

# NEWS YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

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## WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU THOUGHT ABOUT EELS?

If you are like me, you haven't given eels any thought whatsoever. But for some reason a recent book called *The Book of Eels: Our Enduring Fascination with the Most Mysterious Creature in the Natural World* by Patrik Svensson peeked my interest. Patrick Svensson grew up in Sweden and as a young boy went eel fishing with his father. Even though Svensson never liked eating eels like his father did, his experience fishing for them with his father caused him to write a book about eels and as it turns out, eels are fascinating. I realize you may be thinking... **UGG** eels look like snakes

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and are creepy. But you will be missing out about a very mysterious creature that has kept its secrets well. It is what Svensson calls the “Eel Question”.

Eels have fascinated people for centuries going back in time to Aristotle’s days. Why, because no one knew anything about them starting with these questions: How are eels born? Do eels hatch from eggs or birth live? Are eels a fish or not? The **Eel Question** continues to fascinate scientists ever since.

Another mystery for the scientists concerned how eels mate. Maybe you are wondering what COVID isolation has done to my brain to make me also ponder these questions or write about them? But really it is interesting because no one really knows how eels mate and that is because no human has ever witnessed two eels getting it on.

Because eels are secretive about how they mate, humans haven’t been able to farm eels in captivity, much to the chagrin of the Japanese and all sushi lovers.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Aristotle thought eels emerged spontaneously from mud and rainwater. As late as the 1860s, some scientists believed eels were created when the sun hit a certain type of dew. The English thought eels were born when hair from horse's tails fell into the water.

So a scientific quest began to seek answers to the **Eel Question**. Sigmund Freud was also obsessed with the **Eel Question**. He dissected hundreds of eels in search of proof that eels do mate by looking for males sex organs in eels. He never succeeded but perhaps this caused him to become interested in the sexual nature of humans?

In 1904 a Danish searcher, Johannes Schmidt, began a never ending quest to find eels in the waters off Europe. He was looking for evidence of eel procreation. Schmidt even had shipping companies, while traversing the ocean, to net eel larvae so he could try to determine where eels were born. Finally after nineteen years of this effort, he figured out eel larvae began their life in the Sargasso Sea.

You may have heard of Sargasso seaweed because it unfortunately can end up in great massive piles on Galveston beaches to the dismay of tourists. The seaweed gets this name because it comes from the Sargasso Sea. The Sargasso Sea is really a sea within a sea since it has no land borders. Rather it is hemmed in by great currents of water. This causes it to become a garden of seaweed.



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The eel's life begins in the Sargasso Sea as tiny little larvae that are transparent and leaflike and at most 2 inches long. From here they begin a journey to Europe which may take 7 months to 2 years. As they travel, their bodies change from a leaf like shape to become longer and thinner. They also become more translucent such that in this stage they are known as glass eels. When they approach land, they enter the freshwater systems going from saltwater to fresh water. Over the next 6-20 years they gain weight and length and develop yellow-colored undersides. This is when they become known as yellow eels.

First it is the leaf life stage, then the glass eel stage, then the yellow eel stage and then the silver eel stage. No one knows why this happens but at some point, eels get the urge to go back to the Sargasso Sea. At this junction they transform again into silver eels with a metallic sheen and large eyes. They migrate thousands of miles back to the Sargasso Sea and during the journey they don't eat and instead are single focused to get back.

It is assumed they go back to the Sargasso Sea to spawn the eel larvae but no one has ever found them there. Scientists believe they die after spawning but no one has ever seen a silver eel in the Sargasso Sea and believe me many have tried. The journey can be as much as 3,700 miles over open ocean. When the eels begin their journey their gut dissolves because no eating is in order. It is all up to their stored fat to give them the energy to make it back.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Svensson's book contains many interesting stories about the history of eels. Here are just a few.

When the Mayflower pilgrims came to America, they arrived starving and barely alive. Only 53 of the 102 passengers were still alive and half the crew had also perished. A native American Indian, Tisquantum, brought them eels and the pilgrims feasted on them. Tisquantum taught them how to catch eels and this saved their lives. So really Thanksgiving should be an appreciation based on eels not turkeys. We should have eel slides rather than turkey trots.



Another interesting story is a tale about an eight year old boy, Samuel Nilsson, whom in 1859 dropped a small eel into a well at his home in southeast Sweden. The well was sealed with a heavy stone lid. According to the story, the eel remained all alone in the dark well but stayed alive by eating the occasional insect that would fall into the water. The story was the eel lived on until Samuel Nilsson grew up, got old and eventually died. The eel lived so long it became famous and people came to look down into the well to see if they could see the eel.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Whether or not the part about Samuel Nilsson is true, it was true there was an eel in the well. A Swedish nature television show in 2009 documented the eel's existence. In one of Swedish television's most dramatic moment, the TV team removed the stone lid and looked for the eel. When they saw no eel, they drained the well of water and still saw no eel. Finally when they were about to give up, they noticed movement in the bottom and found a very small, thin eel with abnormally large eyes. Its eyes had grown several times larger than a normal eel's eyes. No one knew if it really was 150 years old. But it did survive a few more years until 2014 when it died.

Eels can live a very long time. In 1863 a 12 year old boy named Fritz Netzler caught a small eel no more than 15 inches long and put it in a small tank in his apartment. The eel grew older but not much bigger. Fritz named the eel Putte. Putte was nearing his 70th birthday when Fritz died in 1929. The family donated Putte to the Helsingborg Museum in 1939 and Putte eventually passed away at the age of 88 years old in 1948. Interestingly enough even though Putte was almost 90 years old, he was still in his yellow eel stage which in human terms is his teenage years. He never matured and turned himself into a silver eel. Maybe he did this because he also knew he would never be able to get to the Sargasso Sea while living in a tank.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME



In 2016, a European research team decided to study the migration of the silver eels to the Sargasso Sea. The research team spent 5 years, tagging 700 silver eels with electronic transmitters. But once again the eels wanted to remain mysterious so they shucked off their transmitters. Out of the 700 transmitters on the eels, only 200 eels kept their transmitters. Of these 200 eels, only 87 eels got far enough into the sea to reveal anything useful.

What the researchers did discover is eels move at different paces. Some eels are in a hurry to get back to the Sargasso Sea and some take their sweet time. Some eels went 31 miles in a day but others only went two miles in one day. No one could figure out what causes eels to decide to return to the sea or how they figure out a route to get there or why some are in a hurry and others not.

So in the end if you are looking for something to get your mind off the weird time we are experiencing, get this book and read it. You will also learn that eels are becoming extinct and why we need to prevent this from happening. I have just scratched the surface about eels. Check it out and increase your eel knowledge.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

## IS IT TRUE THAT TO BE A GOOD GARDENER YOU HAVE TO THINK LIKE A PLANT?

Some people will lament they just “don’t have a green thumb” to explain their failure as a gardener. They fail at gardening but it is not because of their thumbs. Or maybe their thumbs do have something to do with it if those thumbs never check to see if the garden soil is too wet or dry or maybe those thumbs forget to grasp a handle of a watering can or the garden hose to give their plants a drink.

The first rule for gardening is this: Try to think like a plant would think. Such as, “Wow I wish someone would think about me occasionally and check on how I am doing.” Plants don’t mind you being rough with them. They prefer this to being ignored. It is all about attention.



The second rule is to read about your plants, find out about their likes and dislikes. This doesn’t mean you have to immerse yourself in books and study everything from their scientific name to the ph factor of the soil they like.



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It doesn't have to be hard. Just have a general idea of how much light and water they like and their tolerance for freezes if they live outside.

It doesn't have to be hard but if your plant doesn't like anything about what you are doing, it is time to relieve the plant of its misery and get something else. Don't force it. Nothing is more depressing than a tortured plant on its last legs. It doesn't matter why. It is just time for the plant cemetery, i.e. the trash.



You wouldn't think there would be trends in the plant world, such as what plants are "cool" or "hot" or whatever the "in" word is. However, unfortunately it is true. The latest trendy plants are succulents. Someone decided succulents look "modern" and because modern is "in" every high-rise building lobby now has to have succulents.

Succulents are a very poor choice for any budding (no pun intended) novice gardener wanting to have a plant. Succulents are difficult to grow because of this one reason: 99% of people overwater them and for a succulent this is the kiss of death.



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The problem is overwatering is so easy to do. Succulents look so cute but they are very persnickety about whether they want a drink or not. This is what happens; you think surely, they must need a little drink and they don't agree. BOOM succulent death.

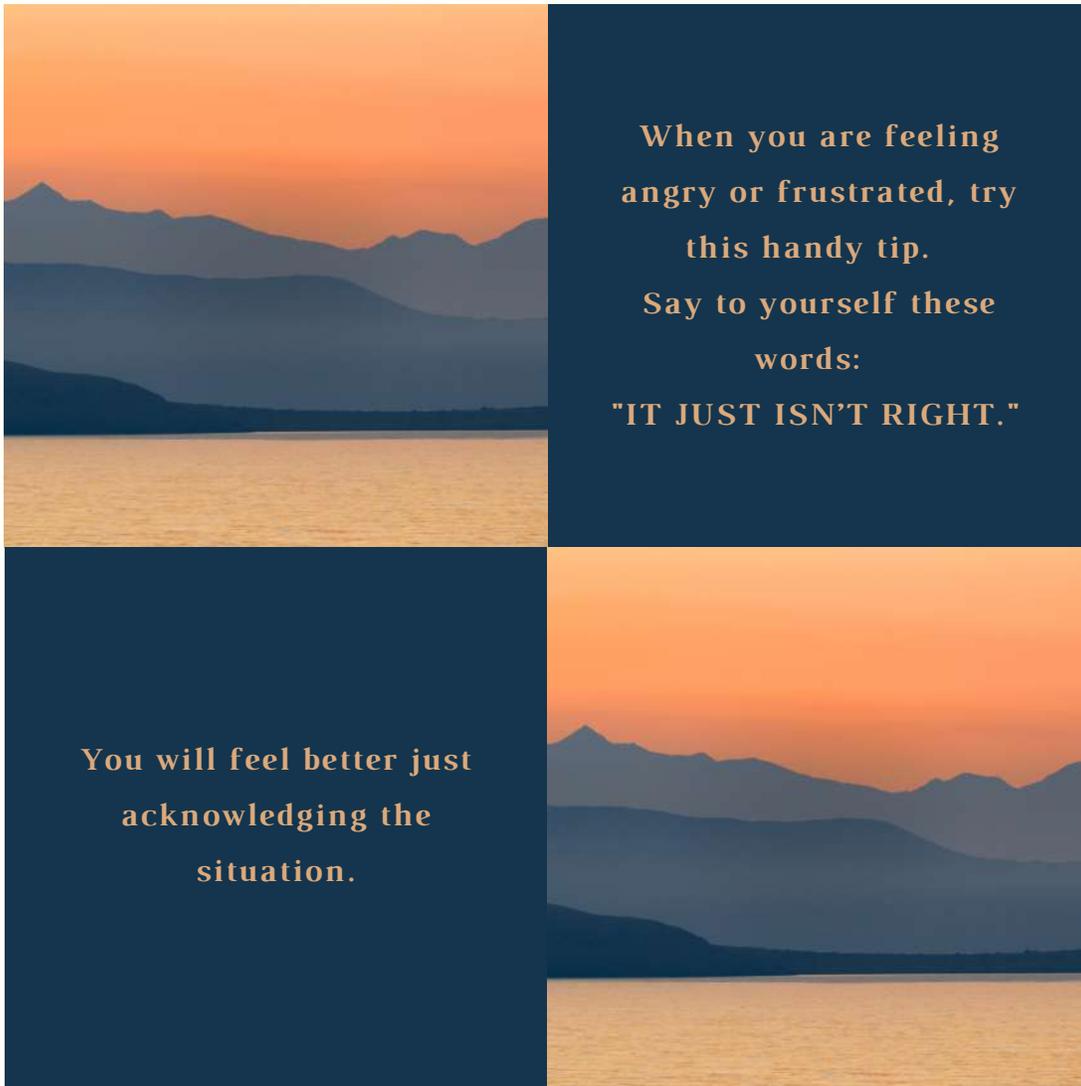
I will end on a gardening experience. When I lived in Galveston, I decided to have a rose garden. I was excited about it but couldn't decide which roses to plant since there are so many varieties. So I decided to choose a rose bush to represent each one of my friends. The only problem was I told my friends which rosebush represented each of them.

One day my friend, Jimmy Windmiller, came over and when he looked at the rose garden he noticed "his" rosebush (a lavender bloomer) was gone and replaced with a red one. "What happened to my rosebush" he exclaimed. I replied, "You weren't performing well, so I kicked you out of the garden." Our friendship survived but it just goes to show you plants can become more than plants!



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

# TIP FOR THE MONTH



When you are feeling angry or frustrated, try this handy tip. Say to yourself these words: "IT JUST ISN'T RIGHT."

You will feel better just acknowledging the situation.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

## A TRIP TO ARKANSAS

Some people may ask, “Why Arkansas?” Well, there are a couple of reasons which are: (1) It seemed like a good road trip in these COVID times, (2) we hadn’t seen the Crystal Bridges Art Museum and (3) seeing the Ozark Mountains seemed compelling. So Tom and I headed out for a five night Labor Day trip.

It was no surprise the drive to get out of Texas took a long, long (seemed like forever) time. We drove up I-45 to Dallas and finally got to the Texas/Oklahoma border. Nothing against Oklahoma but there doesn’t seem to be much going on in Oklahoma. We drove north to Checotah Oklahoma (past the town of Eufaula) then headed east into Arkansas with the destination of Eureka Springs.



Once in Arkansas you quickly realize that even though it is a small state it takes a lot of time to go a short distance because there are NO straight roads. I had been to Arkansas 30 years ago and I had two memories, one was it was like stepping back in time and the Ozark Mountains.

The stepping back in time part was accurate but I was off on the mountain part. This is because of their height.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

The Ozark Mountains are not tall in altitude, only 2500 feet. The Ozark Mountains have been worn down over time because they are so old, approximately 430 million years old. Some scholars believe they may be older than the Appalachian Mountains but at least as old. So if you think of mountains as being very tall with high elevations, this is not the case with the Ozarks. But it isn't like east Texas either



where thick pine forests give the sense of isolation, a claustrophobic feeling like being trapped in a deep pine canyon. This isn't the feeling at all with the Ozarks because the Ozarks are steep which allows for wonderful views of rolling green vistas.

Imagine being on a steep mountain road but instead of being 8000 feet in elevation, it is only 2500 feet in elevation. Imagine a big mountain that had the bottom cut off, leaving only the top steep part. This steep mountain top is a thick forest with every shade of green. To me the Ozarks have the feel of an ancient forest that has slowly been eroding down, layer by layer, over millions of years.



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This erosion created many lakes and bubbling streams. Arkansas is home to numerous beautiful clear blue lakes with hardly anyone on them since hardly anyone lives there. Eureka Springs has a population of 2073.

Eureka Springs is one very funky place, and I do mean funky. It is hard to understand why anyone developed a town there in the first place since it is built on the side of a steep mountain. The reason is in the 1800s it was believed the natural springs in Eureka Springs (guess how it got its name) was a health cure so it become a destination for various ills and ailments.



Downtown Eureka Springs is odd because of the steepness of the streets. There are 238 named streets in Eureka Springs and none are straight and no two meet at a right angle. There are no red lights in Eureka Springs.

The roads crisscross every which way over the mountain. Someone figured out the streets form the letters U and V fifty one times, the letter S thirteen times, and the letter O seven times.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Because of the labyrinth of streets, some of the buildings open on two different street levels. The different street levels are connected with numerous stairs earning the town the name of “Stairstep Town”.



The entire town of Eureka Springs is on the National Register of Historic Places. Architecturally speaking it is an oddball kind of place.

Several of the hotels, built in the turn of the century, claim to be haunted. Eureka Springs is off the beaten path and as a local told me, they believe in “Eureka Time” which is their equivalent of “Island Time”. I saw one sign outside a rambling old Victorian cottage snugly built in the side of the mountain that read, “Don’t F\*\*k with my Zen.”

Arkansas did cause me to go into Topo Chico withdrawal since sparkling water is an unheard of request. The restaurants rarely have sparkling water and the convenience stores definitely don’t. Arkansas water is good to drink so maybe they just don’t need it.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Being in Houston with our excellent restaurants made me forget this caliber of food is not the norm in other places. Arkansas is like stepping back in time when no one feared carbohydrates. Arkansas doesn't know the meaning of eating if it isn't fried, covered in butter or cream sauce and topped off with a generous amount of sugar. *Heaven to Betsy* the locals must think, *doesn't everyone understand what good cookin' is?*

In Eureka Springs we stayed in a bed and breakfast called the *Arsenic and Old Lace Inn*. The owners, Doug and Beverly Breitling, were very kind innkeepers. They have operated the *Arsenic* for 17 years and have thought of every detail. Because of COVID the housekeeper doesn't come into your room. I missed someone making the bed but quickly got over it.



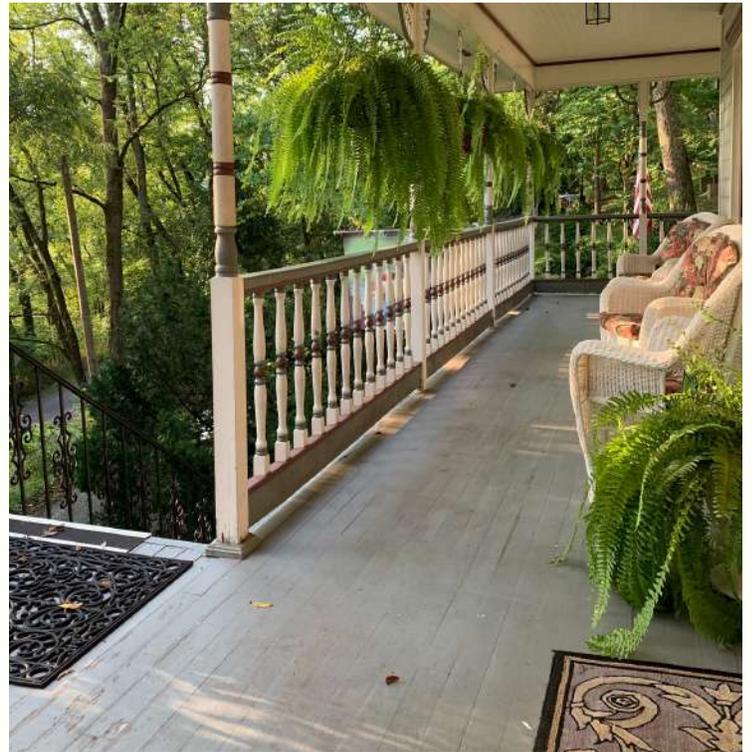
Our room had a small balcony that offered a view of the little garden and goldfish pond below. Beverly puts out corn every morning for the squirrels and if the deer ate some too, so much the better. (Beverly confided there is an ordinance prohibiting feeding the deer but as she shyly noted, she is only feeding the birds.)



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Arkansas is all about enjoying nature and there is a lot to enjoy when you are surrounded by beautiful forests.

You enter the *Arsenic* by climbing steep stairs to a big veranda. The veranda has hanging baskets of Boston ferns and is surrounded by big dogwood trees that, according to Doug, in the spring bloom with white and pink blossoms.

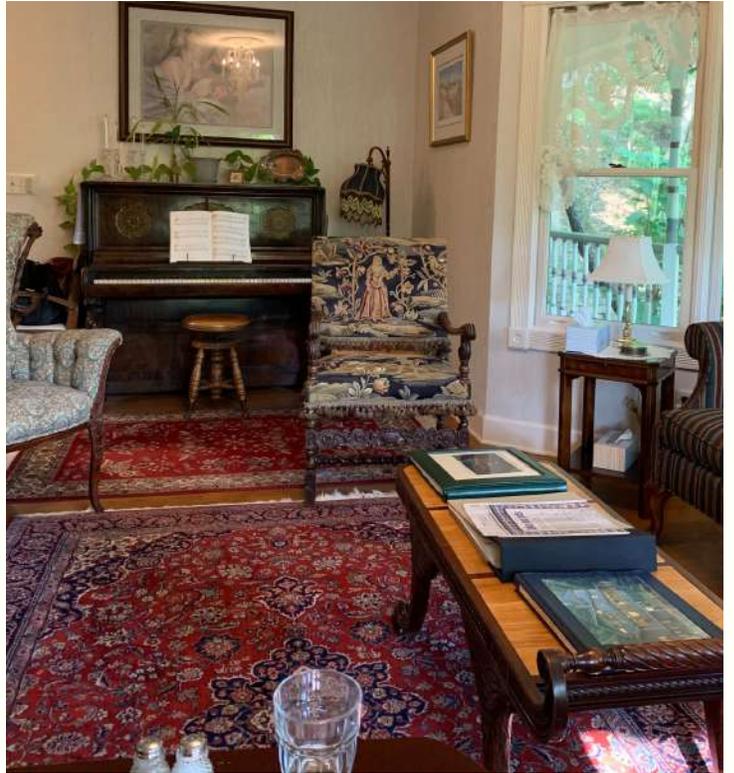


I have to add that I did not see one brown shriveled leaf on any plant. All the plants are apparently very happy in Arkansas and don't look beat up like ours do in Houston having endured a brutal blistering hot summer. Not so in Arkansas.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

The style police haven't been to Arkansas. The style of the *Arsenic* is circa 1970s/80s with lots of golden oak furniture, lace curtains and crocheted doilies on the furniture. Think of a stereotypical décor of an elderly grandma and you get the picture.



The *Arsenic Inn* provided a breakfast every day. Doug and Beverly went to a lot of trouble with breakfast, making it all by hand.

Their idea of a good breakfast starts with a sweet pastry followed by French toast with butter sauce or pancakes with plenty of maple syrup and butter. One morning it also included a breakfast item I recall from my past that was called Brown Apple Betty. This is an old timey desert with brown sugar, apples, oatmeal, butter and cinnamon. Doug calls it breakfast apples but to me it is dessert. Anyway with the Inn's delicious coffee (served with real cream, no sense watching my diet at this point) and a big load of sugar from breakfast to fire me up, we were ready to investigate the town.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

The shopping in the historic downtown was filled with ticky-tacky stuff and the mandatory tee shirt shops. Nothing of interest there other than the turn of the century buildings. So we headed to Beaver Lake and took a nice boat trip over a beautiful lake with depths of over 200 feet. The water was perfectly clear.

On the return trip back to Eureka Springs I spied, outside a souvenir stand, rows and rows of slag glass. I yelled **STOP** and Tom indulged me. For those of you who don't know slag glass, it was made by using pulverized silicate slag, an ingredient that forms on the top of molten iron as it cools down. It is a left-over product and can be opaque or clear in various colors. I have been hunting it for the years since you only occasionally see it in antique stores.



There were makeshift wooden tables outside the shop all loaded with slab glass in all different colors. I was like a kid in a candy store. Tom finally put his foot down since I kept adding more and more weight to the car. He wasn't convinced I needed the 50lb blue slab glass rock and his car's shock absorbers didn't either.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

The next day we drove to Bentonville to see the Crystal Bridges Art Museum built by the Walton's of Walmart fame. The museum is very impressive. The collection of art is extensive and the presentation is well done. I can't imagine what it was like for the curator to start an art museum from scratch and acquire all of that art. The Mark Rothko piece alone is worth 80 million.



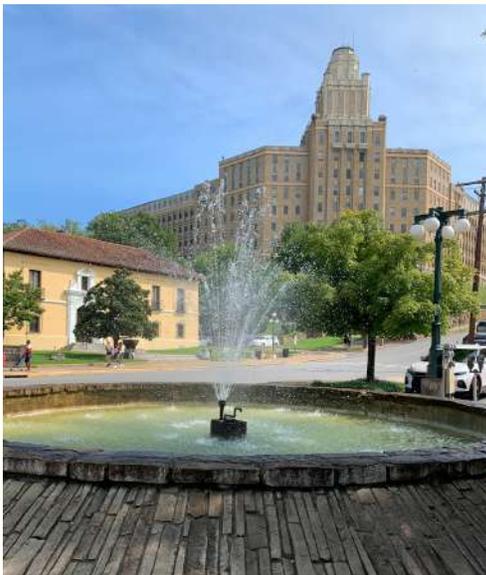
The town of Bentonville is all spanking new. The buildings in the square were new but made to look old. Eureka Springs is "real" but run down and the lack of money is a factor. Bentonville is new and shiny and money is no issue. There is a big contrast between the two.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

From Eureka Springs we drove to Hot Springs. Although it is only 187 miles between the two towns, it took 4.5 hours to get there because of the switchbacks driving through the Ozark Mountains. It is interesting to have steep switchbacks yet no real elevation but it does provide for beautiful vistas. However I was ready to get to Hot Springs and on a straight road.

We stayed at the *Lookout Point Lodge* on Lake Hamilton. Everyone in Arkansas was super into COVID safety with masks always worn and housekeeping not in your room. The Inn provided breakfast but it was left outside our room door for us to eat in our room. The *Lookout Point Lodge* also believed in a sugar breakfast which was good but when I returned home, I needed to go into an Atkins type recovery to get my blood sugar back down to a normal level.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

Hot Springs is a mineral heaven for rockhounds and I am one. Arkansas is known for quartz crystals and we enjoyed looking at them in the stores and of course buying some too. In Hot Springs we toured the Galvan Woodlands Gardens which was nice. The landscaping was one of a forest and the trails were well maintained, plus very few tourists.



I also loved the fact there were few cars on the highways in Arkansas. It was a nice change to get away from the rat race in Houston. Arkansas is about stepping back in time. No one there is setting any style trends or promoting new gourmet cuisine but the people are super friendly and it was nice to not worry about looking good, eating right or doing something constructive. It was ok to just be on “Eureka Time” and enjoying looking at a green forest.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME