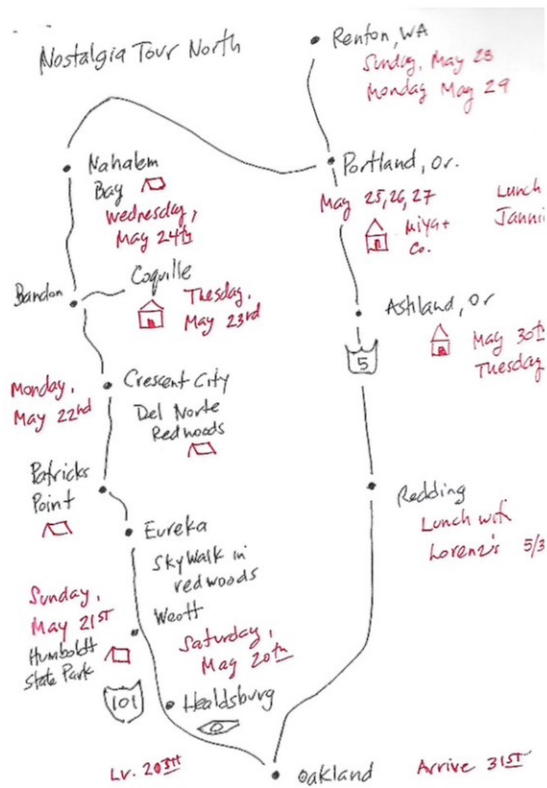


Road Trip

Nostalgia Tour North





My road trip is a nostalgia tour north full of memories. As soon as I cross the Bay Bridge I'm in my Marin and then past Cotati where my dad spent his last happy days. I lunch on the banks of the Russian River in Healdsburg, near where your mom and I biked around the vineyards. The river is too swollen for kayaking, so it's on to the green valleys of Cloverdale, Hopland, and Ukiah – all towns I biked through on a grand teenage adventure to Washington's Olympic Peninsula.

Then I arrive at my favorite spots: the redwood parks of northern California. I stop at Richardson Grove, meandering through the redwoods next to the Eel River. Our family camped there several times, including the memorable morning our Jamie declared, "Look everyone, I'm swimming in the Evil River." At nearby Garberville, I was just 16 when my dad called us out of the swimming pool to watch the broadcast of the first human walking on the moon, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."



I turn off 101 to the alternative Avenue of the Giants. This is the old Redwood Highway driven by my dad on our winter and summer trips to see Grandma and Grandad in Coquille. I've biked along this redwood route, as a young man and as an old one, too. Steinbeck said it best, "The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always ... they are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time."



I roll into the ranger station on the Burlington Loop of the Humboldt Redwoods State Park. An enthusiastic young park ranger greets me, "It's my very first day! You're Mr. Forrest staying in a forest, and you're in campsite #1." She makes me feel like redwood royalty.

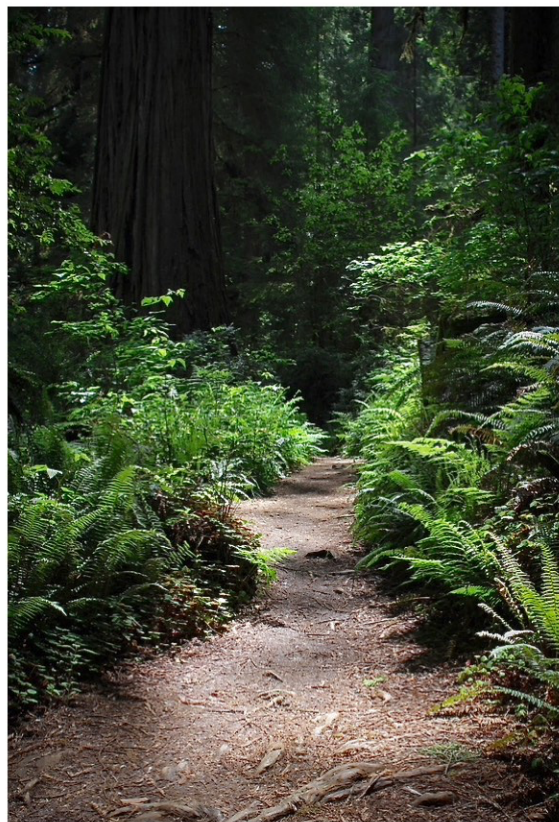


On this road trip, I'm not just retracing old hangouts and haunts, I'm looking for new trails and adventures, too. For the first time, I visit Eureka's Sequoia Park Zoo. The small venue has a wonderful skywalk, where visitors can experience the redwoods a hundred feet off the ground. As you walk along the suspended trail, you've got the forest canopy just above you, below is the forest floor. It was a lot more exciting than our family's traditional stop at Eureka's Thunderbird Lodge and the pancake house next door.



That afternoon, I arrive at the Sue-Meg Campground just north of Trinidad, where Kenny and company escape Anderson's summer heat. I've never explored Patrick's Point, and I am lucky to have a small campsite next to the Rim Trail. It takes me along the rugged coastline, with spectacular ocean views. In the morning, I drink my coffee on nearby Agate Beach. The sun rises, its rays pierce the fog creating silhouettes of the trees and illuminating the beach.

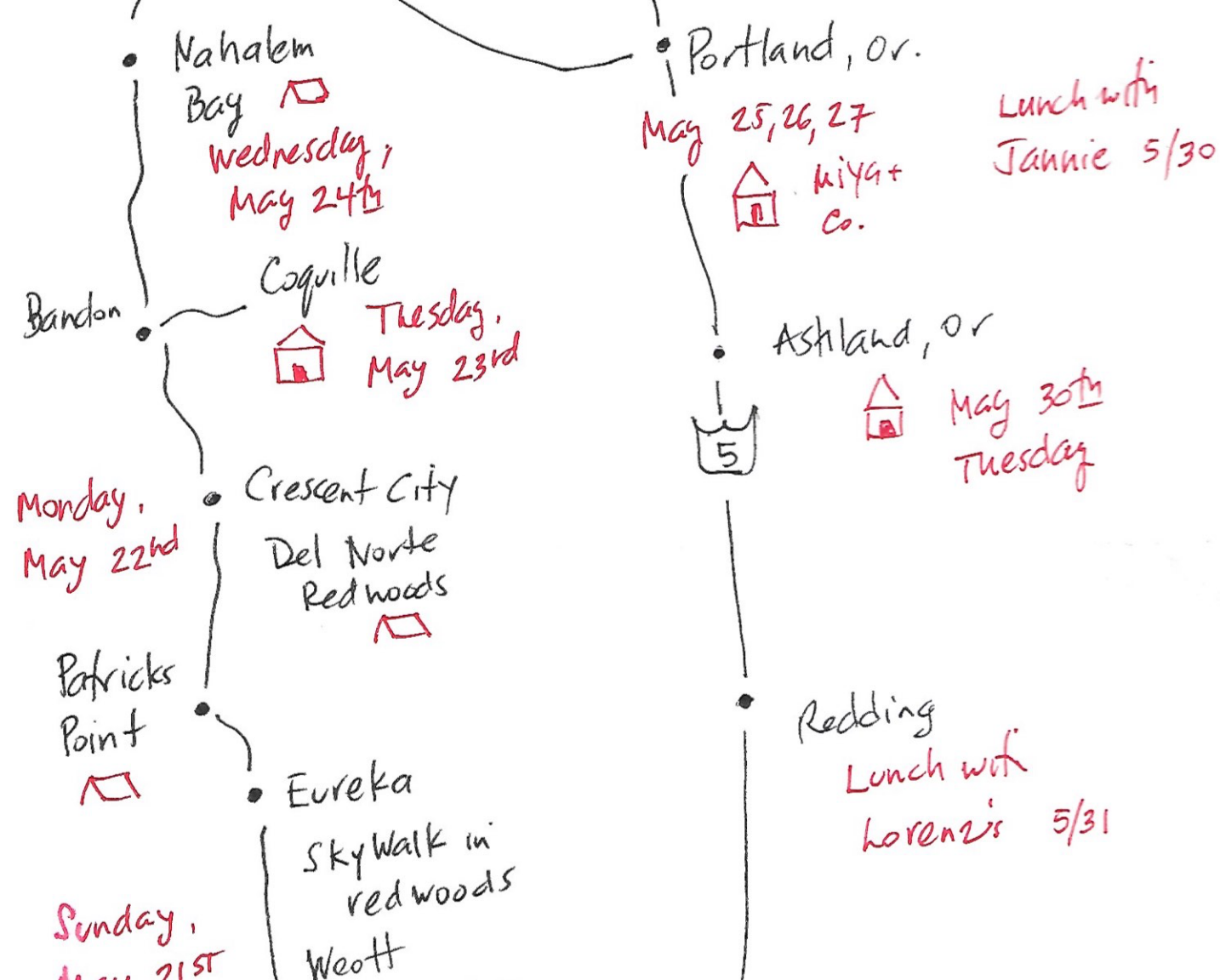
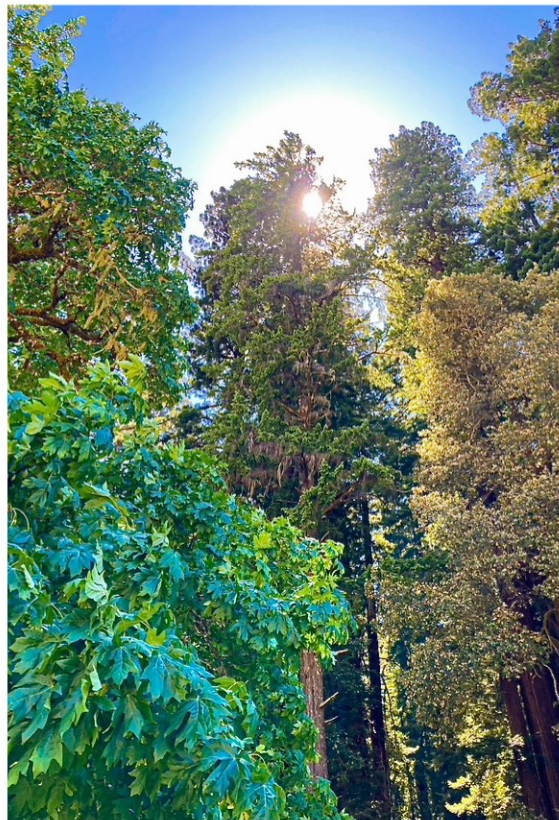




On the third day of my journey, I'm off to Prairie Creek where your mom and I camped the second day of our honeymoon. She was too polite to tell me that camping – even in the redwoods – couldn't compete with our first night, a warm bed at a Mendocino bed and breakfast. I drive through Orick where a herd of Elk have taken up residence in the green playground of the local elementary school. This explains why they are nowhere in sight at Elk Meadow on the southern end of the park. I am trying a new hike, the Trillium Trail. I wind my way through the cool redwoods and lush fernscape. I lunch at Trillium Falls and finish the six mile loop.

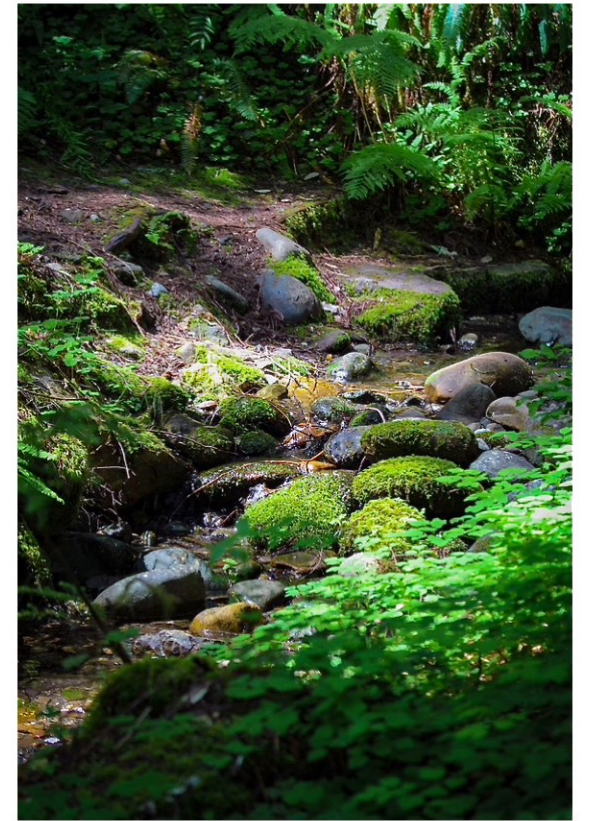


I drive north to the Del Norte Redwood Park, south of Crescent City. On the way, I cross over the Klamath Bridge, where the bear sculptures at either end of the bridge have been replaced, after being washed away in the great flood of 1964. Our family stayed just ahead of the torrential storm on a rainy winter trip to grandparents. I wind through the narrow stretch of 101, where we joined Jamie on one leg of her epic bike ride from Seattle to San Francisco. As I enter the campsite the ranger asks me to sign a strict set of camp rules, including procedures for storing food. Apparently, the bears are back; I'm almost missing the annoyance of raccoons. Thankfully, I had no visitors in the night.





The next morning, I drive a few miles north to the emerald green Smith River. Its gorgeous color comes from the serpentine rock near its source. Jim and I rode bikes along its banks on my 50th birthday. Today, I'll hike the Houichi Trail, a beautiful tree-lined three-mile walk that empties onto a rock beach. I stop for a leisurely bag lunch, before walking back to the car.



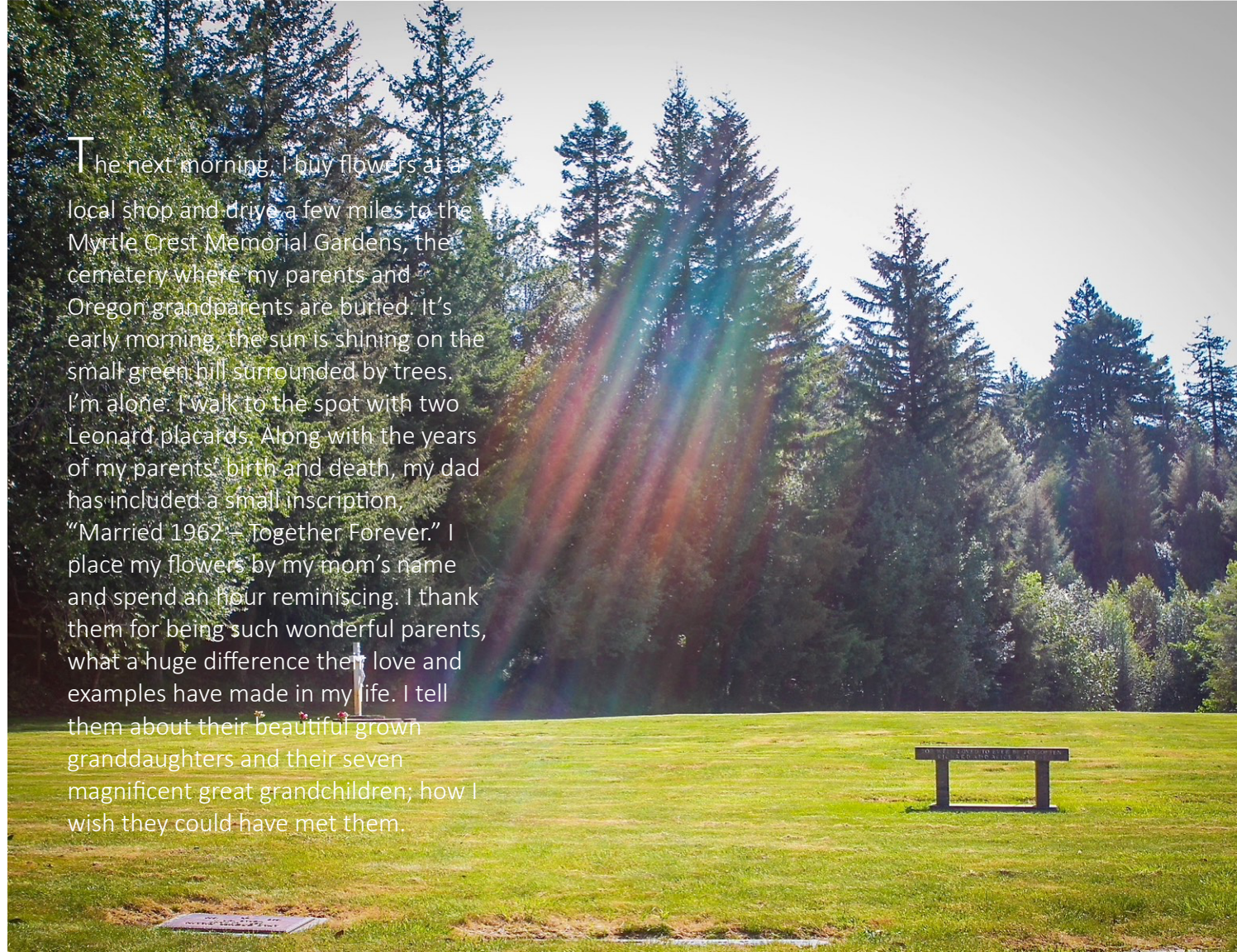
In the afternoon, I am heading north through familiar southern Oregon towns: Brookings, Gold Beach, and Port Orford. To my left, huge rock sculptures, dubbed sea stacks, dot the wild and windy Pacific waters.



I don't stop in Bandon, home of my Aunt Hilma and Uncle Sam, but drive east on River Road – Highway 42S. It winds along the south bank of the Coquille River. The green Coquille Valley is dotted by family farms, that look exactly as they did a half a century ago. The river and valley are beautiful, but downtown Coquille looks tired and rundown. Shops that were busy in my grandparent's day stand empty. I swing by their little two-bedroom home on 4th street, where I have many happy memories. It's been restored by Kenny and Donna, and it looks great! I grab a burger at the Broiler and enjoy the Coquille Riverwalk, a nice addition.



The next morning, I buy flowers at a local shop and drive a few miles to the Myrtle Crest Memorial Gardens, the cemetery where my parents and Oregon grandparents are buried. It's early morning, the sun is shining on the small green hill surrounded by trees. I'm alone. I walk to the spot with two Leonard placards. Along with the years of my parents' birth and death, my dad has included a small inscription, "Married 1962 – Together Forever." I place my flowers by my mom's name and spend an hour reminiscing. I thank them for being such wonderful parents, what a huge difference their love and examples have made in my life. I tell them about their beautiful grown granddaughters and their seven magnificent great grandchildren; how I wish they could have met them.





After my discussion with Mom and Dad, I travel to Coos Bay, heading north on 101 through Oregon's central coast towns. Some seem on life support, others have replaced lumber and fishing with tourism. In Florence, I enjoy salmon tacos while watching boats on the water. A Newport billboard boasts, "We're the friendliest" town on the coast, and I found this to be true. The young man who filled my tank, a sensible Oregon gas station tradition, couldn't have been nicer. Inside, the cashier refused to let me give her money for coffee, "Oh, you don't need to pay sweetie, it's on the house." And Tillamook still seems thriving, having long cornered the Pacific Northwest's cheese market.



I realize the thing I like about Oregon is that it's slow. People drive more slowly, talk more slowly, and take the time to look you in the eye and say hello. I guess I've got a little of that small-town Jim Leonard in me because I feel at home with the slower pace. The next stop is a new one for me: Nehalem Bay State Park. It's a big one, and I pitch my small tent in a canyon of trailers and recreational vehicles. A short trail over the sand dunes takes me to the beach. It's a blustery day and I'm alone on the sand. The grasses ripple in the wind, a choppy surf lines the bay. It's a magical evening, with a blue-black sky full of stars. The next morning, I'm boiling water for coffee and oatmeal on my backpacking stove, when my friendly neighbor comes to chat.



I think he feels sorry for me, "Kinda tough sleeping on the ground at our age. My trailer has a comfortable bed, four burner propane stove, and bathroom with toilet with shower." It turns out he's a retired electrical engineer and he wants to give me a tour of his modifications including: a solar panel, batteries, and three types of water disposal systems. And now he's selling, "I don't know your budget, but it's only \$40,000." I try to be appropriately enthusiastic. As I am packing up my Prius and making my quick getaway, he and his wife are still struggling with hitching their trailer to the car. Now the nice couple is arguing, and I think, I'll stick with simple.



A few miles from the park, I spot a ramshackle building advertising kayak rentals. “It’s before opening season, but we can find you a kayak,” says the equally ramshackle owner. “I know the tides will let you paddle up the bay, but let me make sure you’ll be able to get back.” This seems like a good idea. I’m out on the bay, paddling past a blue heron when I spot a bald eagle overhead. It’s fishing for its breakfast and then returns to its perch high in a tree. I snap a portrait and head on. It’s not the tide, but the wind that makes the return trip a little challenging. But I’m all smiles as I return my vessel.



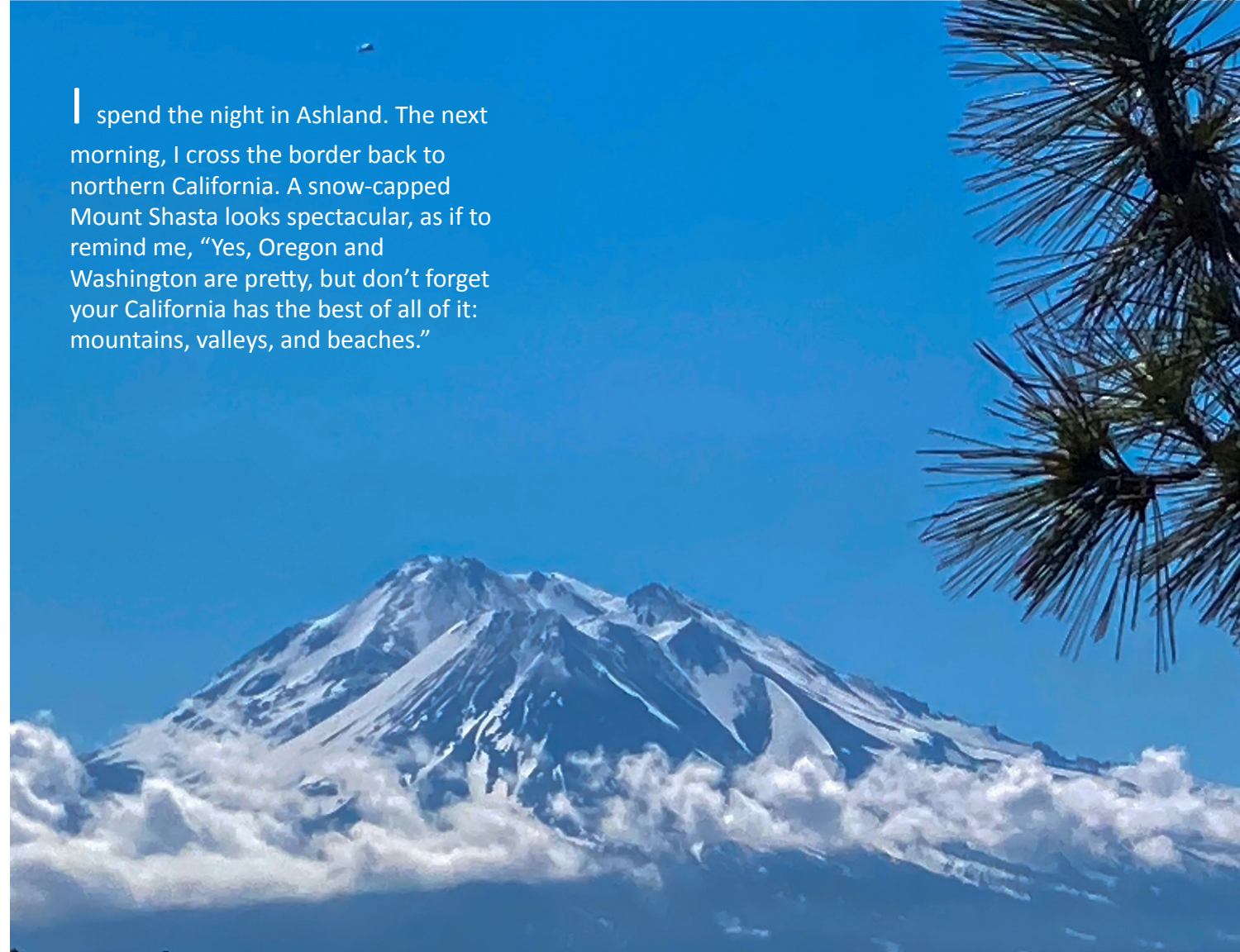
In the afternoon, I'm leaving the coast and heading east for Portland. Miya has invited me to join her own Memorial Day weekend road trip. During our three days, we visit Portland's famous Rose Garden, where cousin Jannie joins us. It's early this year for lots of blooms, so we explore the gorgeous grounds of the adjacent Japanese Gardens. We head for another Portland landmark: Powell's Book Store, where Emiko and Daisuke pick out new stories.



And then it's back to Renton, where the kids demonstrate their new bike riding skills, play in parks, hold dance parties and snuggle for family movie night. The ride north is remembering old memories, with Miya's family we make new ones.



When it's time to go, I head south on Interstate 5. I stop for lunch with Jannie and see her beautiful retirement apartment. It's light and airy with views of the garden, river, and railroad trestle. She's found her place. The trip through central Oregon is lush and green, so much prettier than the last time your mom and I traveled the route choked with smoke from wildfires, an apocalyptic red sun above. I have good memories on highway 5, too: long conversations with Miya as we drove to and from her University of Washington, teaching Miko to navigate mountain curves when she first learned to drive, and watching Nicole's little ones play at Ashland's Lithia Park.



I spend the night in Ashland. The next morning, I cross the border back to northern California. A snow-capped Mount Shasta looks spectacular, as if to remind me, "Yes, Oregon and Washington are pretty, but don't forget your California has the best of all of it: mountains, valleys, and beaches."

I've got one more stop, lunch with Kenny, Donna, and Justin in Anderson. They look well and are excited to soon be heading for the cooler coast in Trinidad for the summer. We share family news, and then I head for home.

It's been an old-fashioned road trip through beautiful country with camping, kayaking, and hiking along the way. I've enjoyed the old memories and created some new ones, too.



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by Dave Forrest
2023

