

Mother and Daughter on and off the Daughter of the Mother Road, East to West, 2013: Marla Perkins, Ph.D.

It's always exciting to start a new project, as I expected the latest graduate program to be. It didn't turn out well, although it was exciting for negative reasons. Even so, my mother and I had a great time on the way there, once we got going. First, we had to stop and appreciate the Rose of Sharon, which were doing an especially good job blooming that year, and we had to get my car fixed. No part existed, even in dumps (all available parts in North America had already been scavenged), so the good people at the dealership jury-rigged the part and said they thought it would probably hold for the next couple of thousand miles until I got to Arizona. They were right, and the part held for another couple of years until I had a job and could afford a different car. God bless them.



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Our first real stop was to visit Uncle Jim in Tennessee. I'm never sure if this guy is actually funny or if he just has that effect on people. I'm also not sure there's a difference.





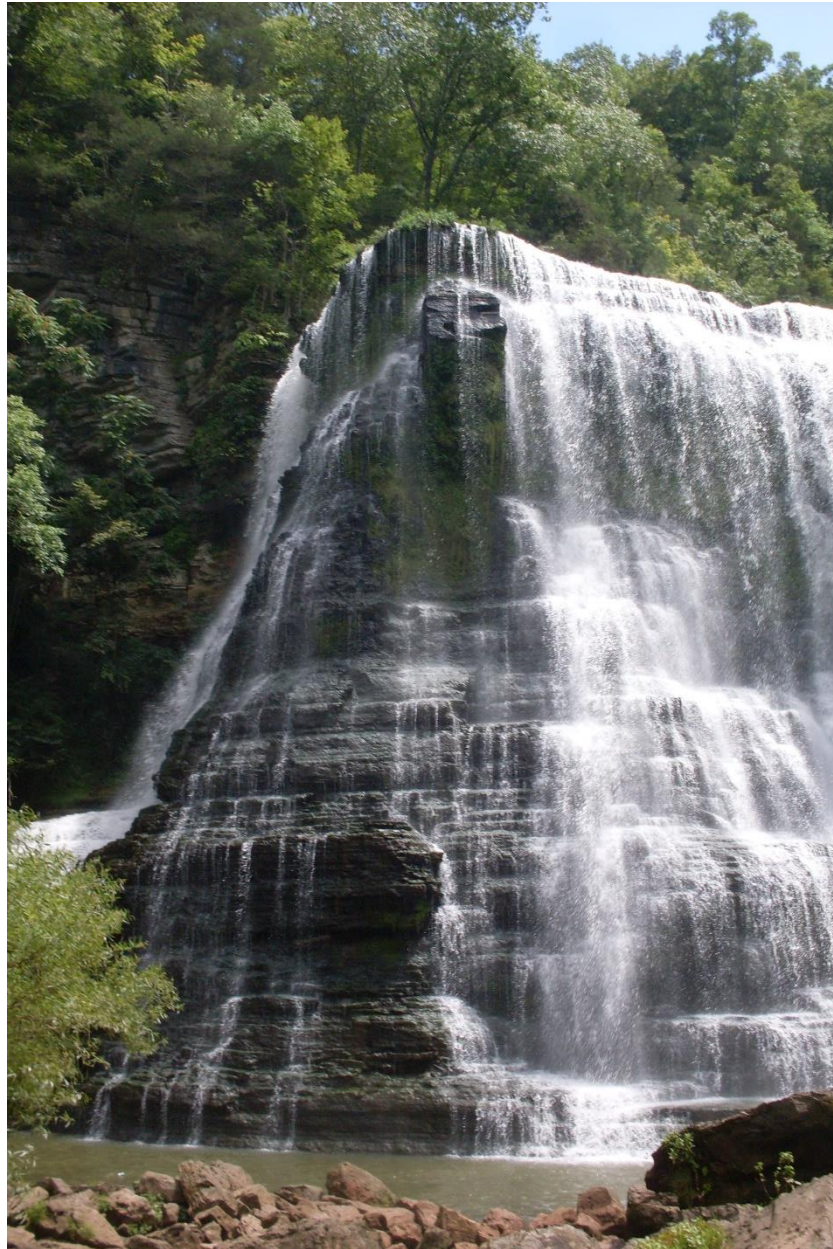
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We got to go out and see the hills of Tennessee with Uncle Jim.



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Shortly after our visit with Uncle Jim, we joined up with Interstate 40, the (possibly illegitimate) daughter of the Mother Road, as Steinbeck called Rt. 66. We hopped off I-40 for Burgess Falls State Park so that I could take a hike along the Falling Water River. My mother and I both thought that Burgess Falls bore some resemblance to Ithaca Falls. There are advantages and disadvantages to spending decades living in a place with many waterfalls. An advantage is that one becomes a connoisseur of waterfalls. A disadvantage is that everywhere one goes, one has already seen that falls, something like that falls, or something better than that falls.





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Mo was traveling with us, and he took the hike with me. He was always trying to recruit more people to join his flock, and he succeeded at the state park. He recruited an entire family of five into his flock, and they were insistent that they have their pictures taken with him. Unfortunately, they didn't travel on with us, so his recruitment success was quick but not durable.



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We crossed the Mississippi River outside of Memphis. We stopped to see a friend of mine in Arkansas, and it was so hot that Mo had to ride in mom's car, because her air conditioner was still working. We stopped in Oklahoma City to see the bombing memorial. The empty chairs are an effective and interesting memorial, but I didn't like my pictures of them. We both scraped the undercarriages of our cars on the way into the parking garage in Oklahoma City, but we tilted ourselves diagonally over the floor corner (floors shouldn't have corners through them, especially in parking garages) on the way out. Our favorite stop of the trip was at Palo Duro Canyon State Park in Texas, not far off I-40. Palo Duro is the second largest canyon in the US, but is still about half as long as the Grand Canyon and much less deep. It is known as the Grand Canyon of Texas. Nope.



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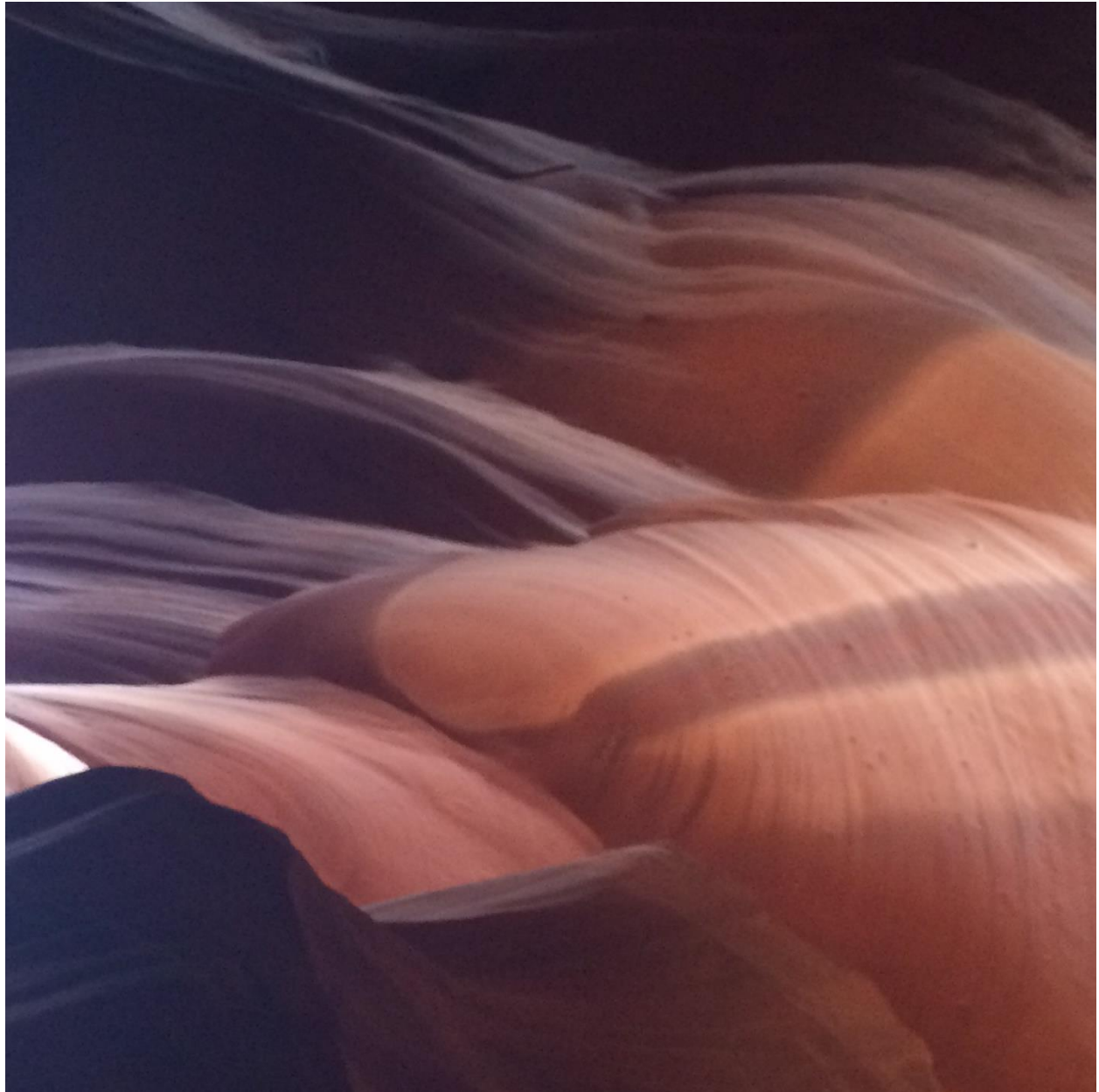
One of the great things about Palo Duro Canyon is the range of ways in which it is accessible. It is not far from I-40, as noted, and it has great hiking trails and great driving roads, so people can see the park in whatever ways make sense to them. I hiked out to see this formation, the Light House. The weather was threatening, however, so I didn't loiter too long in the bottom of the canyon where flash flooding frequently occurs.





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We visited a friend in Santa Fe and continued on to Arizona. After she had dropped me off in Flagstaff, my mother took her time returning to upstate New York, but she made plans to visit for Thanksgiving the next year. We would have about a week, during which I would probably need to be studying for some exam or other, so we planned an easy outing to Antelope Canyon. Antelope Canyon is a slot canyon that was discovered in 1931. It is now part of a Navajo tribal park. Unfortunately, she got sick and had to change her travel plans. That gave us an opportunity to try out travel insurance, and that all worked as it should have, but with more hassle than was probably necessary.





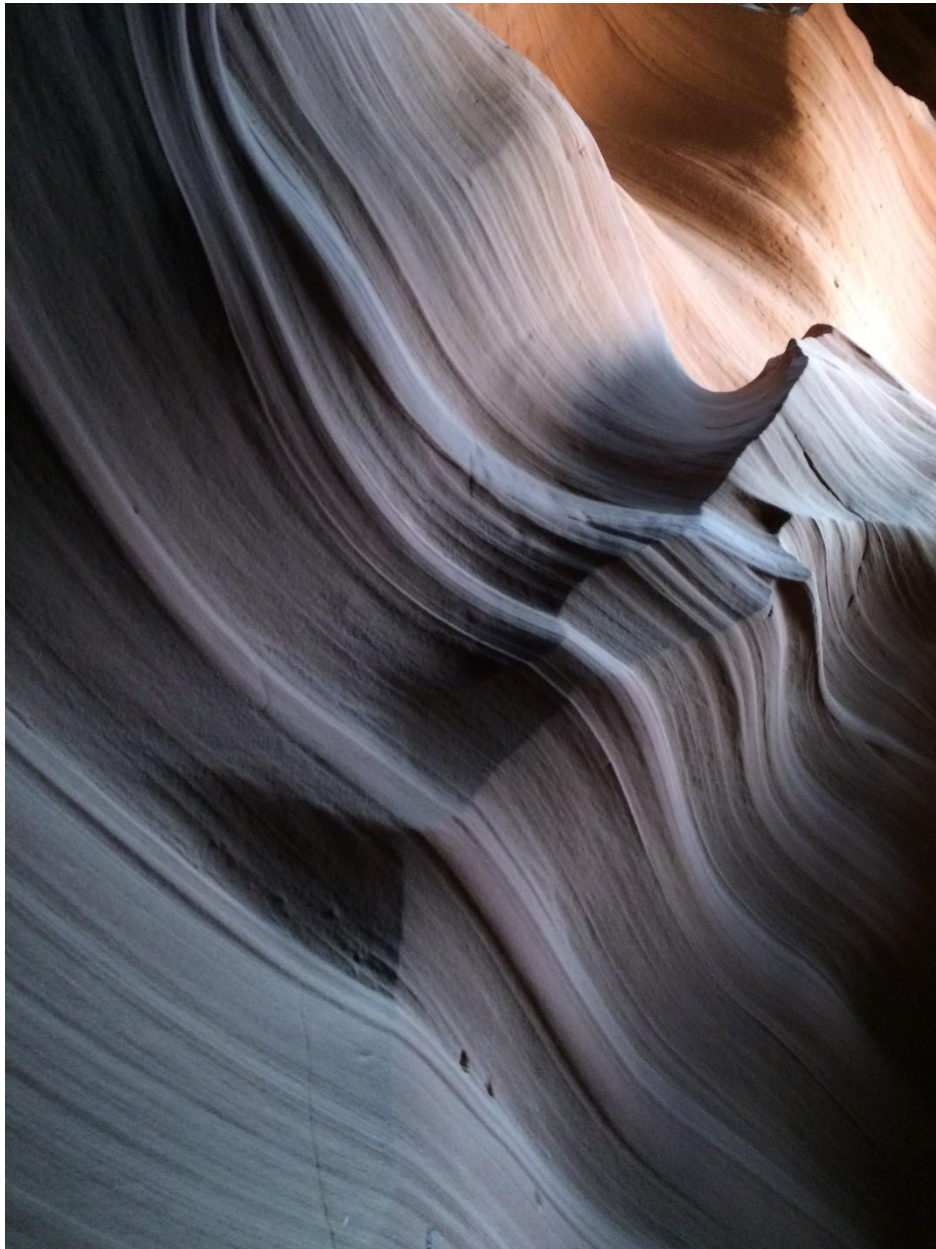
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But my plans were still in place, and I went with James to the Antelope Canyon. When looking up details for this piece, I found a website that provides information about the differences between the Antelope and Grand Canyons, claiming that the people in charge of the website are often asked about these differences, if there are any. Yoi. That should be an entirely unnecessary website, but apparently, it's not. What is the world coming to?



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Antelope Canyon is beautiful and impressive, but it is also small, and expensive to see, especially given what else is available in Arizona (such as the real Grand Canyon) and neighboring states (such as Utah), and neither of us appreciated being herded through the canyon at the pace that the overpaid tour guide thought was appropriate.





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So when she was feeling better and could make plans to come for spring break, we decided on a road trip to southern Utah. It's obvious that this is southern Utah. It wasn't always so obvious that the road was a road.



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Relative to the roads involved in the road trip, the Moki Dugway section of Utah's state route 261 took all of the cake and ate it, too. It used to be a mining road (zinc). The road makes acute-angled turns while it ascends (what we did) or descends (what we drove about sixty-five miles (104.61 km) out of the way to avoid doing) the Cedar Mesa. My mother insisted that she do the driving on this road, and that was all for the better. She is afraid of heights, and while the rest of us hang out the windows and point and exclaim at the scenery, she focuses closely on the road and on staying as close as possible to the inside of each turn. She made it, but she also insisted that we were not going to be going back the same way we came. (She'll be happy to know that the road is featured on a site called [dangerousroads.org](http://dangerousroads.org).)





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A view from roughly the top of Cedar Mesa



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The Valley of the Gods is near Monument Valley, and some of the information I found said that the formations are similar to those in Monument Valley, but I would not agree with that comparison. These are much more irregular, in my opinion. This might come of having spent five years of my life looking at rock formations: I've developed a certain level of visual expertise and make distinctions that might not be immediately obvious to people who have spent less time examining the finer points of rock formations.





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We did go to Monument Valley, but it was a brassy-sunny day, and I wasn't thrilled with my pictures. The Monument Valley pictures I do like are in the piece about my father's trip to Utah. Anybody else want to take a trip to Utah? I'd be happy to visit again. And again and again.



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We spent a day at Natural Bridges National Monument. Mom took the car route, and James and I took the hiking trail. All of the pictures of bridges are of one bridge, Sipapu. 'Sipapu' is a Hopi word for a small hole or divot in the floor of a round room. Often, archeologists call these round rooms kivas, which are religious and/or ceremonial, but given how many round rooms there are in many ruins, it's hard to believe that all of them are ceremonial or religious. I think there was a different set of architectural assumptions, not based on exclusively rectilinear assumptions about building. But what do I know? Maybe the people left and the buildings fell into ruin because they couldn't actually get through their day for all of the ceremonial or religious requirements. Somebody has to eat, sometime. But this is an archeological problem (everything is religious), not a human problem (people do get on with their everyday lives).





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I've included three pictures of one bridge in order to show how the view changes from different perspectives. The sipapus in the round rooms symbolize the place from which humans came into the world, shifting from lizards to humans as they came through the hole. I would like to turn back into a lizard. Even better, a giraffe, but I haven't found the holes for either of those transmogrifications. The original sipapu is thought to be in the Grand Canyon. Everything is about the Grand Canyon.



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There are a few petroglyphs in the Natural Bridges National Monument, maybe, but some of them might be mud stains or general weathering of the rock, and I don't have enough of an imagination to see the proposed dinosaurs. This wall of hands is a pictograph, made with paint, rather than a petroglyph, carved into rock. Better still, I can recognize that hands are hands, but that doesn't explain much about them.





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We stayed in the funnest little motel along the San Juan River, and I do mean along the river. The buildings of the motel follow the contour of the river, and in places, a wall lines up with the cliff down to the river. It's the San Juan Inn, if anyone wants to stay there. What's an entertainment piece without some product placement? They also have some burros and dogs and cattle who live at or near the motel, and we went down to the river to make friends one day. My mother was very popular, of course. Who wouldn't love my mother?

