

VLACHOS' VIEWS

America through the lens of PAUL VLACHOS



Las Vegas, Nevada - 1998

The El Cortez is another great old sign. Another sign that could have been untouched since the 40's. This was on the seedier side of Vegas, which was once the main drag. This part of town is now the showcase for a strip of run-down motels, drug and sex rooms, dens of iniquity, where people spend their days leaning on the outdoor balconies and stairways and checking you out with blank stares. I don't like to linger long here. Lots of bad mojo and broken dreams. I do believe in redemption, but it takes a little more imagination to conjure it up when you're in this part of town. "Coffee Shop and Bar. Free Parking." Of course, we know that nothing in Vegas is really free.



Las Vegas - 1999

The front of the Atomic Bar had a great sign and facade. This is not the front. It's the side view. Not as picturesque, but still pretty evocative for me. It must have been named in the 50's, when the government was conducting above-ground nuclear tests north and west of Vegas, at the Nevada Test Site, and people would gather on the roofs of the casinos to watch the blasts and the mushroom clouds. Of course, the flip side of this is the tragedy for the down-winders, especially those in Saint George, Utah, who are suffering to this day from the fallout - and "fall-out" is not a metaphor here. The story of the high cancer rates, the government deception and the inexorable military-industrial complex are beyond the scope of these slightly happy, mostly depressing captions. Let it be noted, though, that the Atomic Bar was probably named before the truth came out. It's not far from the El Cortez, pictured above.

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The White Rim Trail, Utah - 1998

This was from a trip that Peggy and I took on the White Rim Trail. 100 miles in 3 leisurely days. This campground was called the "Airport Tower Campground," but there was no airport, no tower and almost no campground. At that time, it was just a staked-out area that was off the trail. Then again, could there have been a desert outhouse? My spotty memory can't picture it, but my porous mind seems to remember one. I'll have to ask Peggy. She's younger, so maybe her brain has retained more information. I do remember having a desolate, glorious time out there. Utter quiet, birds rising on the thermals, and a desert breeze all night. The Wagoneer had taken us quite a ways already and I had complete faith in that machine, even though we had broken down in Louisiana and Texas already on this trip. In fact, some mechanic in Moab had a fan belt pulley on order for us when we launched out onto the trail - wobbly pulley and all - and I didn't get it fixed until we had gotten off the trail. I was looking to go down there again a few years ago, but the online "literature" said "No Dogs Allowed in the Backcountry," so I had to can that idea. I know all the arguments for the desert's delicate ecosystem and what a bunch of dog waste and urine would do to upset this balance. Still, it's hard for me and Elko to not get a resentment. This land is HIS land, too, you know.



Gallup, New Mexico - 1997

I love Gallup. Always have, since the first time I passed through there in a rental car and gawked openly at the long strip of old Route 66 that is still very much alive as the main drag. Gallup - and the motel row on 66 - got lucky when the interstate passed through. Gallup was not bypassed, like so many towns, and the cheaper - "budget" motels, the places with masonite doors and ancient plumbing and tattered linens and amazing signs and parking spots in front of each room - those U-shaped buildings from the 30's and 40's, they all survived and thrived, for the most part. The owners changed, some were downgraded into flophouses, and others did fade away, but most are still there, even today. Which brings us

to the El Hopi. I have no memory of the El Hopi, and I have been through Gallup many times. And, on top of that, every time I am actually in Gallup, I cruise the strip, up and down, many times. I believe I can conjure up a memory of El Hopi, but it might be a mental construct. I can clearly recall a few dozen other motels in Gallup, but not El Hopi. I am reluctant to google it. In fact, I may stop using the term "google" as a verb forever and substitute the phrase "search the internet," but that's for another article or, at the least, another caption. If I search the internet for the El Hopi, if I google it, what will I find? I don't want to know. I took this photo a while back, and I know it's not on the main drag of Gallup - that's clear to my eye - but that's about it. I also know that I could have watched color TV had I stayed there, which I did not. I also wish I had stolen that "Ah-Ma" placard on the lower left, the one that states the El Hopi was a member of the American Hotel and Motel Association. Lucky for them that I'm an honest man these days.

the footprints
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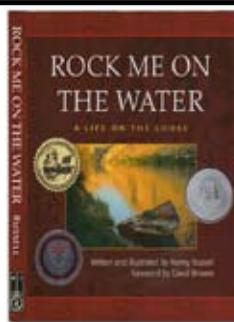


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