**By Lori Pankonin**
*Co-Publisher*

I don't really consider myself a late nighter these days but was still going strong at 2 a.m. in Las Vegas. The Fremont Street Experience downtown finds you unaware of time. The outside walkway with a metal canopy overhead displays hourly light shows and the buzz of people never dies. The brightness there gives the sensation of daylight.

Walking through an indoor casino the following day found me realizing its constant nighttime atmosphere and it wasn't even noon yet.

Whichever atmosphere you prefer, who would know that you're in the middle of a desert? Lights, casinos, more lights, food, shows, dancing, water displays, people, more lights and more people. Rain rarely interferes.

What a buzz. Elvis impersonators. Other characters wanting you to take a picture with them and give them a buck. A drummer on the street giving an amazing show beating big plastic buckets and metal pans just steps from artists using spray paint to create gorgeous pictures on aluminum. And the brides and grooms who have experienced a Vegas wedding chapel moment. There's something different around every corner.

Our foursome was among those standing in line more than an hour just to experience the rush of flying through the air over the crowd on an 800-foot zip line. Cinched in a harness and knowing it must be safe, my heart still raced as I took that leap to become airborne five stories above ground. What a rush.

The crowd attire and prices changed significantly from Fremont Street to The Strip, the majority of women in fancy skimpy dresses and high high heels. You could almost feel the foot pain of those who walked rather wobbly. What women don't tolerate for fashion.

Vegas can definitely be dangerous for those who struggle with control of gambling, drinking or eating. Unlimited buffets offer a huge variety of cuisine choices at one setting, including seafood, Asian, Mexican, Indian, American, Italian with salads and a mirage of desserts. People purchased bands for unlimited drinking for the night. And gamblers put down hundreds of dollars and more on just one bet.

It became obvious that I wouldn't have a big win since I didn't make big bets. But I had a great time starting off with some small wins so that I could continue to enjoy hearing the ding ding ding of the blackjack machine.

When you hear of someone who wins $100,000, just how much do you suppose they've lost over time? Years ago at a national press convention, the governor of Nevada welcomed us and assured us that gaming dollars go toward education. That way when we left our precious dollars there, we could feel good about helping young minds. No doubt just a fraction of the dollars went to the children. Whatever the case, I made a small contribution.

The shows were beyond fabulous and they were worth every pricey penny. LOVE, a Cirque du Soleil production, celebrated the musical legacy of the Beatles! The impressive cast of 60 international artists showed admirable talent. We had the fortune of having third row seats in the massive auditorium which encircled the stage. The close-up view gave an even more dramatic impression of the muscular form of the dancers. Wow!

Dancers and props came out of the floor and down each aisle just feet from us, while trapeze artists, characters and sets came from several stories up. There was such an immense variety of happenings in every scene that there's no way you could see it all. We realized that sitting in a different location would create a whole different perspective.

Terry Fator, America's Got Talent winner, ventriloquist and singer left no disappointment from his rave reviews. His impressive vocal range changed with multiple dummies and his singing talent and wit found us laughing one minute and in awe the next.

It was a super opportunity to get away and smell the roses! And what a great chance to connect and celebrate the achievement of college graduation with our daughter and her high school sweetheart. Yet also gratifying was returning to familiar surroundings and remembering "there's no place like home!"