

Mary Beth and Richard, Christmas, 1992

This has certainly been an interesting year for us and for the United States! Richard is very glad that the political campaigns are over, the ballots are in (Mary Beth is still Canadian and cannot vote) and we can once and for all get on with living! For us, it has been a year full of many ups and a few downs.

Since our last Christmas letter, we had a wonderful visit with Margaret, John, the McIntyre clan and the Joyces in Aurora at Christmastime, followed by a few days at New Years with Jay and Dick Hess in Somers. This year, Margaret and John are coming to Glendale to be with us.

Unfortunately, on January 2, Mary Beth's brother, John, slipped on the ice in his driveway and broke his hip just a few hours after we left Aurora. On a happier note though, it provided an opportunity for both Margaret and John to spend the month of March with us to recuperate and get some outdoor exercise. During that time we managed to take two long weekend trips, one to Anza-Borrego State Park and Joshua Tree National Monument, and an even longer trip (mileage wise) to Death Valley. As usual, Richard took some good pictures.

In February, Robert and Louana McIntyre were in the Los Angeles area attending seminars at the Crystal Cathedral and vacationing, so we took the opportunity to see some of San Diego with them, visit, and have some fun.

Richard's Aunt Betty and Uncle Gerry from Florida visited us for Easter weekend. Our entertainment included a tour of the Desert Poppy Preserve. It was great seeing them, and getting to know them better.

In early May, we attempted another infertility cycle. In February, our new doctor found a previously undetected blockage, so on May 2, Mary Beth had outpatient surgery to correct the problem. To make a long story short, Mary Beth then became pregnant with

the help of fertility drugs. Unfortunately, she had a uterine and tubal pregnancy at the same time (a 1 in 5,000 chance), and the end result was that she lost both pregnancies and had two more outpatient surgeries. She also lost one fallopian tube. So, we're wondering how long we'll keep trying. Please keep us in your prayers.

Luckily, our big excitement for the year was just around the bend—a trip to Alaska during the last three weeks of August. This spring, we applied for the lottery at the McNeil River Bear Sanctuary and we won! We flew to Anchorage, rented a Ford Explorer, and then drove to Seward in the rain. We had a lot of rain on this trip, more than our previous trips. From Seward, we took an all-day cruise of Kenai Fjords National Park. This is a wonderful expanse of totally unspoiled wilderness that we could only get a small glimpse of. The weather could have been better for this trip as well. The highlight was stopping to watch a humpback whale and calf for over a half hour.

From Seward, we drove to Homer and had a free day preparing for the trip to McNeil. The day before our permit became valid, we flew the 100 or so miles from Homer to the McNeil River compound in a 1954 Otter with floats. Our first float plane trip was quite pleasant! We got our gear to the campsite and set up our tent. We were all in the cook house (there were about thirteen of us and ten could go out at any one time to the bear viewing site) the first night when a brown bear decided to wander into camp. A blast on the airhorn sent him high-tailing out of there. The next morning we slogged for two miles through mud in our hipboots, carrying heavy packs of camera equipment to the bear-viewing pad. Then we spent about six hours watching. It was truly exciting—we even saw a small fight over a stolen salmon.

The bears at McNeil River are conditioned to be human-neutral which makes this a very safe place to view

these magnificent animals. This is accomplished by having the same number of people at the bear viewing pad at the falls each day and by scrupulous campground sanitation. None of the bears associate people with food. Unfortunately, due to the politics of land use, this conditioning can also be the bear's downfall as they have lost their inherent fear of man, and that does not do them well when they walk into areas where hunting is permitted.

That night and the next two days were quite stormy, with winds in the 35 m. p. h. range and some rain. Our rented tent held up and we managed a turn in the wood-fired sauna which felt really good. It was a time to read and relax. The last evening we were to be there the weather cleared and we had a beautiful sunset. The next day we had an abbreviated trip to the falls since our plane was due in on the high tide. On our way to the falls, Richard managed to step into a hole along the trail. He used his hiking boots to minimize the pain during the remainder of the trip. When we got home, we discovered he had broken three bones in his foot, but fortunately, nothing had to be done by the orthopedic surgeon.

We returned that day to Homer in the same Otter, and managed to have some good views of the surrounding country which were outstandingly beautiful!

Leaving early the next day from Homer, we luckily drove through Anchorage about three hours before the ashfall from Mount Spurr's eruption. We continued to have a fair amount of rain for three days as we drove via Talkeetna, the Denali Highway through Delta Junction, Tok, and the Top of the World Highway to Dawson City.

We used Dawson City as a jumping-off point to drive the Dempster Highway north of the Arctic Circle to Inuvik, Northwest Territories (460 miles). The drive through the Ogilvie Mountains was beautiful and the weather had cleared. About 160 miles into this trip,

Mary Beth and Richard, Christmas, 1992

we had a flat tire. We discovered that the esteemed car rental company had not fully checked the spare which had two great holes in the sidewall. Fortunately, a constable with the RCMP came along and was able to radio, via Whitehorse!, to Eagle Plains for them to send a tow truck. We spent the next day in Eagle Plains awaiting the tires which were sent down from Inuvik. We had only allocated four days for driving from Dawson and returning to Dawson, so our third day out we decided to drive North at least to the Arctic Circle. It was a beautiful day, so we drove as far north as the Mackenzie River before returning to Eagle Plains. The Richardson Mountains were also quite attractive, but reminded us of portions of the Mojave. For us, then, the Ogilvie Mountains were more interesting.

After returning to Dawson City, we took a walking tour of the historic area and a guided tour of the Palace Grand Theatre. The next day, we headed back over the Top Of The World highway and had another good lunch at the Chicken Cafe. This was another of our 300+ mile days, as we pushed through to Copper Center. The following day, we drove the McCarthy Road which is actually an old railroad roadbed to the parking at the Kennicott River. The bridge across the river was washed out many years ago, and the only way across the rushing glacial-fed torrent is by a hand-pulled cable car or tram (300 feet). After we got our gear and ourselves across, we found it was another half mile to the second crossing which thankfully has been replaced with a footbridge. It was there that the van met us. The sore foot did not make this a terribly enjoyable portion of the trip, but the tram was exciting!

We stayed at the Kennicott Glacier Lodge and toured the abandoned mill sites of the Kennecott Copper Mine. The next morning we took a wonderful flightseeing tour of Wrangell-St. Elias Park—a true gem.

We backtracked down the McCarthy Road and headed to Valdez. From

Valdez we took a day-long cruise out to the Columbia Glacier which is in the process of destroying itself and retreating back out of the bay towards land. We stayed in a wonderful Bed and Breakfast in Valdez. The following day we took the ferry from Valdez to Whittier and the car-train from Whittier to Portage, then drove to Anchorage and flew home the next day (August 30th).

For our anniversary in September, we drove through Los Padres National Forest and spent some time photographing a hamming roadrunner. We spent the night in Ojai and the following day took an all-day cruise to Anacapa Island in the Channel Islands. Although we do not like summers in Los Angeles, it is our home and we are trying to appreciate it. We enjoy finding out-of-the-way locations that are wild and undeveloped nearer to home than Alaska, although here it is islands of wilderness as opposed to Alaska being islands of civilization.

Richard has traveled less this year, although there was still one trip to Israel this spring. He also went to both the Photo Marketing Association and National Association of Broadcasters Conventions in Las Vegas. As part of the NAB convention, Richard stayed at the historic Hotel Nipton in the Mojave which is now a wonderful Bed and Breakfast. We returned there as we explored the Desert over Thanksgiving. This trip included a tour of the old Route 66, Kelso Dunes, back roads of Death Valley, the Ancient Bristlecone pines in the snow, and the Saline Valley.

We expect that Richard will be making frequent trips to Seattle now that he is managing a project for Microsoft's corporate TV center.

In October, we attended a wonderful couples retreat sponsored by St. Luke's Episcopal Church where we are members. Shortly after we joined, the Rector resigned, and Richard assisted with the Parish Profile and was then asked to be on the Search Committee.

A new Rector started December First and we are all looking forward to a long and positive relationship.

Mary Beth is still at Glendale Presbyterian Church, and Richard was promoted to Director of Engineering at National TeleConsultants on December 10th. Although Richard expects to stay active in CompuServe's Photography Forum, he has resigned as a SysOp due to time pressures.

We have a Gateway 486DX-2/66MHz computer on order, and are hoping to learn Windows, Excel, Access, Powerpoint, and Word for Windows. Our present computer will become Mary Beth's.

We wish you a peaceful and joyous Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.