

American Scene

Whiling Away

by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

I have been absent for some time as I was sitting on my hands idling away time. I love random pleasures that make me smile no matter what is going on in my life right now. Sometimes we need to stop, slow down and just do nothing to get back in touch with our true selves. I feel that its's cleansing of mind; some call it unloading.

As fate would have it, I happened to be in in Comal County in the state of Texas. There I saw, for the first time in my life, the origin of a river. It comes out of an underground spring gushing out of rocks in a pristine atmosphere. The water is so clean and unpolluted that it looks like a clear glass top. Comal River is one of the shortest rivers in the world. The locals affectionately call it the "longest shortest river." Comal River is only 2.5 miles long, a tributary to Guadalupe River. "It was a phantom of delight that gleamed upon my sight, a lovely apparition, a moment's ornament" (apology to William Wordsworth).

Moving on I went to Guadalupe River State Park near Bulverde TX. The area sits in the lap of nature and is a delight to the eyes and ears (chirping of beautiful birds). I forgot all my worries looking at the turquoise colored river flowing aside limestone rocks. I truly wandered as a cloud that floated high over that limestone hill.

Lo and behold! All of a sudden, I saw John Newcombe's Tennis Ranch. John Newcombe really? I followed Newcombe (an Australian) in the 60s and 70s. He was from the golden era of tennis along with Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall, Fred Stolle and Ramanathan Krishnan. How did he decide to start a ranch 50 years ago (in 1968) in New Braunfels TX? I decided to go inside where I had a nice talk with Lisa, the manager of the gift shop. Her husband is a coach at the ranch. He was the 42nd ranked tennis player in the world at his prime. Lisa's daughter and Ramesh Krishnan's son (Ramesh is the son of great Ramanathan Krishnan) studied together at John Hopkins and were ladies' and men's captains respectively.

Lisa has met all the tennis greats of today and yester years and knows them personally. She asked me to visit



the ranch in October when all the tennis greats of yesterday including Laver and Newcombe will gather there. For me, the visit was like a kid going to the candy shop. Lisa let me float around the tennis courts where I happened to see the current 19th ranked player practicing his game.

One of the items on my bucket list is to cover all the 50 states and their capitals, so I decided to take a bus from Austin (capital of Texas) to OK City (capital of Oklahoma) with a change of bus in Dallas. That nine hour bus ride was an eye opener. Only two kinds of people seem to avail of the bus facility, poor blacks and young white college girls (no idea how the boys travel). Contrary to the popular belief, the buses run on time. Passengers, both black and white, young and old are very courteous and they mind their own business. The seats are equipped with 110V outlets and free Wi-Fi. All the passengers were decent, observed the rules and were very considerate towards their co-passengers.

On coming back home, I turned on the cable and read the pile of newspapers and magazines to catch up with current events. I was shocked to realize that the world was full of racists, demagogues, jingoists and egoists. We are all here to spread hatred towards each other. Every action we take is full of micro aggression and bias. Women are on streets to protest against sexual harassment and abuse. I didn't see any of those in the real world when I reached and touched both nature and humanity on my tour. Which one is the true universe, the one I travelled or the one that is created for me by the media and politicians?

All in all, it was good for my health to slow down, both physically and mentally. A calm mind leads to a calm body. I don't feel guilty for doing nothing. I have to be strong in the face of social conditioning and stare down the people who look disapprovingly at society while I watch the flowers or wander aimlessly down a country lane. It's well worth it.