

Silver Lining

Have You Been to Death Valley National Park?

By Karen King Russo

I just visited Death Valley National Park, the lowest place in America. At 290 feet below sea level in part, it draws people from all over the world. Guessing from the foreign languages I heard, it must be on the itinerary for visiting Europeans. Yet many Californians have never been there. So I am once again writing about a place of interest often overlooked that is not so far from home. Well at least it's drivable, five hours to be exact.

Actually I was in Death Valley once before. It was in the late '40s and I was about nine. I was traveling with my parents in their two-place Simca, a French version of a Fiat. There was no back seat, just a holding area. That is where I sat. With no air conditioning, it was mid July! Not only is it the lowest place, it is the hottest. But we had been visiting family friends in Bishop and my parents had this wild idea about seeing the Furnace Creek Inn, opened in 1927 and a watering hole for presidents. For me, they held out the carrot of a swimming pool fed by a natural spring. Of course, being July, it was closed. Is it any wonder that it has taken me this long to return? But not only have a few friends extolled its virtues, but photography classes, such as those at Paul's Photo, choose it for field trips for aspiring photographers.

Well John and I stayed at that very Furnace Creek Inn just this week. Just as my parents envisioned, 60 years ago, it was beautiful, made of fieldstone, with the spring-fed swimming pool, a lovely dining room, delicious food and welcoming service. More modest accommodations are available at the nearby Furnace Creek Ranch. With riding stables, tennis courts and a golf course, it is good for families and seems to be the headquarters for RVs.

Death Valley was discovered in 1849 by one wagon of 49ers taking a shortcut on their search for gold. Then Borax was discovered, which was mined for a couple of years. It was the Borax Company that built the Furnace Creek Inn to beckon tourists.

The majority of Death Valley is flat, barren with salt flats. Some areas are covered by sage and creosote, one of the most ancient plants. And it is all surrounded by low mountains, sculpted by nature's resident artists, rain, wind and earthquakes. There are several highlight sites to see by hiking, walking, driving or viewing from vistas. We chose to visit the Artists Pallet, a one-way road that weaves for eight miles through a narrow passage in the subtly-colored and varied textured rocks. We followed this with a two-mile walk through Golden Canyon, another feast for the eyes. Then Zabriskie Point overlooking

the Badlands. Wouldn't you know, I forgot my wide-angle lens, though it probably didn't matter. It was the immensity of it all that was so overwhelming, unlike anything I had ever seen, and not easily captured on my camera.

On foot we'd feel a gust of wind, then winding a corner, no breeze at all, and without the sounds of even a bug or an insect, the sound of silence was unlike any other. Just as was the brightness of the sun. Without a particle of moisture or pollution in the air, my sunglasses were inadequate. With rainfall at only one and a half inches a year, the humidity is zero to five percent.

The main manmade point of interest is Scotty's Castle. A magnificently beautiful Spanish revival home in the most inhospitable setting is of interest not only for its magnificence, but for the story behind it. It is known as the monument to friendship. Walter Scott, a rough and tumble cowboy and con artist, seduced one Albert Johnson, a refined, educated, deeply religious and wealthy fellow from Ohio, into investing in his bogus gold mine in Death Valley. The bottom line is that Johnson did not care that he had been duped, for Scott had introduced him to a colorful, healthy life in the west and to his colorful company that he came to love and could not have found on his own. It was Johnson who built and owned the house and let it carry the name of his egomaniacal friend Scotty. Johnson's wife, a member of the first graduating class of Stanford, expressed her love of the barren area, "Our movies are the moving of the breezes and our dances are the dance of the stars on their course," she said.

We entered the park by way of Baker and left by the way of Lone Pine as we were headed north to spend Thanksgiving with my brother's family in Gardnerville, Nevada. The park is big. After entering, the drive to the inn was an hour. Leaving Scotty's Castle, the drive to our exit was over two hours. Part was like a rollercoaster ride over a mountain that went from sea level to 5,000 feet and down again. Part was like a moonscape. A little long, yet I find myself engaged just by space. Maybe it is from the close quarters in which we live at the beach. I doubt that the park looks much different than it did when it was discovered in 1849 except for the road transversing it. You may find it interesting to note how our stimulus money is being used. The road from the Furnace Creek Inn to Scotty's Castle is about 40 miles. We did not pass one car. Only a bulldozer, a truck, a porta-potty, a couple of workers, and a sign saying "Putting America to Work." They were repairing one little hole.

Karen Russo can be reached at kkrusso@aol.com •

A Senior Citizen's Guide to Social Networking

By Joe Tacoma

Seniors who may live alone, or may live far away from loved ones and close friends can benefit immensely from using social networking sites. These social networking sites may offer a welcome connection to the outside world for seniors who may not be able to get out as much as they would like.

Seniors who may live alone, or may live far away from loved ones and close friends can benefit immensely from using social networking sites. These social networking sites may offer a welcome connection to the outside world for seniors who may not be able to get out as much as they would like. Social websites may be intimidating at first, but once you get the hang of it, you'll be surfing the web in no time, with the proficiency of any teenager on your block. The first thing you must do is to get over your fear of computers and social networking sites and dive right in.

Social networking sites can be great places to meet people, keep in contact with friends and family, share pictures and videos, even to make new friends all over the world. The first thing you'll want to do is to spend some time on your computer, perhaps looking up interesting things in Google, to get a feel for your computer. Many senior citizens after a few weeks become more proficient at using the computer than any teenager or young adult, because of their extensive life experience and high knowledge levels.

Many senior citizens may feel certain apprehensions about using social networking sites due to a multitude of reasons. The truth is that the senior citizen age group is one of the fastest growing demographics on

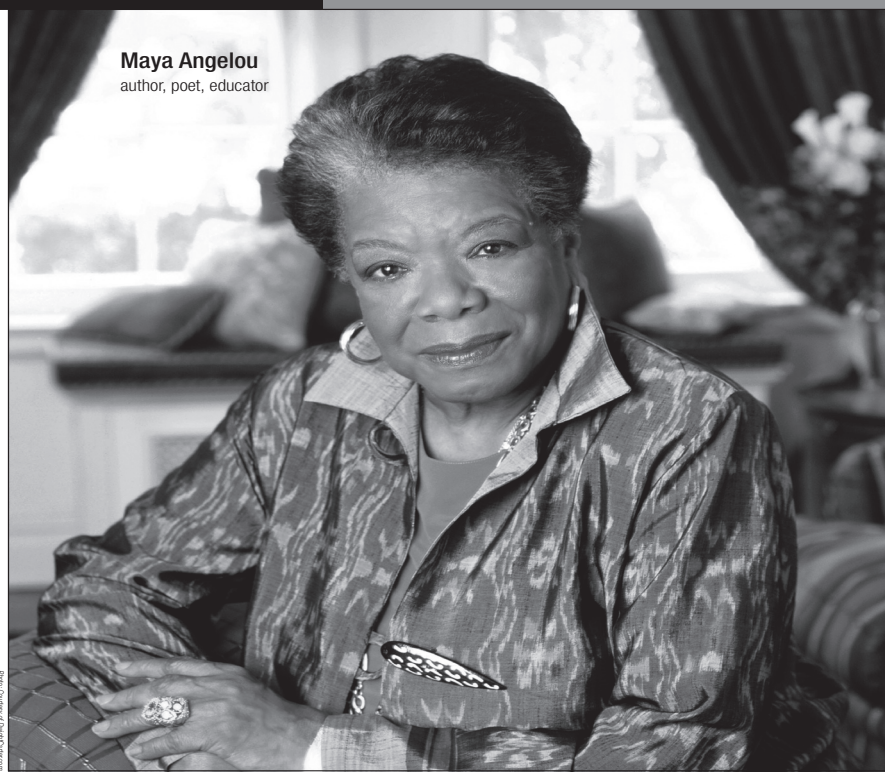
social networking sites, as more networking sites are starting to cater to an older, more sophisticated generation. Popular sites like Facebook and Myspace have gone to great lengths to make their sites more accessible to senior citizens, as well as giving them more features specifically designed to an older demographic.

Social networking is not for kids anymore, just ask the Agewell Foundation who has recently announced plans to launch InteractWell, a social networking site specifically designed for senior citizens. Not only is it a place for seniors to come together and interact, but a place for them to share their views regarding life experiences, all across the globe. Sites like these offer senior citizens a way to interact with other seniors who may feel as apprehensive about social networking as they do. It is a great place to meet other seniors who have similar interests, not to mention contact lost friends and family that may have grown out of touch. With the support of other seniors learning to use social networking sites for the first time, it will help ease your mind about using these sites and open you up to a whole new world of interaction and communication.

Most social networks are free and only require an email address and password. Once you go to the site and set up your free account you're ready to upload pictures and start making friends as soon as possible. You can set up your profile to express yourself in any way you see fit, and interact with people from all over the world, with the same passion and zest for life as you have. All you have to do is sign up and sign on, and you'll be an expert in social networking in no time. •

imagine stopping the progression of Alzheimer's

Maya Angelou
author, poet, educator



I have friends and loved ones suffering from Alzheimer's. But I can imagine... and hope for... a world without this terrible disease.

You can help make a difference. A major brain imaging study led by the National Institutes of Health may help us learn how to stop the progression of Alzheimer's.

Please consider joining the study if you are between 55 and 90 and:

- are in good general health with no memory problems, OR
- are in good general health but have memory problems or concerns, OR
- have a diagnosis of early Alzheimer's disease.

For more information, call 1-800-438-4380 or visit www.alzheimers.org/imagine.

imagine
stopping the progression of Alzheimer's disease
ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE NEUROIMAGING INITIATIVE

WHAT TOOK YOU A LIFETIME
TO LEARN CAN BE LOST IN MINUTES.

WITH A STROKE, TIME LOST IS BRAIN LOST.

Learn the warning signs at
StrokeAssociation.org or 1-888-4-STROKE

Ad
Council

American Stroke
Association

A Division of American
Heart Association

©2004 American Heart Association
Made possible in part by a generous grant from The Bugher Foundation