be lovely to hear from you. very best wishes for a great 2010!



Happy Valentine's Day!

Joy, Brian, Edgar and Miss Sophie

"Jorge & Luisa" Feliz Navidad, Ink drawing by San Miguel friend, Britt Zaist