CH 10: DEX

SISTER mention from chapter 1

We got married 45 years ago. Alice's strawberry hair was smoothed into 1920s waves, and she was wearing red lipstick.

Alice wore a drop waist ivory sheath with a lace overdress. I remember she looked beautiful. I got the words for her description from the wedding notice that her mom put out. I saved it. Pressed in an album of pictures and flowers from that day. She was so adorable, coming down the aisle toward me. I kept saying again and again, "Your eyes are like beautiful almonds." For some reason I had to get that point across. The priest had to tap me on the shoulder to get me to pay attention to the ceremony words. I wish my sister could have been there. I never found her, and I never forgot that Muriel told me about her when I was young.

"Are there almonds to eat?" Alice asked.

"No, Dex says that because he thinks you look pretty," whispered her mom.

"But almonds..." she couldn't let it go.

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It was a long road to that ceremony. Our parents believed in us, but they said to wait until we were both 25 to get married. That was when I would be fully hired as a full-time national forest climbing ranger, with a five-days-on, three-days-off special schedule. I started that schedule right away from my Vista position to ranger in training and lived in an apartment on the South Rim for my days on duty. I set us an apartment in Flagstaff, starting when we were both 20, so Alice could practice the new life-with-me things she was learning. I had stopped stealing, but I had the $5,000 "saved". There was enough for one month's rent, a month's safety deposit,

a sofa, easy chair, a bed and sheets and blankets, a box of dishes and flatware, and a set of towels. Muriel and Dad and Alice's parents gave us the rest. I had time to figure out what the hell to do on my end, living with Alice.

I came down one morning and the stove front burner was on high, no pan over it. Alice was humming, playing with soapy water in the sink. Eggs and a bowl and whisk were all set out. That day, I put automatic timers on all the burners.

Once, I found the washing machine overflowing with suds and Alice dumping a whole box of laundry detergent into the machine.

"Hey, a cup. All you need is a cup," I said.

"My jeans are really dirty. More dirt, more soap," she said.

I had a hard time arguing with her about stuff like that. So, I cleaned up soap suds a lot.

I had to stop swearing. Couldn't even say "Jesus" or God Damn" or much less "fuck", at work or at home with Alice. Dad suggested I adopt the term Holy Moly. I use that.

Through Alice's disability benefits, we had home aides from Colorado DHS; several took shifts to stay with Alice during the day, and others at night when I was on duty. Nice people. Muriel and Dad stopped in most days. Alice's mom visited from Pueblo every month when I was on staff for five days.

I was having oatmeal for breakfast, and Alice came out of her upstairs bedroom with her church dress on.

"I have PT today, OT tomorrow, and therapy on Friday," she said, "so kiss me goodbye." Disability transportation services pulled up outside. "Let's go swimming tonight?" she said as she flounced out with the fancy dress. I didn't question little stuff like that.

We swam at the YMCA Fitness Center Pool.

“Swimming is hard,” she said. “I can’t make it up and back.” I told her to hold onto my shoulders, and I did the breaststroke to pull her across the pool one way. Then she had to swim herself the way back, and I’d tickle her feet to get her going again if she stopped. She loved that. I wanted her to myself when I was home, so I didn’t mind keeping track of her. Gave me something to do.

Hiking with Alice was more like a wildflower hunt or looking for quartz.

“What’s this one?” she’d say holding up bright yellow flowers and silver leaves.

“That’s brittlebush.”

A few feet down the trail she’d pull up a few globemallows and hold them up to me.

“Globemallows.”

Satisfied, she added them to her fistful. Any wild strawberries or rocket leaves went right in her mouth. I turned my head and let her graze while her mother would have stopped her. We did have a woman come in two hours a day when I was home so I could run.

I had to learn to go s-l-o-w, whether helping with meals or waiting for Alice to get dressed or climb a hill. She particularly had a hard time opening things. Tightly packaged cosmetics or food. Her hands and nails weren’t strong. She’d struggle and struggle. The dentist told her not to use her teeth as tools. Slowly, I’d work with her to learn to use scissors, a knife (which we kept all dull), and even plyers to get things open. First cut the cardboard from the plastic. Then puncture the plastic, then use a tool to peel away the rigid plastic. I’d have to go outside and split a log or fix something after one of those sessions.

If I counted all the hours I waited for her in my life, I could be upset. But I think of waiting time as gathering a stone. I collected pebbles, not the agate or quartz on the trail, because of course I couldn’t take those from the Canyon, couldn’t take anything from anywhere or

anyone anymore. Not after that day I met Alice. But I'd go out and pick up an ordinary pebble, if I got antsy, waiting for Alice. I had a huge bowlful on the living room coffee table. Each was a waiting time.

Alice always had to take human growth hormone therapy. She had taken estrogen/progesterone therapy to develop at puberty. To start out, we had long talks with our therapists, separately and as a group, about married life including sex. I wanted sex but only if Alice wanted that, is all I would say and then twirl my fingers in my hands and let everybody else talk and not listen, just stare into space. Alice said OK, but I knew she had no idea what she was talking about. I meant a reasonable relationship, of course. I promised myself I'd always wait for Alice to initiate, and I never broke that promise. The doctors said Alice had absent menstruation and was infertile.

So, her therapist, Cindrine, took her through a special sex education class: Sexual Health Equity for Individuals with Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities (SHEIDD) project. Holy Moly! Did that bring up a lot of questions. Alice asked me about parts in pictures in the manual like she was learning about puzzle pieces. She loved puzzles, was very good at them, and always had one going on the living room coffee table.

"Does the part of yours go in this part of mine?" she'd say.

HOLY MOLY!

I taught her to play chess. She was the white pieces.

First off , she picked the f3 opening, every time, which weakens the White Knight for the whole game. She was stuck on it. She pushed side pawns, left pieces to die. She played chess in the same way her mind worked, which I loved. I could see her thoughts in her moves. Maybe

they didn't always make sense or were the best moves. But I felt a warm glow when I saw her make mistakes because I could see the logic that got her there. It didn't matter to her at all.

Then she started on testosterone therapy to develop a sex drive, after giving her full consent and from her parents too. Then we dropped the sex thing for a while. I did a lot of jerking off for a year.

She and her mother went to the Little Kitchen Academy in Denver and stayed for three weeks. Alice had done some cooking, but now she learned breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack menus. And she practiced preparing and serving reasonable amounts. Of course, she always had to be supervised because of her overeating obsession. We kept one day's food in the house at a time.

For breakfasts, she could make eggs over easy or scrambled. She made perfect toast, always insisted it was the exact golden brown. She stood over the toaster and practically held her breath.

Multi-tasking was impossible or, at best, stressful. A shower was complicated. Alice had a list of what to do, so I (or someone) had to stand outside and read the list:

-Rinse your front, back, and sides with warm water. (On one of the three hair washing days per week - and wet your hair.)

-Take the washcloth and rub the soap bar on it until it foams.

-Rub under your arms pits, then your arms.

She learned to work a Mr. Coffee and later the regular drip machines. She made great pancakes, biscuits, and muffins. And told me every time she mixed batter, "You can't mix too much, or they will be tough."

When she put in a tin of muffins, she'd say, "If the temperature is too hot, they will peak not round."

“Chicken thighs get tough if the heat is too low when you put them on. They must sizzle,” she talked to herself.

I never tired of hearing those words about batter, muffins, or chicken even though I heard them hundreds of times.

Lunches were sandwiches for the 35 married years, 41 together. But it was a different sandwich, bread and chips or crackers for seven weeks then repeat. Turkey with Swiss cheese and blue cheese dressing and lettuce on honey-oat. Or Tuna with celery and cucumber bits and mayonnaise on rye. We had hummus and tomatoes with cheddar cheese on sour dough. I’ll eat anything, and everything was good. I tried so many kinds of pretzels, corn chips, and potato chips. Do you know they make sweet & salty with sugar in ‘em?

We had a cat. Tortie died after three years with Muriel. She had a happy life. We got the kitten Mom had been looking at, Kitty. Kitty was so mellow. Alice could carry her around like a baby or drape her over her shoulder. We had to lock the box of cat food so Alice wouldn’t overfeed the cat. Alice took Kitty to her volunteer job at the nursing home to visit the old people. And sometimes to the Humane Society where she pet the dogs and cats, and occasional turtle or guinea pig.

Kitty was graham cracker colored, not bright orange, with the loudest purr you’ve ever heard. The old people could hear her. And she was calming to Humane Society animals. Even the dogs tended to just sniff and prance. Kitty loved Alice for 19 years and then went over the rainbow bridge, and we had other cats.

After five years of volunteering, Alice got a part-time job at the Nursing Home. The director loved her work. Doing just what she had been doing as a volunteer. She had her same

schedule – Mon-Wed-Fri,10-2 – but got paid minimum wage. My girl was a working woman, and I was proud of her. She was growing up more every day.

One day she came home from an advanced SHEIDD course.

“I’m ready to try oral sex,” she said at the dinner table.

Muriel and Dad were sitting at the kitchen table with us. Dinners were either pot roast with potatoes, carrots, and onions; roast turkey with mashed potatoes, green beans, and cranberry sauce; baked chicken thighs with lemon wedges and buttered noodles with a small salad, dressings changed every shopping trip; or sliced ham with pineapple and brown sugar glaze with baked potato and cold slaw. On weekends, we had spaghetti with ground beef or pizza. It was a pot roast night. Muriel and Dad wiped their mouths with napkins, got up, and headed for the door.

“See you kids,” Dad said.

Holy Moly. It was a good time and a good time all our years. We got quite experimental, but I won’t go into details.

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She loved when I came home from Flagstaff for the three days. First, she jumped in my arms, and I’d swing her around, she was so small. It was usually around dinner time, so the aide would leave, and I’d help with cooking. That was another thing that could be stressful because of the multi-tasking thing. Alice had to be careful to think about one thing at a time. Crack the egg in a large bowl. Add breadcrumbs. Add salt. Add pepper. Stir. Roll chicken thighs in the bowl to coat them. I was making salad or setting the table and moved as fast as I wanted. But quietly, to let her take her time. I’d wait ‘til we sat down, and I’d tell her stories about the shift.

I came home one night and said, “I saw a seven-pound chihuahua tree a black bear today.”

“No!” she giggled.

“You just have to be ferocious with black bears. Grizzlies are another story.”

Another week, “A chipmunk got into a tent and stole a deck of cards. Tore them up all over the woods. A guy slept with a bag of chips as his pillow, and a racoon stole it right out from under him.”

She loved that. “Why didn’t he hang his food?” She knew tourists were supposed to do that.

“He was dumb,” I said.

“You can’t sleep in clothes you cook in or with a newborn baby who will throw up,” she recited the rules. “If you hear a growl less than 10 feet way, stand up and start screaming. If you see a black bear or glowing eyes outside a fire circle, make yourself as big as possible, spread your arms and coat out, and make as much noise as you can with pots and pans if they are right there. You’ll be dead without ever seeing the mountain lion, if he wanted you that way, but they avoid people. It’s the two-legged who are more dangerous,” she recited what I’d said many times.

“That’s right. Very good.”

I didn’t tell her the sad or weird things that I saw after I became a climbing ranger in 1982. You wanted to think of families, hiking together, small distances from the Rim or to the Canyon bottom. Kids sucking on water bottles or juice boxes. Weather hot and sunny, with fall chill still far away. You didn’t want to think about the days people died.

One night I came home, and I couldn’t talk much.

A family of five, with a dickhead “expert climber” father who had taken his family off trail to find Vasey’s Paradise. It’s a highly sensitive ecosystem that can only be accessed from river water boat. Climbing is against the law in the Canyon because of conservation. But he had ropes, crimps, slopers, printers, jugs, and his GPS.

They made several successful rappels. Then roped together, the whole five of them came loose, like clothes pins snapping off a clothesline. They fell 300 feet. The parents and one kid instantly. A second kid had a broken leg and ribs. The last kid was only bruised and set out for help.

We found the four dead; the injured one having succumbed, the next day. It took us three days to find the boy who went for help. He had hidden himself in a shadowed crevice to escape the heat. He was seated with his arms over his legs and his head on his hands. His face was salt stained in river lines. He died crying. I saw his face and took off running. ‘Something’ was back, pounding in my head. Other staff had to deal with the body and the protocol. That was at 11 a.m., when we found him. At 9 p.m., I came into the ranger office, soaked with sweat and torn clothes from crashing through thorn patches. Muriel and Dad were there. The NPS Director was there. And some senior executives. Nobody looked happy.

“Ranger, in my office, now,” said the NPSD. I stood at attention and didn’t say anything but “yes” or “no”. Abandoning post in the line of duty. Disorderly. Harzardous. Words floated around me, and I stood still.

“Are you hearing me?” NPSD raised his voice.

Run. Work. Chicken. Biscuits. Lowe’s. Globemallow.

Words ran like footsteps through my mind.

“Yes,” I replied.

Muriel and Dad took me home. Alice knew I was upset when I came in. I told her I had a stomachache. and Muriel and Dad would take her to a movie. I'd be fine in the morning. I went up and lay down on the bed. She didn't like that but gave me the heating pad for my tummy and covered me up with our fuzzy blanket and kissed my forehead before she went out.

Alice came in at 9 p.m. and put her hand in mine, and I held it all night. I didn't get up until noon the next day.

At the station, over the next few weeks, I faced an inquiry. Since my record was excellent, I was allowed a short probation. My crew watched out for me after that. Made sure I didn't see a kid that died or got hurt because of some fucking adult.

Another time was sad and weirder. Another family, two parents and a boy and girl. Another set of rulebreakers. They stayed behind their guided hiking group on Bright Angel Trail. To pick currants. In ten minutes, the guide heard a yell, "I can't find them." The guide backtracked, while a second staffer stayed with the group. The girl and boy had disappeared. Vanished. The dogs wouldn't pick up any scent. There were no tracks. The parents were destroyed. We Climbers and SAR searched for days. Hard and expensive searches, helicopter short hauls into several areas. We gave up after seven days.

Two weeks later, a group of hikers found the girl but not the boy. She was sitting on a log, happy, eating berries, not a scratch on her. She was five. After she got evacuated and medically checked and with her parents, we asked her where she had been.

"With Fuzzy Man," she said.

"Who's that?" asked her mom.

"He had red eyes. He came out of the trees, took us in the woods to a clearing."

"What happened then?" asked her mom.

“We slept in a hollow tree, and he gave us berries. He yelled at us when we tried to leave the clearing. One day, Cas [her brother] and Fuzzy Man left the clearing, and Cas didn’t come back. After a few more days, we walked and walked, and Fuzzy Man left me on the log by the trail. He said I wasn’t the right kind.

There was the myth of the Big Foot-type hairy, 7-foot-tall creature with red eyes . He was called Mogollon and had been reportedly sighted from 1903 through 2004. But I’d never heard or seen anything like this. It was nobody’s fault. Nobody tried to hurt those kids.

There was another jerk. A mountain man wannabe from the city was illegally trapping coyotes. A mountain lion came in the night and took his dog. Dogs are not protection; they are prey in the Canyon.

One of my colleagues, a quiet guy, kept to himself like me. We were washing up at the outdoor sink one evening, and he started talking.

“I saw a set of stairs, like going into a basement, near Tuweep, after the helicopter evac. Everyone was gone,” he said. “The stairs led down into the dark earth. Makes sense I didn’t go near the place.”

I looked at him sidewise. He’s not the kind who makes things up.

“Holy Moly,” I said.

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Alice didn’t like cleaning the house. We made it a game, once a week. I danced with the broom handle, then with Alice, and we managed to sweep up a bit. She hated the noise, so we couldn’t use a vacuum. Soap suds from scrubbing the tub or sink on her hands, she’d come after me and put the bubbles on my nose. I put dish suds behind her ear like a flower in her hair. We had competitions on who could produce a dirtier dustcloth.

We did errands together. We'd hold hands going down the Lowe's Home Improvement aisles, shelves towering over little her and big me. She looked around like she had never seen any of it before. Screwdrivers and hammers, washing machines, buckets, lighting fixtures, toilet seats.

Our first time in Lowes together, we passed an M&M machine. She stopped and asked me to get her some. I said no. You would have thought that was the end of the world.

She yelled so the birds trapped in Lowes ceilings all took flight. She screamed and pulled on the candy machine until it fell over, but the plastic ball didn't shatter. She kicked the grey rack frames, then lay on the floor, screaming and pounding her feet and fists into the cement.

Alice's mom had told me about occasional temper tantrums. And if it happened, I needed to validate her emotion, talk in a firm calm voice, problem-solve, and offer a cool wet towel for her forehead. I don't think it ever works to tell anybody to be calm, or happy, or give them solutions to problems they don't think will ever be solved, like she's always hungry.

I didn't say a thing.

Just stood there. I directed people around her.

When the manager came, I pulled out my National Forest Ranger Vista badge and said, "She has a disability, and I can take care of it."

The screaming went back to yelling and then crying, then whimpering. Her legs and arms went from pumping 30 times a minute to still. I lay down next to her, both of us looking at the ceiling. She put her head on my shoulder. I watched the white fuzz around the lights pulse with my heartbeat.

"Do you want a cool towel for your face? I asked.

"Yes."

I helped her up, we walked past a rack with micro-fiber cloths, and I grabbed one. At the rest room area, there was a water fountain and a chair in between the ladies' and men's room. I wet the rag from the water fountain. As she sat in the chair, she lay her head back, shuddered her breath out, and closed her eyes.

I bathed her face.

"Your eyes are like beautiful almonds," I said.

"Thank you."

I wouldn't listen to anyone who said Alice was helpless. I knew if she didn't live with me, she'd be in a home somewhere. With people who drooled and screamed and wet their pants. The way I see it, she was doing great. Better than anyone ever would have thought possible. Her mother told me that. We all hung onto that and let her be who she was – fits and food and all.

One day Alice came up from the laundry room with my work pants, dripping.

"Here. These are clean." She threw them at me and ran into our bedroom and lay down.

Weird, she didn't just put them in the dryer. I hung them up.

A few weeks later I found my missing jackknife, all rusted, stuck behind the laundry bleach box.

"Fuck." I hadn't sworn in a long time. I threw the knife in the trash, went out the basement door and ran. I ran like I had run as a kid. I ran from 'something'. 'Something" is anger, I thought. I could see that now. 'Something' was always scary because I thought I would explode. I ran to Muriel and Dad's place. I knocked on the door, told them to go take care of Alice, and took off running again. A few times a year, I got hit with 'something' over Alice. I ran to Muriel's to get help and then just kept running until 'something' went away. Just like I did when I was a kid.

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With a different rainbow color every spring, we made kites together. Her small hands would follow my directions. My large hands would come in to help.

“Fold the paper in half,” I’d say.

Easy for one pair of small hands.

“Bend the top corners down to the crease. Staple.”

Both pairs of hands needed. She had pale fingers with close-clipped nails so she wouldn’t pick at herself. She held the edges to the crease. My long bony brown fingers did the folding.

“Reinforce with a skewer.”

She had one ready, from the kitchen drawer, that we used to barbecue beef kabobs for Christmas. I attached it with duct tape.

“Hang a ribbon from one end for a tail,” I said to finish.

She saved ribbons all year from packages and gifts, so she’d have one ready, in a matching color to this year’s paper.

We had two 200-foot-long balls of string. We’d head out to the field near our yard on the first soft spring day. The wind would gently tug at her hair, and the sun’s weak warmth drew our faces upward and lips into a smile.

I’d have the string. I’d monitor the tree branches moving until just the right breeze was about to begin.

“Run!” I’d yell.

Alice would take off with the kite, like a puppy leaping through grass. She’d throw the kite for the breeze to catch. She’d clap her hands, bring them to her mouth, which was in a wide “O”. By the time she’d run back to me, I had it up 50 feet. She’d hold the string as it sailed and

dipped. I'd grab it out of a downturn. We'd usually get out almost both balls of string, sometimes only one. Her cheeks were always pink and glowing.

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I get home tonight, almost Christmas, from running. I finally pick up the newspaper article that covers my retirement, early, at 59, as I was a climbing ranger and that requires youth.

Dex Soren's Ranger Life (1989-2025)

William's Grand Canyon News

Nov. 26, 2025

Grand Canyon National Park Climbing Ranger Dex Soren is retiring this month after 36 years. Soren has seen many changes at the Canyon including the historic 1990 flash flood that increased the Colorado River flow through the Canyon from 2 cubic meters per second to 575 per second.

"I saw a wall of water 160 feet high," says Soren. "With hundreds of ash trees floating in the torrent. Sedimentary rock formations that had been in place for thousands of years were washed clean. Can you believe that?" asks Soren. He led a group of 100 hikers to higher ground, and no one died that day.

But it's not the big events that Soren remembers. "The still moments matter most," the Canyon veteran says, "the times when you sit and let nature happen instead of having to go out and look for it. I'd tell new staff, 'This is your bonus – you get to take a moment by the river or the Kaibab National Forest and just *be* for five minutes.' Doesn't that make sense?"

Soren wouldn't talk about any dangerous situations in the Canyon. As a climbing ranger, he has definitely witnessed tragedy and life loss. When asked about that, he looked sideways, then up at the sky. "Holy Moly. Look at the cirrus cloud," he said.

He has no plans for saying goodbye for good, saying he'll still be around in between honey-do projects at the house for his wife, Alice, or one of his long runs. He used to do 1,000 milers, but now it's about 250 miles a week. He and Alice plan to travel the U.S. in a caravan.

Soren picks up a trashcan blown over by ever-present winter winds at Canyon Rim. "The clouds and air move fast, but the rock is always still," he notes. Every snowy day of his career, about 17 per year, Soren hiked into the park to make sure everyone was safe. "I don't see stopping that habit anytime soon, just to be out in the snow with the rock," he says.

Soren mentions one of his favorite spots, Eagle Point on the West Rim. "According to Hualapai oral tradition, the eagle flew down to warn the Hualapai people of a flood, then flew back up and stayed near the top of the canyon to watch over them. When the flooding stopped, the eagle flew the Hualapai people on his back to the west rim, where he turned to stone."

There's a peregrine falcon nest near Eagle Point, just spotted last year. "I knew it was around for years because I saw the fledglings soaring around," says Soren. "To find the site was exciting. The parents, mated for life, expertly hid it in a rock crevice."

"I see eye to eye with eagles and falcons. We've had many good conversations," says Soren. He could be talking about a stone bird or the live ones. Soren is known for his unique intuition and connections with rock, trees, and nature. When speaking with people, his voice is soft, quick, with a lot of rhetorical questions thrown in. What he says is important enough to lean in for.

"Climate change, hunting, habitat destruction and water management – don't you think we must do something so the eagles can live?" he says.

Soren has seen every inch of the Canyon since 1985 when he arrived as a Vista Volunteer. His mother, Muriel Soren, lives in Flagstaff's Village at Merry Lake Crossing and his father, a

wildlife biologist, died in 2010. He says he has a sister he doesn't remember, but he would like her to read this article and get in touch. They were both in foster homes when he was about eight, he thinks. And she was a younger sister. He kicks the red rock soil with his toe-steeled boot.

Soren has been a team leader to control invasive species in the Canyon. "The knapweed was here when I got here, choking out native plants. And it's still here," he shakes his head. "Invasive small mouth bass and green sunfish are a problem too."

Normally the Forest Service requires a bachelor's degree or the equivalent in education and experience. When interviewing for his position, Soren rattled off enough information about the Canyon geology and biology that he was hired despite not having a degree. "I had probably run 2,500 hundred miles in the Canyon to prep for that interview," he smiles. "I guess that was enough experience."

Soren started work before 7 most mornings, even if the steep, winding entrance trails were covered in ice or snow. He has lived in the South Rim apartments during three 24-hour shifts of duty, then has returned to Flagstaff to spend four days a week with the love of his life, Alice, at their home.

"I have one of the few jobs in the county that on a frozen, snowy day, I've hiked on the steeper slopes and used bear and elk track to slow my descent," he says. "You can have those great moments with wildlife when there aren't people in the park."

It's clear Soren appreciates those moments. He has a special talent for letting bothersome tourists or administrative quagmires just roll off his back.

"He stood in front of a screaming tourist who couldn't go over a fence to take a picture. He had a half-smile on his face. He pointed to the sign and said, 'Have a nice day,' and walked away," marvels Jay Evans, fellow climbing ranger. "It's like he has a shut off switch inside."

Soren has seen his share of change at the Canyon. The National Parks Overflight Act in 1987 reduced air traffic noise and pollution. The Grand Canyon Trust, a non-profit, was created in 1985 to monitor conservation. From 2006-2009, the local tribes worked with park staff to excavate buried artifacts and structures.

"Cycles of time. I'm grateful to have seen them. Nature and people," he says.

He leans an ear, sensing a peregrine falcon, once an endangered species. We didn't hear anything.

"Wait," he says.

A nearby massive Ponderosa Pine sways gracefully in the wind, 10 or more degrees in one direction, then 10 or more in the other. And out soars the falcon. And his mate.

"There we go," Soren said. "Holy moly, two of them!!"

"Take a moment. Most of the time, you don't get this beauty. Can you believe that?"

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I am checking the classifieds. Alice is holding her breath each time she drops a breaded chicken thigh into the pan. "If it's not hot enough..."

"There's a Jayco Jay Feather 17 C travel trailer for sale," I say.

She doesn't even hear me; she's concentrating so hard on dinner.