

I don't retreat, although I've been asked to do so several times, usually by conservative Christians, who seem to have a thing for 'ladies' retreats'. Trust me: Christian women don't need to do any more retreating. But a strategic withdrawal is sometimes exactly what's required. In January, 2024, I went to visit my friends in Albuquerque. Sometimes they're in Albuquerque. They also live in Oswego. Sometimes in Brazil. Sometimes in Finland. Sometimes in the Carolinas. They get around. And they invited me to join them for a visit, in Albuquerque.

Their invitation was timed well. I was having a hard time for a variety of reasons, but mostly because I was dealing with the death of a friend and dealing with that friend's estate. I needed to run away from home.

While I was away from home at one of theirs, they took me to the Petroglyph National Monument, where I spent hours scampering around taking pictures of petroglyphs. I'm a huge fan of petroglyphs. Many of the petroglyphs at this site look like cover illustrations for science fiction novels.





These friends had put my personal Humpty together again previously, so I had no concerns about going there and not being as put together as I prefer to be. These friends are a soft landing, unlike what this jagged rock would be.





Both friends are retired professors. They've taken different paths in retirement. Friend A continues to do research, publish, accept visiting professorships. She asks questions to elicit a variety of types of information, and she takes time to consider answers and respond in ways that encourage additional consideration in multiple directions. Friend B has taken up other pursuits, including becoming a yoga instructor. She allows space, yet is willing and able to provide penetrating analyses; she sees clearly through to the other side. But she can't see through rocks.





Between the two of them, and given about a week, they managed to put me back on my emotional and intellectual feet. My physical feet were fine and carried me all over the national monument.



In a lot of ways, I feel like a taker when I'm with these friends. They consistently put more into me than I put into them. How do they take care of themselves? They do yoga. Friend B was teaching a couple of classes per week while I was there, so I joined her classes; we also went to a class at the local senior center; the instructor there starts sessions with the *Tequila* song. Different teachers, different classes, different approaches to wringing out our bodies and minds.



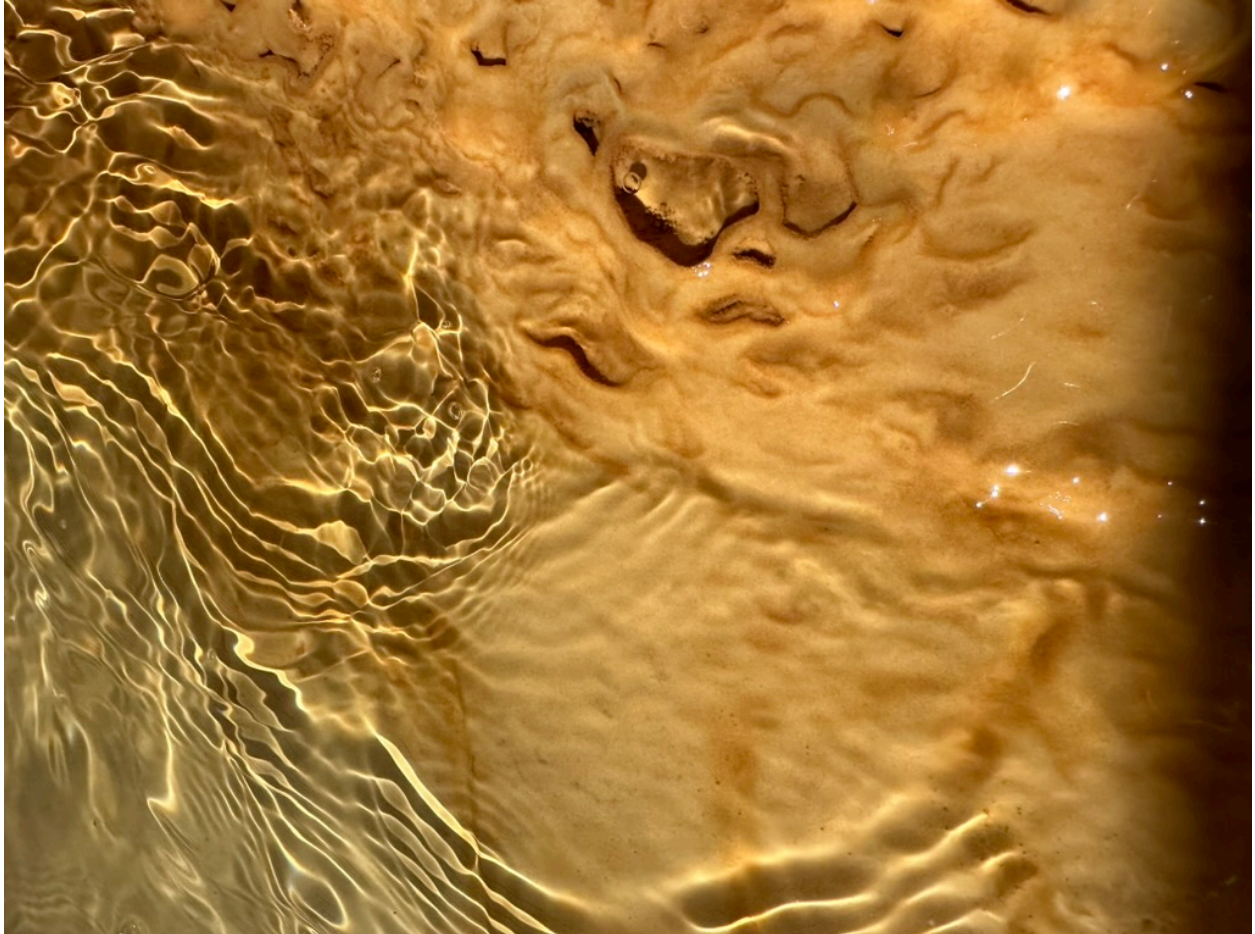


They watch hilarious television shows. They introduced me to Ted Lasso, a modern fictionalized, sports version of Jesus: Ted consistently returns good for evil, and even for bizarre.

They read and write, and encourage others to do so. Less usefully, they take pictures when others are reading and writing. I was happier than this picture makes me look. I'm not the most photogenic person in the world.



They visit hot springs, in this case Giggling Springs, now called Jemez Springs. New Mexico is often a hot place, and hot springs in hot places are redundant. In January, among some of the mountains, this part of New Mexico was pleasantly chilly. It was perfect. Sit in a warm-hot puddle for a while, walk to another puddle in the chilly air, feel good about sitting in a warm-hot puddle again for a while. We did that for an hour.





They take walks, as do I. On the way back from the hot springs, we stopped for a ramble at Soda Dam, an odd rock formation that has built up from minerals in hot springs under the dam. The formation continues to grow and change.





Despite the name, Soda Dam is not actually a dam. The Jemez River flows under the whitest part of the dam, white because the mineral deposit is mostly comprised of calcium carbonate. The road for this area was blasted through the dam a while ago, which changed the way the water from the springs flows, which changed the way the dam is developing. Now the forest service manages the territory, in an attempt to avoid damage both to the road and to the dam.



We walked along the Rio Grande. We saw a couple of porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*) up the trees. These are the same species of porcupines that are found all over their North American range.





My friends cut me loose for a while, because I'm a more ambitious walker than they are. Than most people are, let's be honest. Whilst on my own, I watched one of the most interesting interactions among species I have ever observed. In the picture below, there are sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*), Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*), and a coyote (*Canis latrans*). The coyote walked out of the brush in the background, toward the group of birds. The cranes made a linear barrier along the path that the coyote was taking and kept their pointy beaks aimed at the coyote. The cranes moved themselves between the coyote and the geese, and they herded the coyote away from the group of birds. The geese did not appear to recognize what was happening, with the coyote or the cranes. The cranes maintained their barrier and threatened the coyote with their beaks if the coyote wandered off the acceptable path, until the coyote was well down the sandbar away from the group of birds.



There wasn't much water in the Rio Grande while I was there, but it wasn't dry. In 2022, part of the Rio Grande that flows through Albuquerque went dry for the first time in four decades. The region remains in drought conditions. But it was time for me to go back to Pennsylvania, where my region is "abnormally dry", but not officially in drought yet. Where's all the water?

I don't know. But the friendship was flowing freely.

