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# **Footprints**

"They put in a new sidewalk," my neighbor said, "and the first thing that happened was, a cat walked across the cement and left little footprints!"

My neighbor was amused. "I hope they leave them. They're so cute!" I thought those prints would probably survive. No one was going to take the trouble to cover up a few cat prints on the sidewalk with concrete.

A few years back, they started putting poetry on the sidewalk, laid right into the cement. I stop and read the poetry on my walk. I'll ponder for a moment or two, then move on. I'm not great with poetry. It fills me with questions that have no answers.

I want to ask the poet, "Can you tell me the rest of the story?" But there is no more. I'm sure the poet would be disappointed in me. But I like reading the poetry anyway.

Some pavement was replaced recently, and a leaf landed on it. There remains a perfect leaf print, and I took a picture of it. If I see the cat prints, I'll take a picture of them, too. I'm proud of that cat, leaving its mark.

Several years ago, I was camping in the northeast corner of New Mexico. I took a guided hike that showed prehistoric tracks. The tracks were made by dinosaurs when that piece of land, now desert, had been right at the edge of an ancient sea that stretched all the way to Canada. The land by the shore of this sea was jungle. The interpretive signs said there were a lot of animal tracks right there, because it was easier to walk on the beach than through the dense jungle. Just like today, creatures liked walking along the beach. The sand was dense, there was a lot of clay in it, and many of those prints were filled in and eventually turned to solid rock. The tracks on display in this park were estimated to be 200 million years old.

I tried to imagine leaving footprints that lasted 200 million years. I failed. But the most interesting part, to me, was one particular dinosaur track where the paleontologists said the dinosaur had slipped. They knew this



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### Week of June 19, 2023

because dinosaurs held their tails aloft and only touched them to the ground when they needed extra stability—if they were going to fall. And that's what happened. A dinosaur was walking along this beach—I'm going to imagine it was a nice sunny day—the sand (with all that clay in it) was slippery and... Whoops!

She slipped and caught herself in the nick of time with her tail. Then she kept walking. We don't know what happened after that one moment in time—that moment that happened 200 million years ago. Just like the poems in the sidewalk, there is no more. But today, we can still see her tracks.

I love that.

The cat prints and the poetry and the leaf print in the cement will not last 200 million years. I've no idea if the planet will be here that long. But they will last longer than the poet who wrote the words or the cat who left the prints or the tree that dropped the leaf. And I think that is, somehow, wonderful.

I'd like to leave a small print somewhere. Nothing big. Nothing ostentatious. Maybe just a book that is in print for a few years before it disappears. That would be nice. Maybe just a record of a time when I slipped and—at the last moment—caught myself.

Till next time,

Carrie

To see photos, check out CarrieClassonAuthor on Facebook or visit CarrieClasson.com.