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## A New Mexico Diary

*Saturday, 2005 April 16:* Carl, working in his garden for the first time this year, bends over to transplant a desert marigold and feels a sudden, sharp stab in the rump. He turns around just in time to see a curved-bill thrasher preparing for a second strike and so moves quickly away from the very prickly cholla where a thrasher couple is tending a brood of three nestlings.

*Tuesday, 2005 April 19:* Jeremy returns from three days in Santa Fe, where he won the Best Senator and Best Bill Presentation awards at a Youth and Government meeting. His bill was aimed at energy conservation.

*Friday, 2005 May 6:* Eleanor attends the La Cueva High School end-of-year band banquet and learns that she has been selected as a Drill Master for the low brass section in next year's band. In the fall she will mainly be in charge of organizing sectional rehearsals for the low brass section of the marching band.

*Wednesday, 2005 May 11:* Carl's father Morris, just arrived from Oklahoma to attend the festivities surrounding Jeremy's high-school graduation, stands at the breakfast-room window, enjoying the scene of birds feeding and squabbling at the backyard feeders. His attention is drawn particularly to the Gambel quail scratching beneath the feeders, their dark face masks, ruddy crowns, and foppish topknots making them very different from the bobwhites he has hunted in Oklahoma. Suddenly a bobcat bursts from beneath the back deck, and there is one less Gambel quail to pay attention to.

*Sunday, 2005 May 15:* Karen, Carl, Carl's parents, Morris and Mary, and Carl's sister, Linda, attend the La Cueva High School commencement at The Pit, UNM's basketball arena. Eleanor plays in the band, and Jeremy is recognized as one of eight valedictorians. He is allotted 40 seconds for a presentation. This enforced brevity permits us to present his speech in its entirety.

*I would like to thank my parents for raising me in New Mexico. New Mexicans are blessed with an incredible state, filled with beautiful mountains and wilderness to rival any in the US. We have all learned the importance of conservation from living in a state with scarce water, fragile desert ecosystems, and expansive blue skies. My fear is that there are many people and many of our politicians and leaders who are willing to trade conservation principles and wilderness for the short-term benefits gained from the exploitation and destruction of our environment. Wilderness is a legacy which we all share as New Mexicans. As we all travel our different paths and settle in different states or countries, I ask you to remember this legacy. I urge you to remember how fortunate we are to have such unique, untouched wilderness. I exhort you, my fellow graduates, wherever you go, live like a New Mexican.*

He is interrupted by applause after the line about politicians.

*Saturday, 2005 May 21:* Four more eggs! Having failed with their first brood, the thrasher couple has placed four new turquoise eggs in their ramshackle nest in the front-yard cholla. Better eggs than years.

*Sunday, 2005 May 29:* Spruced up in his new ranger uniform, Jeremy begins a summer job with the U.S. Forest Service in the Cibola National Forest. He will be working mainly at the visitor center at the top of the Sandia Peak Tram, where he answers questions, gives short presentations, and generally looks after things, and from which he takes one or more walks to establish the Forest Service presence on the trails, gently remonstrating when people break the rules. It's convenient for him to commute by walking the bit more than a mile to the base of the Tram and letting it handle the 2.7-mile, 4,000-foot-vertical ascent to the top. The job required him to cancel some of his planned summer travel, but by volunteering at no pay over the preceding ten days and agreeing to work Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, he has managed to salvage participation in our rafting trip on the San Juan River and a trip to Costa Rica with his AP Biology class.

*Thursday, 2005 June 9:* Our party of twenty, family and friends, scrambles along the floor of Oljeto Wash, a deep, meandering canyon cut into the buff-colored rock of southern Utah. It's the final day of a four-day, three-night rafting trip down the San Juan River from Mexican Hat to Clay Hills through the famous Goosenecks, the deepest part of the San Juan's canyon. The San Juan is easy rafting, with only minor rapids. We have completed each day's rafting quickly, compliments of last winter's heavy snows in the Rockies, which have left the river running exceptionally deep and fast. This has meant there is plenty of time for floating in the swift, cold current, relaxing in the bright sunshine, and hiking into side canyons, of which Oljeto is the last. The oldest participant, 81-year-old Morris, has enjoyed every aspect of the trip.

*Friday, 2005 June 10:* Eleanor learns that she has been selected again to be one of the French horn players in the Albuquerque Youth Symphony. The culmination of the coming year, AYS's 50th, will be a thirteen-day concert tour in Brazil next June.

*Thursday, 2005 June 23:* It's a big water skiing day for Eleanor and Carl. Eleanor, after several failed attempts on Tuesday, succeeds this evening as the shadows lengthen over Lake Mendota, and Carl, having also failed on Tuesday, follows up with his first run on a single ski in over 25 years. Karen, Carl, and Eleanor are at the end of four days visiting Carl's brother Doug and his wife Sherry, spending most of the time at their house on the Wisconsin River near Spring Green, but making two skiing forays to their Madison house on the west shore of Lake Mendota. With Doug and Sherry and a collection of their kids, and Carl's parents and sister Linda, we have enjoyed floating, swimming, and canoeing on the river and an evening campfire on a sandbar, complete with s'mores. Karen's brother Ken, in Madison for a conference, and his son David joined us yesterday evening for a performance of *Tartuffe* at the American Players Theater in Spring Green. David exhibits his athletic prowess today by progressing, in a single afternoon and evening, from never having water-skied to skiing on a single ski.

*Saturday, 2005 June 25:* Kelly Rothschild, daughter of Karen's cousin Dean, is married to Andy Jansen in an evening ceremony held in the Grand Ballroom of the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Chicago. Karen, Carl, and Eleanor witness the ceremony, along with 450 other guests, including Karen's three brothers, Jay, Wally, and Ken, Jay's daughters, Sarah and Anna, their husbands, Charles and Casey, and Ken's son David. After the ceremony, the guests adjourn to the hotel's Rio Grande Terrace, overlooking the Chicago River (not the Rio Grande, but sort of a rio), for drinks (three wine bars plus a bar for mixed drinks) and hors d'oeuvres (succulent lamb chops and sushi made on the spot, plus miniature hamburgers, hot dogs, fries, and onion rings) and then return to the Grand Ballroom for dinner, toasts, and dancing to the music of an eight-person band called *Indigo*. It's the most elegant event, wedding or otherwise, that any of us has ever attended. As we retire to our room after the cake is cut at midnight, we marvel at the perfect orchestration of the entire affair. If anything went wrong, we didn't detect it.

*Tuesday, 2005 June 28:* The thrashers' nest is empty, but this time it signals success, as we see five thrashers foraging in the front yard and across the street.

*Wednesday, 2005 July 6:* Jeremy is at the beginning of a ten-day trip to Costa Rica with seventeen students from his La Cueva AP Biology class and their teacher, Jason DeWitte. The group is spending three days at Estacion las Tortugas, a facility for protecting turtles from poachers along a three-kilometer stretch of Caribbean beach. They have a busy time in the wee hours this morning. Late Tuesday night they witnessed a female hawksbill nesting, something seen only seven times since the station opened in 2000. Just after midnight this morning, they rebury the eggs on a protected portion of the beach. At 2:00 am they measure and release 25 leatherback hatchlings, and at 5:00 am they release another 30, watching as the hatchlings struggle toward the sea. It is hot and humid even in the middle of the night; they would be sleeping in pools of sweat if they were sleeping. The sea, at 84° F, offers no relief, and in any case, the sharks rule out swimming.

*Monday, 2005 July 11:* Jeremy and the Costa Rica party, fresh from a day watching lava pour down the side of Mount Arenal, get up at 4:00 am and proceed to a high ridge overlooking Punta Leona and the mouth of the Golfo de Nicoyo. Over a period of an hour, they see about 100 scarlet macaws fly in groups of two or three from the edge of the coastal forest to the shoreline. The birds are an unabashed advertisement for undiluted primary colors: bright red bodies, wings flashing red, yellow, and blue, and long tails of blue and red. Hundreds more, nearly the entire Costa Rican population, wait in the forest. Their loud squawking shows they're awake, but apparently not yet ready to commence the day's activities.

*Friday, 2005 July 22:* Eleanor returns from her sixth year of sea camp at the Catalina Island Marine Institute. Her three weeks this summer were probably her last as a student, although she hopes to return someday as an

instructor. This year she qualified for her Master Diver certificate.

*Saturday, 2005 August 6:* Carl and Rüdiger Schack stand above the Rheinfalls near Schaffhausen in Switzerland. The Rhine thunders over a series of waterfalls, producing an impressive display of foam and spray. Carl is at the end of a three-week trip, which took him to Waterloo in Ontario, Egham just west of London, and now Konstanz on the Bodensee at the German-Swiss border.

*Sunday, 2005 August 14:* Carl says good-bye to Jeremy just after lunch, leaving him in the good hands of the faculty and students at Rice University. Jeremy and Carl flew to Houston yesterday and shopped nonstop for supplies that didn't fit into the four large suitcases they could bring on the plane. Student life at Rice is organized around the residential colleges, and Jeremy has been assigned to Wiess College. This morning Jeremy met his three Wiess suitemates, and they all moved into their suite, which consists of two bedrooms, a living area, and a bathroom. Despite these being the dog days in Houston, Jeremy quickly decides that the heat outside is less of a problem than the general overcooling inside.

*Saturday, 2005 August 27:* The Sun stages an early morning light show as it rises behind the Sandias. Tiny white clouds, scattered thickly across an azure sky, dapple the city and the West Mesa beyond with a pattern of light and shadow, each shadow attached to its cloud by a palpable shaft of darkness. Sky and earth and the ropes connecting them participate in a stately dance until the Sun heaves itself above the Sandias and chases the clouds away, leaving sky and ground to go their separate ways.

*Saturday, 2005 September 24:* Jeremy hunkers down in Wiess College as Hurricane Rita slams into the Gulf Coast. Rita, at one time the largest hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic basin, was aimed directly at Houston, but veered eastward and made landfall at the Texas-Louisiana border. Houston is spared almost entirely, getting less rain than in a good thunderstorm. Jeremy, having elected not to evacuate partly in order to experience a hurricane, is disappointed. Karen and Carl, having acquiesced in his decision not to evacuate, are not.

*Sunday, 2005 October 2:* The Albuquerque Youth Symphony gives its first concert of the season, with Eleanor in her usual position as one of five French horn players. The AYS gave joint concerts with the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra on Friday and Saturday nights.

*Saturday, 2005 October 8:* Karen and neighbor Kate Fry set out from the house to climb the La Luz trail to the mountain station of the Sandia Peak Tram. It's a long, steep climb—9.5 miles with 4,000 feet of gain—but they have a picture-perfect day to do it. At the rock slide near the top, they are rewarded with aspens transfigured into pure gold, shimmering in the autumn sunshine.

*Thursday, 2005 December 29:* Walter Lamberson, Lee Walsh, and Jeremy summit 12,640-foot Santa Fe Baldy in the Sangre de Cristo Range northeast of Santa Fe. They camped last night about halfway along the trail. An inch of new snow this morning, the ice-encased streams, and numbing 40–50 mile-per-hour winds on the top of Baldy remind them that it's winter, despite the general lack of snow, a manifestation of the severe drought in New Mexico. Throughout New Mexico and southern Colorado, the skiing season is off to a dismal start.

*Sunday, 2006 January 1:* The Caves clan gathers in Muskogee for New Year's Day. Carl's father Morris is hairless as a result of six rounds of chemotherapy for lung cancer completed in mid-November, but he is feeling good. The upper right lobe of Morris's lung was removed in June of 2004 to get rid of a cyst that had plagued him since the previous October. The cyst was thought to be caused by mycobacteria, which are very common in soil and water, but rarely cause disease except in patients with seriously compromised immune systems. Malignant cells were found in the cyst, and Morris went on a schedule of regular PET scans to monitor his lungs. A scan in August showed three small hot spots in his right lung, and the chemotherapy sessions commenced shortly thereafter. They were rough on Morris, although perhaps less so than for many people, but post-chemo scans give reason to think that they succeeded in suppressing the cancer.

*Saturday, 2006 January 7 :* Eleanor, participating in four days of All-State Band activities at UNM, plays her French horn in the concluding concert. She was named second chair horn player in the state.

*Thursday, 2006 January 19:* As a member of the Baker Institute Student Forum at Rice, Jeremy organizes a Trivia Night to encourage student and faculty participation in the Student Forum. A reception is followed by the trivia competition. Eleven teams, each with eight members, compete ferociously, answering such questions as "In 1992, President Bush vomited onto the lap of the prime minister of what country?"\* A bonus follow-up to this

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\* Japan

question asks, "What Japanese verb, coined after this incident, means 'to commit an embarrassing act of public vomiting'?"<sup>†</sup>

*Sunday, 2006 February 12:* The Southwest Honor Band, meeting at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, concludes three days of solid music. Eleanor plays first chair in the French horn section.

*Monday, 2006 March 13:* Jeremy and a group of Rice students spend Spring Break near Gardiner, Montana, just outside the northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park. They are staying at a Forest Service bunk-house on the Yellowstone River and using most of their time to re-shingle the roof of a historic dairy barn. Today they swim where the hot springs of Boiling River flow into the ice-cold water of the Gardiner River. With light snow falling, they maneuver to stay in the narrow band of water where the temperature is just right.

*Wednesday, 2006 May 3:* Carl's father Morris dies, succumbing to the lung cancer that came back in force after the chemotherapy sessions of last fall. In mid-January Morris's back began to hurt badly. New scans showed hot spots all over his lungs, with a tumor pressing against his spine. In mid-February he was given about three months to live. Radiation controlled the big tumor, at the cost of a month of misery, but with the subsequent benefit of six weeks of good mobility and little pain. Last Thursday evening, he went into a sudden, mercifully rapid decline, which ends early this morning as he dies at 2:20 am in bed at his home in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Morris's three children are in attendance as the end approaches. Unfortunately, Carl's mother Mary contracted a severe case of pneumonia in late March, which put her in the hospital for two weeks and left her sadly depleted. It will be some time before she recovers to a semblance of her old self.

Morris faced death like everything else in life, as an experience to prepare for, a task to be accomplished with dignity, fortitude, and grace. Those six good weeks in late March and April were a great time for him, as he visited with and said good-bye to friends and relatives and experienced the renewal of spring for the last time. Spring was his favorite time of year, because it was the time to get his extensive vegetable garden going again, after a winter of thinking about improvements. It was the time to watch trees returning to life and to glory in the beauty of daffodils, redbuds, dogwood, and azaleas. Morris would have made a good tree himself, tolerating winter in a semi-dormant state and bursting into activity in the spring. He knew he would not plant a new garden this year, but fortunately some parts of a garden, being mainly a product of past effort, take a while to shut down. Those parts came through this spring, delighting Morris and his visitors with an abundance of asparagus and strawberries in the last weeks of his life.

*Monday, 2006 May 8:* It has been testing time for Eleanor: English AP a week ago, Calculus AP last Wednesday, History AP on Friday, and Biology AP today, on all of which she receives a 5, the highest score. Last Saturday, just for good measure, she took the History and Math SAT II tests.

*Monday, 2006 May 22:* Jeremy and five other Rice students are in Costa Rica for 25 days, taking a post-semester field course in tropical biology led by the Curator of Entomology at the Houston Museum of Natural History. They are spending several days at the Albergue Cuerici, an eco-lodge designed specifically for college courses and located about 2,400 meters above sea level, just below the Continental Divide. The group ascends to above treeline today, walking through an ecosystem called the paramo. With shrubs reaching to head-high, the paramo is very different from the tundra above a temperate-zone treeline. Thick clouds envelope the mountains, obscuring the promised simultaneous view of two oceans, but not interfering much with bird watching. Jeremy is pleased to spot a volcano junco, found only in the high mountains of Costa Rica and western Panama. Back at the station, the group sees a mixture of tropical birds, such as the emerald toucanet and the fiery-throated, magnificent, and violet saber-wing hummingbirds, and temperate-zone species, including hairy woodpeckers and American dippers.

*Tuesday, 2006 May 30:* Eleanor, along with the rest of the Albuquerque Youth Symphony, arrives in Manaus, at the beginning of the AYS's ten-day tour of Brazil and at the end of a 30-hour trip from Albuquerque involving five take-offs and landings. Manaus lies at the confluence of the Rio Solimões and the Rio Negro, which join to form the Amazon. During their nearly three days in Manaus, more water will flow by than in several decades of standing on the Alameda bridge over the Rio Grande at Albuquerque.

*Thursday, 2006 June 1:* The President of Brazil commandeered the boats the AYS had reserved for its two days on the big rivers, so Eleanor and friends were relegated yesterday to the *Apurissaua*, a small, decrepit boat (but with a good chef), which broke down within two hours of leaving shore. They had a good time nonetheless,

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<sup>†</sup> bushusuru

seeing the river and its wildlife from a small motor boat; the biggest excitement came from catching small caimans and passing them around in the boat. Today they sally forth in the motor boat to spot tropical birds along the shoreline. Returning to the *Apurissaua*, they notice water accumulating in the motor boat. Just as they step onto the deck of the *Apurissaua*, the motor boat sinks to the bottom of the Amazon.

In the evening the AYS gives its first concert in Brazil to a packed house at the historic Teatro Amazonas, an elaborately decorated relic of the late 19th Century rubber boom in the Amazon. The AYS plays its signature piece, Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, and concludes with a Brazilian love song called *Carinhoso*. They learned *Carinhoso* especially for this tour, and they realize why when the audience demands that it be replayed twice, singing along all three times and ending each rendition with wild applause. Buoyed by this success, the Symphony is ready for its four remaining concerts, to be given in Belo Horizonte, Ouro Preto, Petropolis, and Rio de Janeiro.

*Monday, 2006 June 5:* Jeremy and the Rice group are spending fifteen days at the Sirena field station on the Osa Peninsula in the Parque Nacional Corcovado, in the southeastern corner of Costa Rica. The station is at sea level, and the extreme heat and humidity make the group long for summer in Houston. Today Jeremy and his partner, Niki von Hedemann, are at their study site, engaged in observing orchid bees. These bees have a metallic sheen, and the males collect scents from flowers to attract females. Suddenly they notice antbirds and bush tanagers flying about in alarm, and soon they know the reason, as a swarm of army ants invades the site. Having been assured that their knee-high rubber boots are sufficient protection (and apparently not having seen the 1954 movie *The Naked Jungle*), they stand their ground as the swarm passes and emerge unscathed. Smaller creatures fare less well: the ants tear a scorpion to shreds, and a lizard barely escapes with its life.

*Sunday, 2006 June 11:* Karen and Carl and three friends hike to the top of Santa Fe Baldy. The hike, 15 miles roundtrip, initiates a conditioning program to ready Karen and Carl for the segments of the Colorado Trail they will be doing in late July and early August. The program is threatened by the extreme drought in New Mexico, which has already closed the high country in the Sandia Mountains and threatens to close this and nearly every other hiking opportunity.

*Sunday, 2006 June 25:* Jeremy and friend Lee Walsh begin hiking the Colorado Trail just west of Denver. Their goal is to walk the entire CT, about 500 miles, ending up in Durango, Colorado, in about eight weeks. Their start has been delayed for several days by a severe sinusitis that Jeremy developed just after returning from Costa Rica. Although the sinusitis put Jeremy out of action for a few days, the delay turned out to be a blessing, because they needed the additional time to complete the intricate planning for the venture, especially the assembly of food and other materials for the eight resupplies that will be delivered to points along the trail by family and friends.

The hike is funded by a John E. Parish Fellowship from Wiess College. Parish Fellowships have been awarded since 1994 to support two-month summer travel projects of Rice students, such as documenting Irish folk music or Australian aboriginal art. Jeremy's project, the first Parish award for a science project, the first for domestic travel, and the first to go to a freshman, is to survey the treeline along the CT, photographically and with measurements of the size of young trees. The idea is to produce a baseline record against which to gauge the changes produced by global warming over the coming decades.

*Wednesday, 2006 June 28:* Yesterday Jeremy and Lee met a sick hiker along the trail. After helping him recover from an upset stomach and supplying him with a day's worth of food, they camped with him along a long-abandoned forest road above Rock Creek, just west of the Kenosha Mountains. His name is Jim Waters, and they find him to be both interesting and inspiring. He has been to Antarctica four times and has spent much of his life working on trail crews. He is doing the whole CT twice as fast as they are, carrying only eleven pounds, an astonishing feat made possible by, among other things, eating only minute rice, ramen soup, and angel hair pasta. They say good-bye to Jim this morning—but see him twice more before he leaves them behind—and hike over Kenosha Pass, enjoying spectacular views of South Park and the distant ranges they will soon be crossing.

*Saturday, 2006 July 1:* Arriving at London Heathrow at 8:00 am, Carl takes a taxi to his B&B in Englefield Green, only to find the proprietors out for the day. Finding the neighbors friendly, he quickly changes clothes at their house, leaves his baggage with them, grabs his trekking poles and book-on-tape, and sets out for a day-long walk through Windsor Great Park to Windsor Castle, all this to stay awake and to stay in shape for his segment of the CT.

*Tuesday, 2006 July 4:* Eleanor and friend Rachel Grey arrive in Dominical, a tiny two-street town on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, for two weeks of Spanish surfing camp. The camp's participants, ten girls and two boys, surf in the morning and take Spanish lessons in the afternoon. They are housed in a beautiful resort on the beach.

*Tuesday, 2006 July 11:* Jeremy and Lee awake at 2:00 am in order to summit Mt. Massive before sunrise. At 14,421 feet, Mt. Massive is the third highest peak in the continental U.S. and the second highest in Colorado and lies right in the middle of the Colorado Rockies. The moon is nearly full, allowing them to hike by moonlight once they're above treeline. The summit is bitterly cold, but they wait long enough to see the sun peek above the horizon before scampering down to warm up. A perfect blend of clouds and sky makes for a brilliant sunrise, with delicate pinks, reds, and oranges set against a blue backdrop. In all directions there are endless mountains, range backing range as far as the eye can see.

*Thursday, 2006 July 13:* Today is Eleanor and Rachel's last full day in Dominical. They have surfed on roughly four-foot waves at Dominical and Ventanas beaches. They have ziplined through the rain forest, ridden on horseback to an isolated waterfall that plunges into a pool perfect for swimming, had lunch or dinner at every good restaurant in Dominical and neighboring resorts, and enjoyed gallo pinto for breakfast every day. They might have learned a little Spanish, too. Tonight, when Eleanor and Rachel return to their room after dinner, they find two three-foot snakes in Rachel's luggage. The hotel staff removes one and determines it not to be poisonous, after which Eleanor and Rachel let the other one crawl around on them before releasing it outside.

*Friday, 2006 July 21:* Larry Beal, son Aaron, and a friend of Aaron's hiked a mile into the wilderness yesterday to meet Jeremy and Lee below Mt. Princeton. They delivered sandwiches, fresh fruit, and, best of all, milkshakes from K's Dairy in Buena Vista. Today all but Larry summit 14,197-foot Mt. Princeton, where, to the southeast, they look straight down the knife-edge backbone of the Sangre de Cristo Range, the Arkansas Valley on the east side, the San Luis Valley on the west. Unfortunately, the four young hikers leave Larry behind, and he misses the turn-off to Princeton, instead ending up on a smaller peak to the south.

*Saturday, 2006 July 22:* Late in the evening, Eleanor and friends watch a movie, and Carl tries to finish a proposal before leaving tomorrow to join Jeremy and Lee on the CT. As midnight approaches, Carl spots a large moth clinging to the stucco wall just below the outdoor light at the front door. It turns out to be a Glover's silk moth, the Rocky Mountain equivalent of the cecropia moth of the eastern U.S. As Eleanor snaps photos and her friends ooh and aah—Karen is awakened by the noise and gets up to see what's going on—the moth slowly spreads its wings, which are over 5 inches wide, russet like its body, each decorated with a large white spot and fringed with a delicate pattern of grey and white stripes and dots. Why a creature of the night needs such exquisite raiment is a puzzle. Certainly not for our gratification, but we appreciate it nonetheless.

*Tuesday, 2006 July 25:* Carl, along with Lee's girlfriend, Maritsa Mallek, and her friend, Andy Ritter, joined the CT trek on Sunday evening. The party gets up early this morning, at 4:00 am, to climb 13,971-foot Mt. Ouray. We leave camp at 6:15 am and summit at various times between 9:30 am and 10:30 am, after climbing a steep, 1,200-foot ridge from the west. Thanks to Ouray's missing 29 feet, we encounter no other hikers, Coloradans preferring to congregate in self-congratulatory hordes on the summits of fourteeners. The view from the top, despite that 29-foot deficit, is spectacular: the high peaks of the Sawatch Range extending majestically to the north; the Arkansas River Valley backed by the Mosquito Range in the northeast; the massive bulk of Pike's Peak on the eastern horizon; the jagged spine of the Sangre de Cristo Range, high above the San Luis Valley, running from just below us in the east to 14,337-foot Blanca Peak in the southeast, then continuing to Wheeler Peak, barely visible 180 miles away in New Mexico; in the south, the low Cochetopa Hills through which we will be hiking till Friday; and on the southwestern horizon, the San Juan Mountains, so far away that it is hard to credit that one could walk there, but Jeremy and Lee's ultimate destination nonetheless.

It's a typical topsy-turvy summer day in the Rockies: sunglasses and shorts by mid-morning, replaced by pants and rain jackets in the afternoon and evening. As the party approaches the summit, a stiff north wind that has blown all morning dies suddenly. Immediately two small cumulus clouds pop up near the summit. By the time we descend to treeline in early afternoon, these two clouds have grown into massive thunderheads, thrusting toward the stratosphere, their bases just above us dark with menace. Fortunately, a southwest wind chases them away, sparing us the need to take cover before reaching camp. Clouds return later in the day, producing drenching rain as we eat dinner under the protection of a tarp.

*Wednesday, 2006 July 26:* The party awakens to a delicate sunrise. The undersides of successive clouds flare with subtle pinks, which brighten to salmon before fading to the grey of dawn. How fortunate it is that sunrises speak in soft tones—think of the *Morning Mood* of Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*—so different from the emphatic reds and oranges that blare at us from a vivid sunset.

We spend the afternoon in the Cochetopa Hills, ambling along a section of the Continental Divide that descends gradually from Windy Peak. We walk along the broad crest of a westward-tilting plateau that is covered by a

classic lodgepole-pine monoculture. The pines are dense, but with no branches or foliage below about 30 feet and almost no underbrush, the forest is eerily open and spookily empty. In all directions, to the limits of vision in the filtered light, one sees bare trunks—and only bare trunks—and we seem to be the only things moving among them. Where the trail approaches the northern edge of the plateau, the trunks thin until a sudden precipice reveals high mountains above the lush green Tomichi Valley, tinted yellow in places by masses of daisies. After a hike of 15.5 miles, dubbed “death march with a view,” we arrive at our campsite on Tank Seven Creek.

*Friday, 2006 July 28:* Today the CT follows the Divide along the crest of the Cochetopa Hills, never contouring around a hill when it can go over the top. The hills aren't high, only about 600 feet, but they are many, and by the time we meet Karen at Highway 114 after 14 miles of pointless ups and downs, today's hike has earned the sobriquet “death march with hills.” Karen brings a full dinner of salmon, rice pilaf, creamed spinach, and chocolate cake. It is Jeremy's favorite dinner, but nobody else is complaining.

*Sunday, 2006 July 30:* The hiking party, now consisting of Jeremy, Lee, Karen, and Carl, camps near Los Creek. Though just a trickle, it is the only water source for another 10 miles.

“What's that noise?” “A woodpecker?” “Nah. Too lazy.” “Let's look.” Sure enough, it is a woodpecker, but not one of the rat-a-tat-tat hairy woodpeckers we've been hearing and seeing along the trail. The nice thing about woodpeckers is that they stay put long enough for reliable identification, and this one we quickly identify as a three-toed woodpecker. We watch for 30 minutes as it slices bark from the trunk of a dead spruce to get at the goodies underneath, occasionally turning to feed a juvenile that follows it around the trunk. Clad in a raffish version of the usual woodpecker tux and capped by a scruffy yellow crown, the three-toed isn't the handsomest of woodpeckers, but you won't find it outside spruce forests, and even here it's uncommon, so seeing it is a treat. The three-toed's habit of slicing off chunks of bark gives its pecking the lackadaisical character so different from the rapid-fire drumming of woodpeckers that drill straight into the trunk.

*Monday, 2006 July 31:* As we top the low divide that takes us out of the Los Creek drainage, we see ahead of us Cochetopa Park, a vast meadow dotted with clumps of spruce and bounded on its southern side by aspen and conifer forests. The meadow is a riot of wildflowers—bright yellow daisies, purple asters, orange-red paintbrush, blue and maroon lupines, bright red gillias and penstemons. The daisies dominate, casting a golden haze over the distant reaches of the meadow. On the far side of the Park, about 6 miles away, we can see the steep west wall of van Tassel Gulch, which we should reach by mid-day and where we begin our ascent into the high country of the San Juans.

*Tuesday, 2006 August 1:* A day and a half of hiking up Cochetopa Creek leaves us at a campsite just below treeline, with a picture-window view of the high ridge that forms the Continental Divide. The night is dark and clear, and shooting stars go off like fireworks.

*Wednesday, 2006 August 2:* Up at 4:00 am and away from camp at 6:00 am, we spend the whole day at or above treeline, crossing four passes, all above 12,350 feet, the highest at 12,850 feet, peering into the deep basins of four creeks, three on the west side of the Continental Divide and one that joins the Rio Grande. Jeremy and Lee take a side trip at the first pass to get the grand view from the top of 14,014-foot San Luis Peak, yet reach our treeline camp in the basin of East Mineral Creek at the same time as Karen and Carl.

After soaking rain in the afternoon and early evening, the clouds lift, and the Sun lights up the basin. Azure sky, dazzlingly white clouds, and bare red peaks surmount the playful light greens of tundra and the sombre greens of the conifer forest. Pikas chirp as we watch from atop their home, a talus slope just above the camp. The show concludes with a memorable sunset of pink clouds scattered across a deep blue sky, after which we retreat to our tents for the night.

*Saturday, 2006 August 5:* Up this time at 4:30 am, we leave our camp on Middle Mineral Creek at 6:30 am and proceed above the basins of West Mineral Creek and Miners Creek, as clouds drift up the valleys from the north. The day turns appropriately grey and blustery as we descend onto Snow Mesa, a landscape of low hills and swales that is a 12,000-foot-high Rocky Mountains version of an English moor. It has the same sense of space and desolation—we see one tree as we trek the four-mile length of the Mesa—but it has coyotes, howling in the distance, and it does not have a cozy inn to serve a Devonshire tea after a day's romp. At the edge of the Mesa, the trail descends abruptly to Spring Creek Pass, where Karen and Carl find a car and commence a return to civilization. Karen has walked 60 miles in eight days, and Carl 120 miles in thirteen days. Jeremy and Lee, joined by friend Mairi Litherland, continue their CT adventure, plunging into the heart of the San Juans.

*Friday, 2006 August 11:* Hiking over a 12,600-foot pass early today, Jeremy, Lee, and Mairi cross to the western

side of the Continental Divide, the last such crossing on the CT, and then descend into Elk Creek basin for the seven-mile walk to a campsite at Elk Park. The basin is a spectacularly steep-sided canyon, walled in by 1000-foot-high quartzite cliffs and abounding in waterfalls. The campsite at Elk Park is in the Animas River Gorge, five miles south of Silverton, next to the narrow-gauge tracks of the historic Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, which these days takes tourists on day trips from Durango to Silverton.

*Wednesday, 2006 August 16:* Nearing the end of a 23-mile day, necessitated by the absence of water along more than 20 miles of the trail, Jeremy and Lee climb onto Indian Trail Ridge, a high north-south ridge that terminates in the La Plata Mountains outside of Durango. Because the five-mile-long ridge lies at or above treeline, they have been worried about thunderstorms, but the afternoon is beautiful, with cumulus clouds not quite large enough to storm dotting the sky. To the west the canyon country of the Colorado Plateau recedes into Utah; they can barely make out the La Sal Mountains outside of Moab. To the east lies the entire San Juan Range, its high peaks piercing the sky. They stumble into camp at Taylor Lake, totally exhausted, but are rewarded at sunset by the largest thunderhead they have encountered, looming over the Animas River Valley to the east, lit up in purple, red, and orange, and rumbling impressively.

*Friday, 2006 August 18:* Karen meets Jeremy and Lee in mid-afternoon at the end of the Colorado Trail, just north of Durango. They head to a motel room for multiple showers and a change of clothes and have dinner at a Himalayan restaurant. Jeremy and Lee have walked about 550 miles in 55 days, through some of the grandest scenery in Colorado. On all but two of those days it rained, at least a little. Although the Southwest started the summer in the grip of an extreme drought, the monsoonal thunderstorms, which began just as Jeremy and Lee began their trek, have been the heaviest ever recorded.

*Wednesday, 2006 August 23:* Carl is promoted to Distinguished Professor, the highest professorial rank at the University of New Mexico, held by just 21 faculty members.

*Thursday, 2006 August 24:* Jeremy leaves the house at 6:15 am, off to pick up Charlie Foucar for the drive to Houston, where they will start their sophomore years at Rice. Along with four other refugees from Wiess College, Jeremy and Charlie this year are renting the second floor and loft of a house not far from the Rice campus. Jeremy is driving the Dodge Dakota pickup he inherited from his grandfather, and it is stuffed full and piled high with his and Charlie's possessions. It took three hours to load and secure everything last night, and it is certain that the loading would never have gotten done without the help and equipment provided by our good friend Bob Grey.

*Friday, 2006 September 8:* As Carl brushes his teeth, an alien, orange head emerges from the sink drain, swaying like a cobra mesmerized by a snake charmer. Carl watches transfixed as a three-inch-long centipede slowly wriggles out of the drain. This is the sort of thing that could alter your relationship with bathroom sinks forever. Karen and Eleanor, already gone to work and school, are relieved they didn't see it.

*Saturday, 2006 September 9:* Jeremy and friend Julia Scheevel drive to Galveston to witness the commissioning of the nuclear attack submarine *USS Texas*. Their mutual friend, Mairi Litherland, is the daughter of the captain, John J. Litherland, who supervised the sub's construction. After the ceremony, Captain Litherland gives them a personal tour of this newest Navy submarine.

*Tuesday, 2006 September 26:* Eleanor learns she is a National Merit Scholarship semifinalist, one of 34 in the Albuquerque Public Schools.

*Tuesday, 2006 November 7:* What turns out to be the best day in America in more than six years is marred when Karen, nearing the end of her early morning walk, slips on loose rock and finds her feet shooting forward and her body crashing to the ground. Breaking her fall with her left hand, she realizes immediately that the wrist has snapped. X-rays show the two lower arm bones broken clean through about half an inch above the wrist. We are fortunate to know one of Albuquerque's best orthopedic surgeons, and he squeezes Karen into his busy schedule, installing a plate in her arm late in the day. Carl manages to get away for a few minutes in the afternoon to vote—fortunately, Karen voted early—and Karen returns home at 8:00 pm, facing over two months to full recovery.

*Thursday, 2006 December 4:* Eleanor is one of five winners of a Sandia National Laboratory essay contest. Her essay addresses the question of why scientists were surprised that the human genome has only about 30,000 genes. Here's the concluding paragraph.

*So what is to be concluded now? That genes are too infinitely complex for us to ever fully comprehend? Certainly not. Whether one chooses to view gene behavior as mischievous or simply complex, it is that very*

*behavior that is helping us to discover that research is hardly ever finished, and that good science means never jumping to conclusions. Certainly this work will continue into another generation, my generation, because questions will arise as long as humans study themselves. It is, as Darwin termed it, the stamp of our lowly origin, our DNA, that we wish to understand, and to discover how, with that stamp ever present, we could have become what we are today.*

The win comes with \$2,000 in US Savings Bonds.

*Thursday, 2006 December 14:* Karen's cast is removed today, replaced by a removable splint. Movement in her left wrist is very restricted. She is supposed to increase the range of movement by exercising with a hammer in her hand for the six weeks till her next appointment with the orthopedist.

*Monday, 2006 December 18:* Eleanor has been on pins and needles since Friday, when she was supposed to hear by post about her Early Admission application to Pomona College. Today Carl accepts the mail directly from the delivery person. Eleanor intercepts him halfway up the driveway, snatches a package from Pomona from him, rips it open, and finds a letter that begins, "Warmest Congratulations." She's in.

*Monday, 2006 December 25:* We spend Christmas Day and the preceding weekend visiting Carl's mother in Muskogee. She is much improved from her condition after Morris's death last May and is very pleased to be in her own home, where she has 24-hour care from a group of caretakers whom she really likes.

*Friday, 2006 December 29:* Carl and Jeremy, home for the Winter Break, walk to the tram along the foothills trail as snow falls. About eight inches have fallen as they set out on the walk, and even this amount obscures the trail. They wallow along, trying to avoid stepping into the humps that are prickly pears. As they return, they notice a flock of dark-eyed juncos that land on grama grass stems poking out of the snow. The stem promptly slumps to the ground, and they think these birds are pretty stupid to believe a grass stem will support them. They then notice that the birds slide down the stem as it slumps, knocking the seeds off the end so that they can be foraged off the snow. They're not such bird brains after all.

*Saturday, 2006 December 30:* Buried. While the media hype the snowstorm that didn't shut down Denver, we are buried under two feet of snow by the end of the day. Live oaks and junipers stick out of snow, although their branches are burdened by heavy dollops of snow, but the prickly pears, bushes, and rocks, normally a prominent part of our landscape, are reduced to undifferentiated white lumps. Jeremy, Karen, and Carl—Eleanor has escaped the storm by visiting her boyfriend, Chase Morgan, in Tucson—spend much of the day shoveling the driveway, producing by the end of the day a 60-foot driveway to nowhere. This is by far the biggest snowfall we have experienced in Albuquerque, nearly double any previous snowfall.

*Sunday, 2006 December 31:* A plow connects our driveway to the outside world shortly after lunch, and we have friends from the neighborhood over for a New Year's Eve dinner and movie shown on our new 42-inch LCD TV. The main streets of Albuquerque are relatively clear, but side streets and parking lots are a mess of ice and snow.

*Saturday, 2007 January 6:* Ski Santa Fe finally manages to get its upper mountain open, so Jeremy and Carl and five friends, including Jeremy's Rice friend, Shira Polster, from Shaker Heights, Ohio, spend a glorious day zooming down the slopes. This will be Jeremy's only skiing outing this winter, since he plans to spend his Spring Break on a field geology course in Big Bend National Park.

Best Wishes,

Eleanor

Jeremy

Karen

Carl

CMC/TEX

P.S. If you think too many days in this diary started way too early, you're right, but on any school day, Karen, Carl, and Eleanor get up at 5:30 am to get Eleanor off to band practice. The photos show Eleanor on the Amazon and Jeremy on the CT.