

Christmas, 1990

Dear Friends,

A warm and heartfelt "Hello" to you!!! It is difficult to believe that another Christmas Season has rolled around as we find ourselves writing our annual letter and signing our cards. To help us get into the mood, we are listening to Christmas music as we work.

As usual, 1990 has been another very busy year! It is far better than being bored! We both enjoy our jobs, but Richard's consulting work at National TeleConsultants requires more travel than either of us would like. Richard is away from home approximately one week every month.

Mary Beth continues to work at Glendale Presbyterian Church and enjoys her job very much except for the typical political problems which, of course, happen everywhere.

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, where we belong, has kept us busy also. We have, however, reduced our involvement considerably these past few months. Mary Beth had belonged to five organizations, including being president of a Social Club for young couples. She decided that with a full-time job and trying to become pregnant (which still has not happened), she would give up many of her activities. In July, the Social Club Presidency was turned over to others. Our main activity now is that as members of the Music Guild we prepare the programs for each of the five concerts on our home computer and laser printer. This fall, we provided the sound system for an outdoor dedication ceremony for new property which the Church had acquired. Richard also took some pictures of the ceremony which were greatly appreciated by the Church. Richard completed the installation of sound system upgrades and a new lighting control system for the Church early this year. In fact, a new Episcopal

Church in Westlake Village has recently asked Richard to consult on sound, video, and lighting.

We continue to travel as much as possible. During the three-day weekend in February we returned to one of our favorite spots, Cambria. On the Saturday, we went to Debbie and Ed Fritz's wedding here in Glendale and then drove about three hours north to The Inn at Harris Ranch near Coalinga. We had never been there before, but it turned out to be a lovely spot in the middle of nowhere. Sunday, we drove across the Santa Lucia mountains to the Pacific and then down the coast to Cambria. Our harbor seals were there to greet us again. We drove home Monday. The following weekend, we drove to Las Vegas to attend PMA, a photo equipment convention. Las Vegas is a place that is nice to see, but, for us, not a place to spend much time!

In July, Richard found himself visiting Disney World in Orlando, Florida, on business, and Mary Beth flew down after Richard had completed his work. We spent the first day at Epcot Center—it was nice but not worth a trip by itself—perhaps we are jaded! We spent the next morning at the Disney/MGM Studio Tour. It was interesting to see the final incarnation of projects which Richard had worked on at National TeleConsultants. We drove west to Clearwater where Mary Beth met Richard's Aunt Betty and Uncle Gerry Phaneuf for the first time. The rest of the week was spent mostly photographing alligators and birds. We visited Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary near Fort Myers, Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island, and Everglades National Park as well as driving all the way to Key West, which was a bit disappointing. The photography at Ding Darling was probably the best with egrets, herons (several varieties), roseate spoonbills, pelicans, and cormorants. The anhingas which were

so prevalent in January (when Richard had a free weekend after another trip) were mostly gone in July. Eco Pond in the Everglades was probably the best bird location on that portion of the trip.

Since we went to Florida in the summer, we thought that a good way to finish the year would be to go to Alaska in the winter! That's right—we spent the last two weeks of November visiting Haines, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. We loved Alaska so much during our summer trip of 1989 that we wanted to see it in the wintertime. We enjoyed the trip, and have decided that Alaska is a nice place to visit in any season, but we would not like to live there as much for political and economic reasons as the climate.

Our favorite spot on this trip was Haines which has gorgeous scenery similar to Norway. Indeed it is said by some that the Lynn Canal from Juneau north to Haines and Skagway is the most spectacular fjord in the world. Our reason for choosing Haines in November is that the largest gathering of bald eagles in the world takes place along the Chilkat River each fall and winter. Richard stayed out for up to five hours on some days photographing eagles. Haines is a small town of about 1,200 but we had perhaps the best food of the trip there. Our hotel was part of the Fort Seward complex which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Our only complaint was the tiny shower in a converted closet! The weather in Haines was great! We had bright sun every day.

We found Anchorage to be a sprawling city with many subdivisions and strip malls. It reminded us of parts of the San Fernando Valley with snow! This one city contains about half of Alaska's half million or so residents. We drove to both the Portage and Matanuska Glaciers. Some of the views of Turnagain Arm were the highlights of this part of the trip.

Fairbanks and vicinity has a population of approximately 60,000. We wonder how even that many can stand the ice fog which appears to be basically frozen automobile exhaust! When we left we could not see lights 100 feet away! The day we left, it was -43°F, but we were prepared and were generally comfortable at any temperature.

To briefly summarize our trip, we flew to Juneau on Saturday, November 17. We took the Alaska Marine Highway (ferry) to Haines on Sunday—through a blizzard! We left Haines on the morning of the 23rd, flying a six-seater Piper Cherokee to Juneau and an Alaska Airlines 737 to Anchorage. We left Anchorage on the 27th for Fairbanks and flew home on December 1st. On the 27th we clearly saw Mt. McKinley (20,320 feet—highest in North America) from the plane. On our return we saw the mountain in haze and were told that this was normal “Arctic Haze” some of which is air pollution traced to Soviet industry in central Asia! Sadly, it seems one cannot find clean air anywhere all the time. Perhaps Antarctica?

We saw some wildlife on this trip, but not as much as in the summer. We saw a few moose, red fox, and, of course, the eagles—hundreds of them. While shooting the eagles, Richard was interviewed by a news crew and the clip appeared on both NBC and CNN according to various sources—we have not seen it. In Anchorage, we went to the Alaska Zoo (yes, it was cold and snowy) and saw musk ox, llama(!), caribou, and a sleeping polar bear. The brown and black bears were already hibernating for the winter.

Wildlife continues to frequent our backyard even though we live in a highly populated area. We have mule (black tailed) deer which eat all our geraniums. We have also seen opossum, skunks, raccoons, lizards, and even a tarantula. We did not see

any snakes this year and we are just as pleased.

Richard has been active this year in CompuServe's PhotoForum where he helps newcomers with basic photographic questions, edits message threads for archiving, and helps out with the conferences. We have met a few of the people and been able to put faces to the names. We met Lowell Reiger and his wife Loretta Steed in Bonita Springs, Florida, Mike Chmarouski in Anchorage, and Lee and Stewart Rothman in Fairbanks.

We continue to take nature and wildlife pictures and have been to the Los Angeles Zoo several times this year. Richard has gotten some great pictures there—especially of the polar bears. We went today since we had a rental 500mm f/4 lens from the Alaska trip which needs to be returned on Monday. We think we got some good lion and tiger shots as well as more polar bear shots.

Richard's camera purchases of last year did not turn out well for a variety of reasons—especially the fact that Canon cannot seem to produce a good, affordable lens for overall scenics. He traded the Canon EOS system for a Nikon system which has worked out quite well. It seems that the majority of nature photographers shoot Nikon anyway. We now have an F4 and an FA camera body with the following autofocus lenses: 20mm f/2.8, 35-70mm f/2.8, 85mm f/1.8, 105mm f/2.8 Macro (to 1:1 without adapters), 180mm f/2.8, and 300mm f/4. We also bought an SB-24 flash which has worked very well. The new camera system is finally settling down.

In April, we were delighted to have Robert and Louana McIntyre, Mary Beth's cousins, visit us. Robert was attending a convention in Hawaii, so they made a stop over in Los Angeles to visit us for a few days. They had a good time sightseeing on their own

while they were here. They took us to dinner and to see The Glory of Easter at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, one place we had never been to before. We tell the truth—we do not sightsee unless we have company!

This Christmas finds us in Glendale. Mary Beth's mother and brother, Margaret and John, are coming to be with us. They arrive December 21st. John will fly back to Toronto December 28th and Margaret will stay with us until January 8th. It has been two years since they have been here. We had a great time with them last Christmas in Aurora and the Muskoka Region. Margaret has sometimes visited us mid-year, but this year she and Vera Clarke took a tour of Portugal.

Our card this year is a humorous depiction of some horned puffins in breeding plumage. These are found off the coast of Alaska. We saw some in Glacier Bay in 1989.

We wish you a blessed, happy, and healthy Holiday Season and hope that 1991 is everything you wish it to be.