

Christmas, 1991

Dear Friends,

As we ponder how to begin our Christmas letter this year, we are noticing that much of this year's focus seems to be on nature, beauty, peace, and happiness. This is reflected in our Christmas Card. We certainly do not intend to be anti-religious, but perhaps as we grow older—especially living in a place like Los Angeles—we feel that we want to preserve and hold on to the things that God created and gave the world.

As you know, we have been to Alaska twice, once in winter and once in summer, and still feel a strong desire to return. The attraction seems to be wide open spaces, few people, clean air (most of the time), and perhaps a more basic lifestyle. This summer, we enjoyed a trip to parts of Europe, but we certainly did not enjoy it as much as going to Alaska. Our overall reaction to the Europe trip is that we are very glad we had the “Europe Experience.” We enjoyed the different cultures and the architecture, but were disappointed with the crowds. The scenery did not impress us as much as what we have seen in Alaska, California, and Canada. More about this trip later.

Our day-to-day life remains the same. Richard is still at National TeleConsultants and Mary Beth is still at Glendale Presbyterian Church, and we are still trying to start a family.

Last Christmas, Margaret and John (Mary Beth's mother and brother) came to visit and we had a great time. In addition to the traditional Christmas celebrations (or as traditional as they can be in Southern California) we also saw Dickens's A Christmas Carol and spent two days in San Diego visiting Sea World and the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Sea World is fun, but it is basically a theme park whereas the Wild Animal Park is a research environment and a sanctuary for endangered species. Richard had the opportunity to purchase a used Nikon 500mm f/4P lens right before Christmas and this was his one and only Christmas present! This trip provided great opportunities to use the lens.

During January and February we had a foreign student from Japan living with us who spoke limited English. We decided that although it was an interesting and educational experience, we probably will not do this again.

Richard's travel was cut back during the Gulf War, but he has made up for it in the second half of this year. We have had a few fun weekend trips this year. We like to go to some of the wild and wonderful places within a few hours of LA as a means to escape.

In February we spent a three-day weekend visiting Joshua Tree National Monument and Anza-Borrego State Park in the southern part of California. Winter is a nice time to visit the desert. Although we missed the wildflowers there, we later managed to find acres and acres of orange California poppies (our state flower) in the fields just north of Glendale and west of Palmdale. It was a gorgeous time of the year for a drive.

As you may know, Richard has been involved in designing the audio systems for four radio transmitter stations for The Voice of America. He continues to travel considerably for this project. The contract for the audio system was awarded to a prime contractor in Haifa, Israel. The first site to come on line is near Tangier, Morocco, and the contract has also been activated for a station in north-eastern Thailand near the city of Udon Thani. His first meeting with the Israeli firm was in the third week of July, followed by a visit to the Morocco site. Since Richard was flying via Paris, we decided to use this opportunity to visit Europe.

We spent three days in Paris, but were somewhat enervated from the heat and jet lag and did not see all we wanted to. The one surprise to us was the beauty of the Church of St-Etienne-du-Mont near The Pantheon. Although we saw many of the famous churches in Paris, this one stood out for its beauty, cleanliness, and peacefulness—we recommend it to all. We attended Sunday services at the Church of St-Sulpice where we heard their famous organ. We had wanted to attend services at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, but the crowds were so overwhelming we decided against it.

We rented a car and drove to Versailles and then on to Chartres. We spent the entire next day photographing glorious Chartres Cathedral and its fantastic collection of 12th and 13th century stained glass. We continued on to Mont-St-Michel and were disappointed with the commercialism as well as the traffic jams! Perhaps one of the nicest times was walking around the Mont after dinner at sunset. We were alone and it was romantic, and with all of the silting of the bay, we did not have to fear the tide, as it only comes in during the highest spring tides, twice a month.

We visited several attractive Normandy Cathedrals including Bayeux, Caen, and Coutances. At Bayeux, we were able to see the famous Bayeux Tapestry. It is exciting to see this piece of historical documentation (or is it didacticism?) that has survived so long.

As you probably have guessed, one of the purposes of this trip was to expand our photo library. After completing our collection of the twenty-six medieval English Cathedrals on our honeymoon, we thought it would be interesting to expand into the better-known French Cathedrals, which are always mentioned when “Gothic” Architecture is discussed. We continued by visiting the remnant of Beauvais and ended the tour with Reims and Amiens—both certainly worth seeing. In addition to the medieval points of interest, we stopped at two moving locations related to the two World Wars—The American Cemetery-Romagne-sous-Montfaucon near Verdun and the site of the German battery at Le Hoc Point near Omaha Beach.

We left France via Strasbourg. After crossing the Rhine into Germany, we drove through The Black Forest and stopped at the Mummelsee, Gutach Falls near Triberg, and spent a pleasant evening in Freiburg.

Following our one-day stay in Germany, we drove to Interlaken, Switzerland, and explored the Lauterbrunnen Valley, Grindelwald, Murren, and Trümmelbach Falls. We took the cable car to the top of the Schilthorn and had marvelous views of the Alps from there. This is certainly an impressive, wild area, but even here it seems

tamed compared to North America, although we must admit that the roads through both Grimsel Pass and Furka Pass were some of the most exciting that Richard has ever driven!

Mary Beth left for home from Zurich, and Richard continued on to his meetings in Israel. Before the meetings, he managed to drive around the Sea of Galilee, obtain some Jordan River water, visit the ruins at Capernaum and Caesarea, see the site of the Sermon on the Mount, and tour the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. After the meetings, Richard and some colleagues saw the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Western [Wailing] Wall in Jerusalem and visited Masada and the Dead Sea.

The following week Richard spent most of the time on business in Tangier, Morocco, but did manage to see a little bit of the market, or souk, and bought Mary Beth an elaborate Moroccan caftan.

After Richard's return we looked at our 160 rolls of slides and discussed changing churches for political reasons. At the end of the summer, we decided to leave St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Glendale and join St. Luke's of the Mountains Episcopal Church in La Crescenta. We have joined the choir and Richard has been asked to be on the Search Committee since the Rector there recently left.

As many of you know, Richard has become a forum administrator (or SysOp) for the Photography Forum on The CompuServe Information Service. This is a public computer bulletin board system which has almost one million members worldwide. The PhotoForum attracts photographers, both professional and amateur, from all over the world. One of the members, retired Kodak staff photographer Bob Clemens, was Kodak's resident photo expert in Yosemite for the month of August. We drove to Yosemite to meet Bob and had a PhotoForum picnic. It was a fun chance to see the people we had been typing to.

In an attempt to relax, we took off for our anniversary in mid-September to one of our favorite haunts, Cambria on the coast.

We had a good time and saw sea otters and harbor seals as usual.

In October, Richard had a trip to New York and then back to Israel. Not to miss out on more photo opportunities, he managed to revisit Masada and this time had the opportunity to float in the Dead Sea. In addition he visited St. George's Monastery near Jericho and spent time in Jerusalem, including an extremely moving visit to the Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem.

Due to the draught, the City of Glendale has rationed our water this year. Our garden, therefore, did not have the blooms that attracts some of the wildlife. However, we did have Dan and Marilyn (California) Quail in our backyard for a while! We still have the occasional deer, raccoon, possum, and tarantula.

We will be in Aurora, Ontario, this year from December 21st until January 2nd when we leave to spend a couple of days with Richard's parents, Jay and Dick, in Somers, New York. We will return to California on January 5th. We will be arriving in Aurora just in time for Mary Beth's mother's birthday on December 22nd. Cathie, Theo, and some of the Joyce family are expected to be in Aurora to join in celebrating Margaret's birthday. We also hope to see some of the McIntyre clan during the holidays, too! We look forward to seeing as many people as we can, but it often proves difficult to fit everybody in. Richard is hoping to have a PhotoForum dinner on December 23rd in Toronto.

Wishing you peace, happiness, and love this Christmastide, and best wishes for a joyous New Year.

Mary Beth and Richard