

Living in the USA, turning 56 in Colorado-living it my way
"There is only one success-to be able to spend your life your own way" Christopher Morley

It seems like yesterday. I was sleeping on the floor of a hut built on an island in the South Pacific home sick as hell. Of course being the Peace Corp, my accommodations were not exactly like the Ritz. The big hogs that were prized possession and the guest of honor at the occasional pig roast slept under the house causing the ever so comfortable wood plank floor to lift up and down when the bugs bothered them and they stood up to scratch, grunt and do what uncomfortable pigs sleeping under your hut do.

In order to escape the realities of the sleeping arrangements I fired up my cassette player and chose from my vast selection of 5 cassette tapes. My Grandpa Earl and I think my brother had a hand in building speakers that were encased in Tupperware plastic in order to survive the humid jungle which were connected to a tape player ensconced in a wooden frame. As high tech as you could get, very functional and a connection to home.

It was when the floor was moving around and the hogs were a grunting that I mashed my plastic homemade Tupperware speakers connected to my dying tape player and turned the volume full blast to Steve Miller-Living in the USA. Man what a song-cheeseburgers, French fries, you know the tune, do dodo dada da, living in the USA, time keeps on ticking into the future..... It was like being home. No pigs, no moving floors, no body rot from living with 100% humidity, 100% of the time.

So when I saw Steve Miller was going to play at Red Rocks on my birthday and Val was going to be here in Colorado, I had to go and see him. No question about it, I am there. I had to see the guy who had no idea how his music comforted me thirty four years ago. Yes, that's thirty four years ago. I can't believe it either.

I went on line and ordered up the best tickets I could get. Row 41 almost center stage and made dinner reservations at the Red Rocks Grill for two. You see Ron and I saw Bob Dillon, and we pretty much did the same agenda, dinner and concert, so I knew it was good. BUT I made a huge mistake and told Val about the wild trout we had for dinner and she pretty

much cried a bucket because she was not there. So this time, we are together, dinner reservations are made and I can't wait.

Hey Bruce what's the weather forecast? Well I am not sure, let's check the weather channel. What is all that green on the radar over the mountains? What? 60% chance of rain, especially during the evening with a low of 45 degrees. Oh man, not quite the birthday and Val's maiden concert voyage at Red Rocks that I had imagined. The concerts seem to go out here rain or shine, so we packed my Ducati backpack with rain gear, extra clothes and a big dose of optimism for no rain.

We left the house at 5:00 because my general anxiety disorder causes me to get to places months if not years in advance in order to mitigate the stress associated with rushing around to get seats etc. So we arrived at my normal time and had to stand in line before the gates even opened. Val is used to this and Red Rocks affords wonderful scenery providing on-line entertainment worthy of an anxiety induced early arrival.

The folks out here are so friendly and warm that conversations in line are always a part of the pre concert package. We noticed two young maybe 18-20 year old guys in line next to us. As mentioned above Steve Miller has been around for a while so I asked these guys, you guys are so young and you follow Steve Miller? Yeah man, he replied trying real hard to keep his eyes focused and avoid bleeding to death from some ailment that he must be suffering manifested as deep redness in his eyes, yeah man they are one of my favorite groups.

Come to find out, Steve Miller music has been used in advertisements extensively exposing young folks to his music creating a huge young following. Who would have thunk it.

OK we arrive at Red Rocks Grill at the duly appointed time of 45 minutes prior to my reservation. Ron and I had firsthand experience with the hostess during our Bob Dillon adventure. I think knowing that she is a third grade teacher pretty much sums up her style. That being said, they have two hostesses with the other being a young female that might be vulnerable to an old man's wit and self effacing humor and seat us early.

There are two lines leading to the hostess station, one being for the poor suckers who have to wait in the queue for the one table reserved for walk ins and the other for reservations. The walk in line had maybe 10-15 people in line, while reservations had none. We walked toward the hostess station and there they were, the pit bull and the puppy.

I was starting to get scared when the pit bull took some folks from the walk in line leaving the puppy. Great, great , great. She asked if we had reservations I smiled and said yes we do. The name is Bruce Carr. She looked and looked and could not find us. You see the anxiety produced early arrival put us so far in advance of our reservation that she had to go to the next page to find us. Oh, here it is she said, your reservation is for 6:30. I looked at my watch and it was 5:45.

Being the award winning insurance salesman that I once was I still have confidence that it is always worth a shot trying to get what you want, if you can negotiate with a human. I have less success negotiating with computers. I said with my best insurance selling smile and attitude, yes we are early and wondered if you could take us early. She looked at us, looked at the seating manifesto, looked back at us.....Yes we can seat you. Woo hoo we are in.

Our early arrival strategy was working and early dinner seating would surely enable us to sit on the concrete slab in the amphitheatre well before the music started. I love it when a plan comes together.

Val and I enjoyed a nice meal with ok food and slow service, and finished in time to find our seats and settle into the damp cold concrete seats that would be our home for the next five hours. Little did I know, we would not sit much. One of the great things about arriving way early is you can find your seat so easily as no one else has arrived.

The night is just wonderful so far. The plan is coming together, our stomachs are full, Red Rocks is beautiful, the night is cool and NO RAIN. It is now pitch black as the moon and stars are covered by a thick blanket of heavy clouds when the announcer proclaims. "For the safety and comfort of our guests Red Rocks does not allow smoking except in the designated

areas”, which of course are far away from seating. “Now sit back and enjoy the summer rock and roll concert series.”

At that point the lights went down and were quickly replaced with the glow and thousands of pipes, bongos, cigarette lighters, butane torches and any other assorted device enabling folks to smoke funny smelling stuff in the clearly designated, NO SMOKING, areas. Lighting from the spot lights were no match for the glow emanating from the seats.

After the initial fire ball and associated mushroom cloud, our eyes once again adjusted to the dark and a band comes onstage. The music was a little shaky and I noticed Val had kind of, is this for real, look. We later learned the band was a DJ band from the local rock station promoting the concert. I am sure they make better dj’s than musicians.

After 45 minutes of warm up music, the dj band left to be replaced by a band that included the lead guy who wrote and sang much of the music for Santana. The music was good, filled with electrifying lead guitar riffs and solid vocals. After a while the music started taking a pretty familiar and repetitive sound. At the point the crowd started treating the music as background music and engaged in 150 decibel conversations regarding their office, stock market, quality of the tobacco in their little pipes.

Val got in to sensory overload with loud conversations all around, some people were dancing, and there was very loud music and clouds of smoke emanating from the non smoking section. She just started laughing and going with the flow. While the music was technically incredibly demanding and complex it did not have the soul to touch hearts.

OK, the second band broke down their stuff and the crew built Steve Miller’s stage. It was about 9:30 and still, NO RAIN.

Out comes Steve Miller. His group includes his 32 year harmony partner and several other, well let’s just say they weren’t kids, musicians. The first song started out slowly with just a hint of Steve Millers guitar skills and distinctive vocals. The crowd started coming back to the music and paying attention. Man he is pretty good.

Next he started letting the percussion loose to warm them up and get the heart of the band start driving the heart of the audience. Man it is getting better.

OK, now we are cooking. Steve Miller lets loose with vocals that immediately take me back to Ponape and makes me 21 again. Along with the Time Keeps On Slipping away realization that song is 30 years old and time is really slipping away, the music is just wonderful. The band is crisp, and absolutely perfect. It is truly a wonder to witness people who are so wonderfully gifted, talented and skilled at what they do. To witness the elite in any endeavor whether it's music, sport, art etc. is one of life's special gifts. Men are they good.

Steve Miller played at least 10-15 different guitars 18 strings, electric, acoustical, six strings, etc. with an incredible skill whether it be lead, rhythm or back up. His guitar playing matched with his unique vocals, making songs like Living in the USA, Time Keeps on Slipping, Joker, as fresh as they day they were recorded.

He brought out the Santana guys for a jam session that was one of the best I have ever heard. They had two sets of drums, conga drums, bongo drums, electric guitars, organ and vocals going to the point where the band and the audience were one.

Different than most musicians, Steve Miller turns up the house lights enabling him to see the audience and interact. Thus his energy became ours and ours became his. The house light shone on 8000 people rocking, dancing, singing to the beat. We were one. All in a smoke filled non smoking outdoor. AND STILL NO RAIN.

The band went on until 12:00 with two encore numbers that sent everyone home with a smile, or was it the smoke? STILL NO RAIN.

Val and I managed to exit the parking lot and get on 285 no problem with the exception of some minor fog making for poor visibility. No problem I know where I am going, thank goodness. We got to the road that takes us to the top of the mountain and the temp gauge says 50 degrees. We climb up the mountain and the temp starts to drop and the fog starts to build.

As I have already hit a deer in broad daylight, I have no problem going slow at night, but visibility is starting to become an issue. As we climb I slow down to 5 mph and we have resorted to me hanging my head out the side window and Val doing the same thing on her side in order to see the edge of the road. At least we will know that we ran off the mountain. It is bad, bad. I cannot see 5 feet, but we persevered and made it home and down the driveway safe and sound. STILL NO RAIN.

We get home and take care of Finney, get settled in bed when the mountains let loose with a storm of biblical proportions. Hale is coming down the smokestack in the bedroom sounding like marbles thrown against a tin roof, the wind is howling, the rain is pounding on the windows.

Just like 34 years ago, the thoughts of Steve Miller, Living in the USA running thru my head providing comfort as I settle down to sleep while the hogs lift the floor, or is that the storm waking me up?

Time keeps on slipping, slipping, slipping.....Into the fuuuuture!!!!!!!!!!