

Shalom from the Schwab Family!



Friday, December 25, 2015

Shalom!

The Schwabs have had an eventful week! We started in St. Louis, enjoying the hospitality of Rabbi Brad Horowitz and the St. Louis

JCC. In addition to splashing around in their indoor water park we loved the City Museum (best interactive family museum I have experienced) and of course the arch. Next was Kansas City where we had a "ball" at the College Basketball Experience (I know, terrible pun) and had dinner with some cousins and my brother.

We spent the next two days in Lawrence with my brother and his wife who live on the prairie. A lot of outdoor time, family time, great KU experience and an awesome toy store in downtown Lawrence. We were supposed to be in Santa Fe today enjoying the hospitality of Manny and Kathryn Marczak, Jeff Zilka and Ivy Stern (all Beth El members) but a huge snowstorm is predicted for tomorrow so we fled south and are now preparing for Shabbat in the parking lot of the only synagogue in Lubbock Texas!

Saturday night we drive further south to San Antonio to avoid a rare Texas/New Mexico snowstorm. The beauty of carrying your home with you - you can call an audible as you wish! While I can't say the kids never complain, we are certainly having a great time and feel blessed to have this experience as a family.

We miss you and wish you a hearty Texas Shabbat Shalom!

The Schwabs

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**Monday, January 4, 2016**

Shalom!

Hope you are all well and had a great New Year's eve! The Schwabs are currently in Scottsdale, AZ, which, until today was sunny and beautiful, (a welcome change from the unseasonably cold weather down south we had been experiencing thus far).

Last time I wrote we had fled the blizzard in western Texas and eastern New Mexico and were preparing for Shabbat in, of all places, Lubbock, Texas. The congregation was small but very welcoming and delighted in our kids as we joined them for services. They allowed us to park the RV in their parking lot as well, so I was even closer to shul than normal!

Unfortunately, the storm was headed for Lubbock as well so we drove right after Shabbat to San Antonio. We spent a lovely three unplanned days there exploring the Alamo, Riverwalk, New Children's Museum and various activities like the Mirror Maze. There was a delicious dairy kosher restaurant as well that we enjoyed.

After San Antonio we traveled to Carlsbad, New Mexico to explore the largest caverns in the Western Hemisphere. They are beautiful, impressive and truly large enough to fit an underground city. The kids were amazing hiking all of the way down and even more impressive hiking all the way back up. Next we headed to White Sands, which is a unique white sands desert in SW New Mexico. We learned geologically how it came into existence and then had some kind fun on the sand dunes there - we were able to go sledding on the sand! We all had fun doing that for awhile.

From there we took the long drive to Scottsdale where we spent Friday visiting with Erica's grandfather, her aunt and uncle as well as cousins. On Shabbat we had planned to attend the Conservative synagogue there (the rabbi was my camper on USY on Wheels in 1996) but they moved services to the JCC this past Shabbat which was too far to walk. So we held Schwab services in the living room of our friend's house where we were staying. We missed being with a community but it was fun to have an interactive Torah discussion with my kids. Sunday we experienced the majesty of Sedona. The kids rocked the long strenuous hike up to Cathedral Rock and enjoyed the bumpy and windy desert jeep tour. It is truly beautiful there.

Today is a work day, so after some play and swim in the morning we are all doing our work at the local public library. Tomorrow is an educational day at the science center and dinner with Erica's family. From there we push on to "rainy but supposed to be sunny" San Diego.

Kol Tuv,

The Schwabs

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February 2016

Shalom!

Ari kept a journal of our trip as well. To read both a humorous and complete accounting of our trip with lots of pictures, from a 9-year old perspective, [click here](#).

When I last wrote we had spent five wonderful days in Scottsdale. Our next stop was San Diego and we chose to drive there through Palm Springs. We had a great time taking the aerial tram from 55 and sunny at the bottom to 30 and snowy at the top. We did a little sledding, had some hot chocolate and enjoyed our ride down.

To celebrate Liana's birthday we went to Sea World San Diego where she was able to feed, touch and help "train" a dolphin. It was truly a highlight. We enjoyed home hospitality for dinner at the parents of a Beth El friend (thanks Danielle!) and of course really enjoyed our experience at the San Diego zoo. On our way to LA we surprised Ari with a special treat - a surfing lesson on Huntington Beach! While the girls and I enjoyed swimming and playing in the sand Ari and Erica did a great job riding the waves. Also on the way to LA we celebrated Noa and Miri's birthdays at Disneyland. Going in January meant short lines and fun was had by all. Ari and I particularly liked the new Star Wars rides.

In LA we stayed with close friends and had a wonderful Shabbat with them. We also enjoyed the hospitality of Rabbi Camras, a friend and colleague, who is the spiritual leader of Congregation Shomrei Torah. It was a lovely shul experience complete with the celebration of a bat mitzvah and a guest speaker. We also visited American Jewish University's Skirball museum and had a great experience in their interactive Noah's Ark exhibit. There was also a wonderful exhibit about how individuals and communities can make a difference in the world. I was impressed and glad my kids experienced that exhibit. Before we left we (of course) had to go to

Hollywood! We did it Schwab style and hiked to the Hollywood sign which was fun. Then we drove Hollywood Boulevard past the stars and Chinese Theatre. The highlight was when "Spider-Man" gave Liana a balloon animal through our car window while we were at a light.

Next we headed to Edwards Air Force base where my cousin is a test pilot. It was great to see him, his wife and their dog, all of whom our children adore. We received a first class insider's tour, viewing many different aircraft up close and getting a peek inside test pilot school. It is a huge base which also houses NASA operations as well as certain private contractors such as Lockheed and the like.

After a short stopover at M&M world on the Vegas strip and a drive-by of Lake Mead and the Hoover dam, we arrived at the snowy peak of the Grand Canyon. We stayed on site at their RV park and after a restful night were dazzled by the majestic views from the rim in the morning. During the afternoon we hiked into the canyon on the bright angel trail, braving the snowy and icy conditions. I was very proud of the kids who were great hikers.

On our way from the Grand Canyon to Albuquerque/Santa Fe we made two wonderful stops. First was Bearizona. A relatively new wildlife park it provided unbelievably close encounters with Wolves, bears, bison and mountain goats. None of us had ever been within an arms reach of some of these types of animals without a fence or wall separating us. It was quite an experience. Next we stopped at Meteor Crater, supposedly the most well preserved meteor crater in the world. There was a movie, Museum and of course the crater - all of which were interesting.

The next morning we enjoyed the hot air balloon museum in Albuquerque on our way to Santa Fe. The kids particularly enjoyed a balloon simulator where they could "pilot" their own balloon. The experience inspired us to make arrangements for a real balloon ride that Sunday - we were all excited.

That Shabbat we enjoyed the wonderful hospitality of the Santa Fe Jewish community. Welcomed by both the Reform and Orthodox rabbis (no Conservative shul) due to parking availability we stayed across the street from one of the lovely members of one of the Orthodox shuls. We had a hamish Shabbat experience at what my kids called the "small shul" as it consisted of three rooms in a small business park. However davening was nice, kiddish was home cooked by members and we met some lovely people. That afternoon we visited the home of Beth El members Ivy Stern and Jeff Zilka who also gave us a great walking tour of downtown Santa Fe. After joining a couple of Santa Fe families for havdalah we went to sleep

early in preparation for our early morning balloon ride. Let's just say there was nothing not to love about the ride. The view was magnificent, the ride relaxing and exhilarating and our pilot was great. We next hiked the mountains in Bandolier National park climbing ladders to visit ancient pueblos, experiencing the beautiful forest and meeting some elk up close.

The next day we tackled the slopes of Santa Fe, well at least Ari and Liana did! Thanks to a state-wide program subsidizing young skiers they got lessons and lift tickets for the day at a great price while the rest of us enjoyed a relaxing day in the lodge. The instructors said they were great and both had a fantastic time. After dinner with a wonderful couple we met over Shabbat in Santa Fe we got ready to say goodbye to that fun city.

We woke up to snow and headed toward Taos - a mountain town east of Santa Fe. After enjoying the beautiful drive we did a great hike into the canyon where the Rio Grande flowed. There was snow and ice on the path and the river was cold but by a miracle of nature right on its banks were hot spring pools that were 100 degrees. We all enjoyed a fun swim and dip in the springs while watching the Rio Grande roar by.

Finally it was time to start heading home. After a long night drive we arrived in Liberal Kansas, home to Dorothy and the Land of Oz. The kids enjoyed their virtual Oz experience and we all concluded that there is no place like home! After a great second visit with my brother and his wife in Lawrence we set out for our last stop - the Endangered Wolf Center outside of St. Louis. There we learned about the wolves and other canines they studied and cared for there, made treats for them and visited the animals in their enclosures. It was a special experience and a great final activity.

While my family has re-entered our lives this week, I am currently on a plane to Israel from Budapest after visiting with an incredible Jewish community there that is fighting anti-Semitism and assimilation. I look forward to sharing with you all of the many things I learned on both of these trips.

Thank you for reading my posts but more importantly for supporting me during this time, allowing me and my family to have these experiences. Being away emphasizes what I already knew - how special our community truly is!

Shabbat Shalom!
The Schwabs