



The Tolopka Tattler

Millennial Edition Redux
"All the News It Gives Us Fits to Print"



"Steve," said Janet, "You'll recount our year for everyone in the Newsletter, right?" Although I was unaware of any irregularities, I dutifully mailed a draft off to Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris for certification. We *still* haven't received a reply,¹ but Janet was good enough to clarify her original question for me. So despite the lack of official imprimatur, we're publishing the Christmas 2000 edition of *The Tolopka Tattler* without further delay.

In the Merry Old Land of Oz

Five years ago we spent a few days in Sydney on our sabbatical, fell in love with the city, and decided that someday we'd return. And we've

long been fans of the Olympic Games, although only vicarious TV-bound participants. The combination of Sydney and the 2000 Games proved irresistible; in Spring 1998 we started planning² our trip Down Under.

Getting tickets to the events is an interesting process. A year before the Games begin, you

get a fat brochure that lists every scheduled session and decide which tickets to order. This is challenging:

- You know what sport is being contested and what round (prelims, semifinals), but have no idea what countries will be involved;
- Tickets are assigned by lottery, so there's no guarantee you'll get what you request.

Friends who had attended previous Games advised us to order plenty of tickets since we'd only get some of our requests; to our surprise, we got

all our first choices except for one event – which meant we'd be in for some busy times!

So in September we flew to LA where we met Steve's brother Ken and sister-in-law Sharon, then hopped an Air New Zealand 747-400. Twelve thousand kilometers, one equator, one International Date Line, two meals, umpteen bad movies and sitcom reruns, and thirteen-plus hours later we touched down in Sydney as the sun came up on a perfect spring day. We spent the rest of the day admiring the city, its parks, and waterfront icons like the Opera House and Harbour Bridge along with hordes of welcoming Sydneysiders and guests from around the world, then capped the evening by cheering the runners in the Olympic Torch Procession on their way through Circular Quay.

Next day we made our first train trip to 1,878-acre³ Olympic Park, located about 9 miles west of Sydney at Homebush Bay, for the Opening Ceremonies. While we waited for the festivities to start, a fellow in the row behind us introduced himself as Jin DeSilva, one of the world's foremost collectors of Olympic memorabilia. Had the photo album to prove it, too. "Gee," we said, "How long have you been coming to the Olympics?" Answer: "Since I was Sri Lanka's entrant in the 400m race in the 1948 Games in London." Oh yeah – he currently maintains the Honolulu home of a famous pineapple heiress.



Steve & Jin DeSilva in Olympic Stadium

Beneath the Wisteria in Hyde Park, Sydney



And these people call themselves public servants. Sheesh!

² In this context, "planning" mostly means "periodically send another large check to Cartan Tours."

Then the crowd counted down from ten to zero and the Sydney 2000 Games were under way in a stupefying whirl of color, myth, costume, aerialists, history, music, fire, metal grinding, pyro-

³ For the math-challenged that's almost 3 square miles, so we got plenty of exercise schlepping from venue to venue!

technics, tap dancing. An hour later, the initial extravaganza ended and they brought out the marching band that would play for the Parade of Athletes. Now, Janet and I aren't easily awed by large bands since we march with the 550-person OMTAAMB every summer, but our jaws dropped when we saw this one – it was huge! Heck, there were 65 sousaphones alone. And then they brought the rest of the band onto the field – 2000 musicians in all. What a sound!⁴

Over the next couple of hours 10,000 athletes attired in everything from blazers to capes to dashikis to loincloths wended their way to the infield, forming a vibrant tapestry of color and

humanity. Then the stadium darkened, a lone runner brought the Olympic Torch into the arena, and a few hand-offs later Australia's 400m world champion Cathy Freeman headed our way.

And that's when we figured out that our seats were *really* fabulous, being perhaps 50 feet from the actual lighting of the Flame! What appeared to be a solid platform just below us opened up and became a pool, with a waterfall rushing into it from the stadium's upper rim and steps leading down into the arena.

Freeman ran up the steps, walked across the water, and ignited the Flame. As she stood seemingly on the surface of the pool, the flames of the Olympic Cauldron rose around her – we were so close we could feel the heat and hear the roar. Finally, the cauldron levitated to the top of the stadium where it would preside over the Games. Simply a breathtaking experience.

Over the next 16 days we saw twenty-three sessions of fifteen different Olympic sports. Fortunately for you, we won't provide a recap of every shot, corner kick, tumbling run, smash, dig, rally, ribbon swirl, slide, paddle, and sprint – but we will share a few of our favorite highlights:

¶ Beach volleyball on a sunny afternoon at world-famous Bondi Beach. Admiring how much



Lighting the Olympic Cauldron



Feel the heat!

court two players could cover.⁵ Grooving along with the crowd as the vapid, repetitive – and utterly addictive – “We Like to Party” by The Vengaboys blasted out of loudspeakers at an almost physically painful volume. Sitting a dozen seats away as Olympic decathlon legend Rafer Johnson watched daughter Jennifer Jordan win her preliminary match.



We thought we were clever ... but check out the guy at back left!

¶ The USA's tense, come-from-behind extra-inning victory in the gold medal women's softball game. In a light mist, the Japanese left fielder ice-cream-coned a long drive right in front of us, then slipped on the wet grass and couldn't hang on as the winning run scored. We whooped and hollered with the rest of the US crowd in a drenching downpour while waiting for the medal ceremony, but were even more moved by the gracious bows the Japanese team offered their fans despite the wrenching defeat.



Sportsmanship & grace are not dead

¶ Sports you never see on U.S. television. Team handball is a cross between lacrosse, basketball, and water polo – and a fun, exciting game to watch. World-class badminton is a game of interesting contrasts, constantly changing from furiously hard smashes to delicate finesse shots at the net as players scurry about the court. Table tennis doubles demands constant frenetic motion as players set up for the next shot and get out of the way of their partners. If the pace of badminton looked like gerbils at work, table tennis looked like gerbils on Benzedrine.

¶ “Rooting for the little guy” in the Cameroon-Spain men's football (soccer) final. Spain scored the first goal after only 78 seconds and notched a second during the extra time at the end of the first half. That's that, right? But somehow Cameroon came back with two goals in the first 14 minutes of the second half. In the opening moments of overtime, Spain's second red card had them playing two men down. That's that, right? But Spain's defense grimly hung on, and it finally took a missed penalty kick to decide the game – the first-ever Olympic gold medal in any sport

⁵ And how much skin they could uncover!

⁴ For more of our pictures of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Band, see www.getalifemb.org/olympics.htm.

for Cameroon. 100,000 fans who probably couldn't find Cameroon on a map cheered as if they were natives.

¶ Pole vault was always a men's event since women are Delicate Flowers.⁶ We had ringside seats as the USA's Stacy Dragila outdueled a host of rivals for nearly four hours to win with a vault of over 15'. She edged Australia's Tatiana Grigorieva, whose combination of strength, athleticism, and drop-dead gorgeous looks had Janet muttering darkly about Satanic pacts.



Vaulters Flossadottir & Grigorieva

¶ Making a 3-day side trip to Hamilton Island at the Great Barrier Reef. We spent a great day catamaraning to a private platform at the Reef to snorkel, submarine, and otherwise gawk at colorful fish, giant clams, delicate corals, huge groupers, and other sea life. Back on the Island we enjoyed the antics of the sulphur-crested cockatoos, checked out the wallabies and kookaburras, looked nervously over our shoulders for the Wicked Witch of the West as hordes of bats swept by looking like winged monkeys, and fended off rainbow lorikeets from our breakfast plates. A highly satisfactory break!



Colorful breakfast thief

¶ Men's trampoline may be a weird sport, but there's no denying that those guys catch some big air! While most of the competitors had their Serious Game Faces on, crowd favorite Ji Wallace of Australia was ear-to-ear grins all night long from the time he walked into the arena.⁷ He nailed a silver medal in this never-before-contested Olympic sport while the "Aussie! Aussie! Aussie!"⁸ cheer rained down from the stands.

¶ Hustling back to the hotel each night hoping to catch part of *The Dream* on Channel Seven. Roy (Slaven) and H.G. (Nelson) hosted this show each night at 11PM. Part daily recap, part Jay Leno, part Saturday Night Live, and part Monty Python's Flying Circus – and the best thing on

⁶ That's satiric commentary, folks – no feminist rejoinders!

⁷ We've seen the look before; it's basically the same I-can't-believe-they're-letting-me-do-this look that the One More Time Around Again Marching Band gets on parade days.

⁸ "Oi! Oi! Oi!"

Australian TV. Most of it was highly irreverent: Bantering interviews with actual Games athletes,⁹ Lowlights, hushed but twisted commentary,¹⁰ and lots of Other Stuff You Don't Usually See on TV like full-frontal (un)coverage of a male streaker, underwater shots of waterpolo players gaining an advantage by grabbing each other's trunks and Delicate Parts,¹¹ two wrestlers sweating and grappling to Barry White's *Can't Get Enough of Your Love*.

¶ Sitting trackside in Olympic Stadium the night that Cathy Freeman ran the 400m finals carrying the weight of a continent and a people on her back. For weeks the world press focused on her as a leading Aboriginal athlete/activist and the host country's best chance at an Athletics gold medal. The 400m start/finish line was at the far end of the stadium from us. When the starter's gun fired, a raw wall of urgent sound flooded the stadium and rolled around the track with the runners as 110,000 souls rose to their feet and willed her to win. She didn't disappoint. A thrilling moment that still brings goose bumps every time we relive it.



Trackside in Olympic Stadium



Cathy Freeman is 3rd from left, in green

¶ Participating in a similar "wave" as 81st place finisher Elias Rodriguez of Micronesia ran the last 500m of the men's marathon (the final Olympic event) an hour behind the winner, making him the last competitor in the Sydney 2000 Olympics. Basking in the cheers of the crowd, Rodriguez milked that last lap – a real feel-good moment.



Closing Ceremonies: "Bye from Oz"

¶ Freezing our buns off at the Closing Ceremonies. We shivered in shirtsleeves as the temperature dropped, the wind kicked in, and the "eski"s (styrofoam coolers) with everyone's trinkets blew into untidy heaps in the stands. A jet fighter screamed over the arena, "sucked in" the

⁹ "How exactly did you come to be interested in jumping over tall things?"

¹⁰ A long table tennis rally: "Ping ~ Pong ~ Ping – Pong."

¹¹ "I believe that's the Squirrel Grip, H.G."

Olympic Flame, and extinguished it. We can't claim to understand the Dali-esque parade that followed (gigantic mirror balls, Violent Hen, Frankenstein's Kangaroo, shrimps on bicycles, dozens of gigantic shoes with stiletto heels, enormous Kewpie dolls, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*), but we still enjoyed it.¹²

And that was that. Memories to last a lifetime.¹³

Soothing the Savage Breast

We're still having a blast playing saxophones in lots of bands. The One More Time Around Again Marching Band played a swing music show for Rose Festival this year, and 550 musicians can

make a really *Big Noise from Winnetka*. The highlight was playing *A String of Pearls*, arranged for us by and under the baton of Norman Leyden, who was Glenn Miller's arranger in the Army Air Corps – quite a thrill!

The Get A Life Power



Santa's just another Pep Band celebrity

Pep Band played at halftime for the Portland Trailblazers (NBA), Portland Fire (WNBA), the championship game of the Indoor Professional Football League, plus numerous other beer fests, farmer's markets, and sporting events. Our dance band, Second Wind Jazz Ensemble, played a half dozen concerts/dances and earned Janet her first paycheck as a musician.¹⁴ We even cut our first CD as our church community made a special recording for a departing priest. It all takes copious portions of our spare time – but the joy is sure worth it.

Ding Dong, The Witch is Dead

Our softball team finished 6-6, so we were surprised to find that we'd made the I League playoffs.¹⁵ Expecting to play our proper role as cannon fodder, we scored 6 runs in the first inning and never looked back, winning 14-7. We then played the league's undefeated team in the championship game, repeated the 6 run first inning, and pounded them 16-4. Although we're still not sure what the heck happened, it was a naughty pleasure helping old age and treachery triumph over youth and skill.

¹² We quizzed the Aussies about the symbolism on the train ride home, but they were as puzzled as we were!

¹³ For a longer trip report and many more photos, see members.home.net/tolopka/olympics/header.html.

¹⁴ Steve had made a few bucks playing with The Flying Scotsmen back in high school.

¹⁵ We suspect hanging chad to have been involved somehow.

Job News¹⁶

Janet's in her second year as an auditor with Regional Environmental Management at Metro (our tri-county government). She likes the job and her boss is a real sweetheart, so she's pretty pleased with the situation. Steve has a new role as owner of Connected Consumer strategy for Intel's Architecture Labs; as part of the switch, he traded his direct reports for a virtual (matrixed) team. He's also cut his hours back to 32 per week in an attempt to wedge in all his extracurricular activities and still sleep occasionally.

There's No Place Like Home

Our last big news of the year: We're building a house! A downstairs bedroom/bathroom for visiting parents and larger music rehearsal space started to sound like a good idea, so we started looking. We lucked out with a secluded lot fronting on a greenway with creek about a mile from here and broke ground in June. Janet's excited about the big

kitchen and more closet space, Steve's gaga over the number of bookshelves and all the high tech A/V and network wiring, and both look forward to the spacious bonus room that'll become a home theater and rehearsal room. Current projections are that we'll move around the end of January. Come see the new digs!



The new house on Christmas Day

Our new address:

Steve & Janet Tolopka
10321 SW Todd Court
Portland, OR 97225-6959

Enough is Enough

Reckon that wraps it up for this year. We wish you peace, health, and more than your share of laughter as we brave the True Millenium.

With love,
Steve & Janet



Riding the train after the Closing Ceremonies

¹⁶ Mostly boring, but we figure you're wondering by now if we still have jobs!