

Shock and Awe, and Sparkles

This was the Tootle of tootles! Sir William Lembright, Lady Jan Lembright, and I haven't been on an enjoyable tootle for a long time, and we made up for it in spades.

On a recent Friday, I had been scheduled to go down below to visit House Clinic for a VNG test. House Clinic is where they do cochlear implants to enable deaf people to hear, and yes, I am deaf in one ear and almost deaf in the other. My right ear has been able to hear for over two years due to the implant there; the left ear is about to get one. I will be able to hear with both ears for the first time in years! Thank You, Father, for Your God-given human ingenuity that makes such things possible!

Unfortunately, the test was at the clinic's Los Angeles location on Wilshire Blvd., in the heart of L.A., where none of us had ever been, and where I dread ever having to go. And I had to have a driver due to the nature of the test, so Bill and Jan agreed to come,



and we decided to turn the trip into a genuine, bonafide Tootle. (Some of you may remember Tootles of the past.)

Our first destination was Hitchin Post Market in Reche Canyon, Colton, located in the hills south of San Bernardino, between Grand Terrace and Loma Linda. The Hitchin Post was our first store, which we operated from 1967 to 1981. It had been a turkey-processing plant, with a floor sloped to a drain in the center, and then was converted into a small convenience market. We changed it from a small ugly little box on a bare lot to an interesting little store, which included a snack shop, some hardware, a feed store, a garden shop, gas pumps, and a self-operated wand car wash. It was a jewel of a place, which God used to train us in the grocery business, but we finally left in 1981 at His direction, thankfully getting us out of the hyper, increasingly urban and still smoggy bowl of San Bernardino Valley.

We watched sadly over the years as various owners let it run down into a dump, so when one day someone pointed out pictures of the "new" Hitchin Post on the internet, we were shocked to see that someone cared enough to make it beautiful.

SHOCK: the freeways were easy to navigate, showing blue almost entirely on our Google maps all the way to Reche Canyon. On a Friday morning. When everyone was leaving town.

SHOCK: Leaving the Riverside Freeway at Washington St. and driving along Barton Rd to Reche Canyon Rd., we were shocked at how much development there was – many businesses, lots of trees, and even more trees and houses as we went up Reche Canyon Rd. Wow. Kinda sad. In fact, ewwww. Urbanization to the max.

AWE: The transformation of the little store into an attractive market and liquor store. (Mixed feelings!)

Sparkles: We drove by two of the houses we had lived in, amazed at how one had changed, and the other had not but seemed in decent shape.

Sparkles: My favorite -- there are wild burros everywhere in Reche Canyon. We got to see a couple of groups of them just standing around, looking bored, waiting for Linda to hug their necks, if I could get that close.

Next stop: Bill Lembright's cousin Christy and husband Angelo, whom he hadn't seen in years, and who live in Walnut. Little Red's dashboard display of Google Maps directed us to take the 60 Freeway to Walnut. We took the most direct route to the 60 (ok, not so direct) – we turned up Reche

Canyon Rd. and took Reche Vista Rd. over the hills, and down into Moreno Valley (formerly Sunnymead) (more ewwww), where we hopped onto the 60.

SHOCK: Freeways still pretty clear.

AWE: This town I'd barely ever heard of (Walnut) is an oasis of beautiful green, in winding streets, nice houses, and a beautiful park with bicycle trails.

Christy's house is in a quiet Cul-de-sac in this green oasis in the middle of the frenetic LA freeways nearby. It's beautiful and very green with nice lawns and tall trees. It's hard to realize that those nasty freeways and horrid LA sprawl are very near.

Last stop was the House Clinic in the heart of L.A. Back on the 60 Freeway to the exit shown on Little Red's Google map. And then the **SHOCK:** rather than take us directly to Wilshire Blvd., we turned left onto some little street, and then right there, up here, and down there, and then had to pass a garbage truck stopped in the middle of a narrow street, or an Amazon van also stopped in the street. **AWE** (as in awe, no!) Sir William went around one HUGE truck on an uphill street, and as we crested the little rise, there was a bus coming right at us!

Pedestrians and cars were everywhere. Mexican mothers with their little kids in tow were negotiating those streets. Lining the streets were old wooden batten and board two-storey houses that I imagine could create a huge fire if one burned. We had to watch the traffic lights or stop signs, pedestrians, cars and lots of other busy distractions to avoid running into one of them. Highland St. in Lucerne Valley this was NOT!

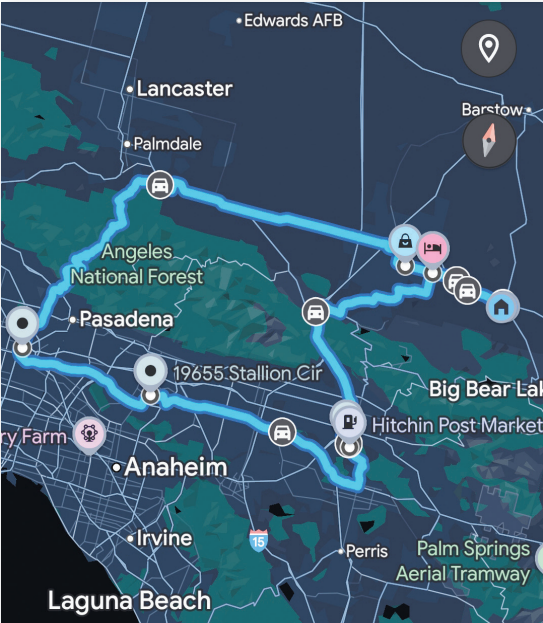
Finally we came to a couple of giant buildings, one of which appeared to be a hospital, and the other an office building. Both were labeled PIH, which recently (sadly) bought House Clinic. We had to stop someone to find out where to go – up four floors in the office side of the complex and finally, we arrived! Whew!

Balance test done, and we gladly got out of there, the same way we got in, right on this street, left on that one, up this little hill and down another, until we were led to the Glendale Freeway. Did you know there was such a thing as a Glendale Freeway? I didn't.

Sir William was driving, so I navigated. I looked at the printed directions to the way home and told the others, "You're going to be surprised at the route Google is taking us home! And you're going to like it!"

They thought I was kidding. Of course, we were facing Friday afternoon rush-out-of-LA-to-go-have-fun-somewhere traffic, which would make all east-west freeways a slow-and-go mess and the Cajon Pass even worse. To our surprise, Google had other plans, turning a driving nightmare into, well, **AWE!**

SHOCK: Google led us home over the San Gabriel Mountains, using the Angeles Crest Scenic Byway! Freeways avoided!



Bumper to bumper stop-and-go traffic forgotten.

AWE: WOW! I have never been through that area before. What spectacular mountains – ste-e-e-e-p gorges with vertical sides; you could look down to see the



tops of trees and a green patch wa-a-a-y down there, at the bottom of the gorge. The road wound around and around and around, traveled by a line of cars who undoubtedly had been routed that way by Google maps, also.

NON-SPARKLE: As is often the case on two-lane mountain roads, there was a slow



vehicle holding everyone up, and refusing to pull over into a turnout so cars could pass. It was a gray Amazon-type van that held a single speed no matter how many cars piled up behind it. Along with others, we finally passed it, but then SOMEONE in the car (not me!) had to make a pitstop at a campground, and as we pulled out onto the road, there went the gray van by us, and we were stuck again.

After miles and miles of winding around spectacular scenery, Google instructed us to turn right on Mt. Emma Rd. We thought the gray van would go straight while we went right, to freedom. Nope! The van turned right also, but there was a short passing lane which allowed us to get around it. Thank goodness!

Mt. Emma Rd. led us down to the desert and on to Highway 138, the Pear Blossom Highway, now a nicely paved four-lane highway, but only for a few miles. At one point, there was a 7-minute backup of traffic on this highway in the middle of nowhere. We were sure we'd find that gray van at the front of it. 😊

Finally we reached Highway 18 'way out west of Victorville, but at least we were in familiar territory. We thanked the Google voice for the scenic tootle home and found the rest of the way home all by ourselves!

SPARKLE: Google's creative routing saved us one whole hour coming home, or so the map said. And even if it didn't, I'd far rather have wound through those mountains on a beautiful fall afternoon than to sit on the 10 or the 210 freeway and the 15 freeway, inching forward, squeezing right and squeezing left to find a faster lane, and paying sharp attention to the cars and trucks, trucks, trucks (!) all around.

SUPER-SPARKLE: When Lucerne Valley came into view, I was so GLAD to be coming home out of that horrible mess that is the Southern California freeways and urban blight. And to leave it behind and top off the day with such breathtaking scenery created by God Himself . . . well, all we could do was to say, "Thank You, Father, for that wonderful treat!"

P.S. As I drove home from the store a couple of days ago, there was an Amazon-type gray van parked on the north side of the highway, near Café 247. I wonder if it's stalking us? Hahahahahaha!

Linda Gammel

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