

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

*T*was the month after Christmas, and all through the town
The merchants had taken their Christmas Stuff down.
The carols had ended, the lights were unplugged,
The cookies were nibbled, the eggnog was chugged.

*And Janet in her dance togs, and I (overwrought)
Had just settled back to give New Year's some thought.
When out on the lawn there arose a great clamor,
Like full-armored knights playing catch with a hammer.*

*And then in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
A Squish! and a Thud! and a voice that cried "Oof!"
"Why, that's Santa," I said, "And his sleigh that went thud,
And it sounds like he's driving his Northwest Slug, Bud."*

*Then Santa appeared in the midst of our den,
"Gee, Santa", asked Janet, "Why're you here again?
The presents you brought last month made a huge stack!"
Said Santa, "Those presents will have to go back."*

*"Oh no!" we both cried, "Oh no, this can't be!
We handled our Christmas-time chores to a tee!
We left platters of cookies, and milk by the jug,
And tasty house plants for your eight Reindeer Slugs!"*

*"All true", quoth St. Nick, "But there's work yet to do,
And until you have finished, no presents for you!"
So to get our gifts back (and to make us feel better),
Here's the '96 Tolopka Christmas Newsletter!"*

Holiday Greetings from both of us to all of you!¹

Last spring was our 20th wedding anniversary and my second Intel sabbatical (everyone at Intel earns eight extra paid weeks of vacation every seven years). We spent almost all of it traveling, and the trips provide most of this year's highlights. About a month before we left on Trip 1, ATS Tours told us that we'd be traveling without a permanent tour director since "there are fewer than fifteen people signed up for the tour." As we waited to begin a tour of Tahiti, we had the following exchange with another couple:

Them: "Are you on the ATS tour?" *Us:* "Yes." *Them:* "Well, we're the other ones."

And so we met Barbara and Lloyd Kinsey, with whom we spent the next four weeks.



The ATS tour took us through Australia and New Zealand, with brief side jaunts to Tahiti and Fiji. The Down Under countries are fabulous: fascinating cities, friendly people, interesting accents,² intriguing native cultures, awesome natural wonders—we'd go back again in a heartbeat. Sydney was our favorite city; we loved the cheerful feel of the city, the parks, and the sparkling harbour that seems even busier than the city streets. Particularly memorable were a seafood dinner³ at The Rocks (where the first convicts landed in Australia in 1788) and attending a play at the world-famed Sydney Opera House. In the Red Center of Australia, Steve tried climbing the 1000+ feet of Uluru (*left*); his legs and lungs still hold it against him.

Near Alice Springs we sampled bush tucker (food that aborigines glean from the outback desert), including a fat white grub about the size of your little finger called a witchetty grub—just pop it in the coals for a few seconds,⁴ slice, and eat. Janet's verdict: "Tastes like unsalted scrambled eggs." Other Australian delights: snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef near Cairns;⁵ riding in a WW II US Army amphibious Duck and a treetop-high aerial tramway through the rainforest at Kuranda; feeding damper (bread) to kangaroos; watching the Parade of the Fairy Penguins near Melbourne as they dash madly across the

¹ Hey—MLK Day is coming up, and we didn't say *which* holiday!

² Q: What's the difference between a buffalo and a bison? A: A buffalo is a member of the oxen family, and a bison is what an Australian washes his face in.

³ Crab, huge shrimp, oysters, a Moreton Bay Bug (a lobster-like crustacean), and fish, all absolutely fresh—and that was just the appetizer!

⁴ Just like Ballpark Franks, they "plump when you cook 'em!"

⁵ The sail out to the Reef was a major dramamine opportunity for Steve!

beach from ocean to burrows; cuddling a koala,⁶ standing in silent solemnity at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance to Australia's WW I dead. Steve's still trying to learn to play his new didgeridoo!



New Zealand is beautiful and much slower-paced; the whole place feels vaguely like it's stuck in the 1950's. There are sheep⁷ everywhere; we saw several demonstrations of shearing and dogs working the flocks, and had numerous opportunities to buy sweaters, fleeces, and other trinkets that were (as Janet put it) "sheep at twice the price." In the part of New Zealand called the Southern Alps we stopped briefly at Mt. Cook, which is a little over 12,100 feet tall and towers 10,000 feet over



the neighboring valleys. Spectacular scenery—jagged snow-covered peaks rising abruptly from the valley floor and milky blue-green lakes filled with glacier run-off. We took a sightseeing flight up the valley, where our pilot cranked skis under the plane wheels and landed on the Tasman Glacier. Way cool! Other New Zealand treats: geysers and thermal pools to rival Yellowstone in Rotorua; glowworms generating a million burning green pin-pricks of light in pitch-black darkness at the Waitomo Caves; petting the angora rabbits; great food and music at a Maori *hangi* (feast); watching kiwis fossick;⁸ dozens of silver cascades snaking a thousand feet down the rock face after a rain at Fiordlands National



Park; singing "Deep in the Heart of Texas" around the piano on the *TSS Earnslaw* on an evening cruise across Lake Wakatipu near Queenstown.



After a brief stop in Fiji (where firewalking was the hot demo), we came home for a day to wash clothes and pay bills. Next up was Mexico, where we joined our friends Eric Dittert and Carylee Eaton who were also on sabbatical. Our first three days were spent meandering from Chihuahua to Los Mochis aboard the South Orient Express along one of the world's most scenic railways. The Copper Canyon area covers 2500 square miles and is deeper than Grand Canyon at its deepest point,



⁶ Well, actually we only got to cuddle the pillow the koala was sitting on!

⁷ Q: Where does virgin wool come from? A: Ugly sheep. (And steel wool comes from hydraulic rams ...)

⁸ Get your mind out of the gutter and go look it up!



although it lacks the coloration of Grand Canyon. In Divisadero, our hotel room's balcony felt like it extended out over the canyon—unbelievable views. We were also introduced to the Tarahumara, Indians who live all through the Sierra Madre mountains, mostly (it seems) in places no one else would want to live. The people are fairly dark-skinned, shy, colorfully dressed, and grindingly poor—a stark reminder that not everyone lives as well as we do. On the last day of the train trip, we passed from 7000' elevation down to about 200', crossing numerous bridges and negotiating 75 tunnels ranging from under a hundred meters in length to over 1800 meters—a real engineering marvel.



From Los Mochis, we went via bus to Cabo San Lucas (*below right*), where we joined the Yorktown Clipper for a week's cruise⁹ in the Sea of Cortes off Baja California. The Yorktown is a small ship (~140 passengers) with a shallow draft, which means we could go lots of places. The Clipper Cruise Line focuses on the area you're visiting, not on the ship itself; no casinos, no big shows, no midnight buffets.¹⁰ We had four knowledgeable naturalists on board who stuck with us on hikes through the uninhabited islands, birding expeditions, snorkeling in the sparkling turquoise waters, etc. On land, there were 20' tall flowering cardón cacti, huge barrel cacti, elephant trees, numerous woodpeckers, rare hummingbirds, blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigate birds, colorful crabs, and on and on. The snorkeling was great: pufferfish, angelfish bigger than dinnerplates, rainbows and wrasses galore, a little red octopus, a red, white, and blue zebra moray, a foot-long lobster, a four-foot-long



cornetfish that used us as cover to hunt other fish—we didn't want to get out of the water.

And we didn't want to go home. So we didn't—we went to Hawaii, spending time on Kauai and the Big Island. The trip to Kauai had been planned since we ate at The Beach House in Poipu in 1988 and said "this is where we want to have our 20th anniversary dinner." It was every bit as good (and romantic!) as we remembered. We also took a Zodiac raft trip out of Hanalei, where we saw reef sharks as we snorkeled above underwater caves and gawked at the parts of the Na Pali coast you can't reach from land—sheer cliffs rising from the sea, caves and arches, waterfalls pouring through lush greenery, towering rock spires. In one place, we looked through an arch to see the last 20 feet of a waterfall that was running from a cliff 3000 feet above us. It's easy to see why this part of Kauai was used for the Indiana Jones movies and *Jurassic Park*. On the way back to port, we started running against the wind; seas hit 4-6', which is pretty interesting in a rubber raft,¹¹ and I donated my hat to the Zodiac god. Janet, of course, was merely exhilarated.

⁹ A dramamine opportunity for Steve.

¹⁰ Although my journal notes "As usual, the ship is filled with charming, perky young people here to satisfy our every whim. Life is hard."

¹¹ A major dramamine opportunity for Steve; unfortunately, necessary but not sufficient



the Pacific Ocean. Our other big Hawaiian adventure happened right at our hotel, where we lucked into a lottery slot in the Dolphin Quest program, which allowed us to spend an hour goofing around with the dolphins in their pool (and we have the videotape to prove it!).

On our return to the Portland airport, we collected Steve's parents who had arrived an hour before us. This time we spent *two* whole days at home before we all headed north to Seattle, the San Juan Islands, and Victoria, British Columbia. In the San Juans, we took a whale-watching cruise¹² with great success, seeing numerous orcas (killer whales), including two that were "spy-hopping" by coming straight up out of the water. Victoria was lovely as always, with Butchart Gardens in full spring bloom. A fine time was had by all.

As for our mundane lives ... Janet's still an accountant at Metro (local governmental body). Her last six months have been pretty busy since she was doing double-duty filling in for a colleague who was on maternity leave. This was, however, a case of "turnabout is fair play" since the same person subbed for *her* during our sabbatical.

Steve finished his 15th year at Intel, now as director of the Home Communications Lab. He's also working working on an initiative that aims to make PCs easier (and cheaper!) to manage in businesses. A September highlight was Steve's New York stage debut at the Madison Square Garden Theater in the role of the Not-Very-Savvy Vice-President of Sales as part of the on-stage demos for Intel's Wired for Management seminar. Thirty-four hundred press, analysts, Chief Information Officers, and information technology professionals said "Good entertainment ... but don't quit your day job!"

The One More Time Around Again Marching Band is still going strong with a new sponsor (Wendy's); we just sent in our applications to play again this year. Come by in June for Rose Festival and hear the world's biggest (550+ people) marching band. Volleyball continues; we play as well as we ever did, which ain't saying much. The year's VB lowlight happened a few weeks before sabbatical when Janet broke her face by catching an elbow with her cheek. Fortunately, minor surgery installed a plate and she was in good shape to travel. On a brighter note, we had our most successful softball team in years, finishing 2nd in G League. We also entered a Halloween tournament where everyone played in costume; it's a hoot to see a team dressed like Robin Hood's Merry Men and Women scooting around the bases in tights and wimples. Oh yeah—we finished second in the tourney, winning a trophy adorned with the usual winged victories *and* a witch riding a broomstick!

Both of us attended our 25th anniversary high school reunions during the year; it's shocking to see how our classmates have changed while we've remained eternally young. Janet did well in this year's Football Pool again, finishing second in the Weekend Competition by only a single point and earning free pizza. And now you're up to date.

And we're heading off to Orlando for the christening of our new nephew Kristopher (Steve's brother Ken and wife Sharon decided there wasn't enough excitement in their lives), so we'll close. Stay happy and healthy. Give us a call if you're in town and we promise to introduce you to Portland's fine collection of restaurants.

With love,

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¹² Yes, you guessed it! (But this time it worked ...)