

## Adventures in the National Parks

*By Joan Mish*

Since retirement I have volunteered at eight different National Parks across the United States. What a wonderful adventure it has been. It was after my husband had died and I dared to travel alone because of a good friend who got me into my first park: Hawaii Volcanos. He had been there for several years and knew lots of the folks that worked there. So he wrote me a recommendation and I got in within six weeks.

I will write about my three most favorite parks:

Hawaii Volcanos was a good place to start in 2004. I learned a great deal for I had only had one science class in high school. I found out how important Plate Tectonics were to forming these islands. I had had a student while teaching who made me a bulletin board to explain it to the rest of his science class and I learned enough to explain it to our visitors from around the world. The fun part about volunteering in the National Parks is learning so many new things. The training in each park was at least three to six days. In this particular park I gave tours, and gave talks at the visitors' center. I also protected visitors from walking on the live lava when I volunteered for a day at an active volcano, Kilauea. (I noticed on the news this past week it had become active again.) There was a woman who walked right on the active lava and almost fell down into it the day I was helping. Another interesting fact: did you know that the Canadian geese, like we have here in Windsor Gardens were sent over by a jet stream to Hawaii? This bird is called a nene bird there. Their feet are different than the ones here for they have to allow the birds to walk on the lava.

The next favorite park was the Grand Canyon in Arizona. I went there the year after Hawaii in 2005. Wow, another beautiful unique park formed once again by nature: the flowing of the Colorado River carved the uplifted rocks. The condor bird is unique here and is currently growing in population. It was close to becoming extinct the last 30 years. But it has a protected environment in the Grand Canyon. It is the largest flying bird in North America. Because of their large wing span of 9-1/2 feet, they will travel and glide up to 50 miles per hour and fly 100 miles looking for food.

My last favorite place was Gila Cave Dwellings in Southwest New Mexico. This cliff dwelling was established by Theodore Roosevelt in 1907 as a National Monument honoring the Mogollon civilization. I learned a great deal about Native American cultures. The best part of this experience was the house I shared with folks of my age. I believe there were eight of us in this double-sided trailer, who were all recently retired. Since the kitchen was so small we decided to share dinner every night. We shared everything: kitchen, bathrooms, beer, and you name it. We had great fun every night.

Volunteering for the National Parks has been the highlight of my retirement.