

Holiday Letter 1997

No Italy, But California, Here We Come!

As you can tell, we are not sending this to you from Naples, Italy. Now most of you know Priscilla has Psoriatic Arthritis, and because of this, she did not pass the Navy's medical screening for overseas. So now the Navy has put Priscilla in the Exceptional Family Member Program, which means I have to be stationed near a major Naval Medical Facility in the states. And that is the reason why they are now transferring us to San Diego.

Even though Priscilla was really disappointed not to be going to Europe, she and I both are excited about going to sunny Southern California. Priscilla lived in Orange Country for 12 years, through all of the 1980s, and she has some great friends out there. Plus, she loves the weather... most of you know how she hates the snow and cold here on the East Coast. San Diego is also one of my favorite cities. I was stationed on the aircraft carrier USS Constellation out of Naval Air Station North Island there in S.D. for four and a half years in the late 1980s.

Now I will be assigned to Mobility Detachment Four out of Naval Media Center Detachment San Diego located on the Naval Station at 32nd Street. My main job will be to deploy to remote locations anywhere in the world for up to six months working at or operating a mobile Armed Forces Radio and Television Station for any troops that would be there, like in Bosnia right now, or when we had troops in Haiti. They also could send me for up to six months to any AFRTS station at an overseas Navy base, but that would be only if that station is drastically short of personnel and needs a body. When I'm not deployed, I'll be working out of San Diego doing stories for Navy/Marine Corps News.

I just left Navy/Marine Corps News and transferred out of the Naval Media Center Headquarters here in D.C. the day before Thanksgiving. I'm now attending a three-week Broadcast Managers Course at the Defense Information School located at Fort Meade, Maryland, 25 miles north of here. I graduate on 19 December, and that's when we start driving across country. I have to be in San Diego on 3 January for a two-week leadership course before I officially report to the Media Center Detachment there. Priscilla's last day at Tysons Public Auto Auction is 14 December. The movers come on 16 and 17 December and we head out on Friday.

Happy Holidays!

There just isn't enough time for us to drive all the way to Portland or California for Christmas, so our plan is to spend the holiday in Salt Lake City where Priscilla has a couple of life long friends. Then on to Anaheim where we plan to spend New Year's Eve at Disneyland with more of Priscilla's old buddies. And then on to San Diego. During the entire trip across the country we hope to have enough time to stop in Louisville to visit the Kentucky Derby Museum at Churchill Downs, to stop in St. Louis and visit the Arch, maybe Kansas City to see the Trails West Museum... I would like to stop in Dodge City in Kansas but is a little out of the way... Priscilla wants to see Denver or something in Colorado, and we are definitely visiting the Grand Canyon. Of course, all of this (except the Grand canyon) depends on weather conditions and getting to Salt Lake City by Christmas, without having to drive 18-hour days.

So those are some of the places we want to see on our trip west. Most of you know how we like to travel and see things, and of course we've done a good bit of that this past year. Here are some of the highlights:

Lake Tahoe, Nevada... This past October we went to Lake Tahoe. This trip was suppose to be our vacation enroute to Italy, but we had already bought the nonrefundable tickets when that was canceled, so we went anyway. Since it was suppose to be our good-bye trip before three years in Europe, we had planned on everybody visiting us there, but now that we're moving to California, the only people that visited us there were my cousins, Debbie and Zesto Baily and their kids. They live in Sacramento, so it was a short drive to Lake Tahoe, and they stayed with us for a couple of days of the week we spent there.

We have a timeshare in Orlando, Florida, and we traded our week there for the week in Tahoe. We had a great time and it was some beautify country. The lake was a very pretty blue and the mountains and evergreen trees were picturesque. We visited the Ponderosa, where the old TV show Bonanza was filmed, and now it's an old west attraction. It was pretty cool touring the house where Little Joe and Hoss Cartwright grew up.

Another adventure that Priscilla and I did was to take a cruise on a paddlewheel boat out on the lake to Emerald Bay. The water there is as clear green as an emerald, so pretty, and there's an old Scottish castle at the end of the bay. We ate lunch aboard, enjoyed the scenery, took pictures and really enjoyed ourselves.

We also took a side trip up to Crater Lake in Oregon... now that's a deep vivid blue and the scenery is breathtaking.

Of course, we also did some gambling in Tahoe... overall for the week I ended up winning \$300. And we spent it upgrading to first class seating for our flight back to D.C.

Yorktown, Virginia... In the late summer, we took a trip down to Williamsburg, Virginia, not to visit historic Williamsburg because both of us have already been there a couple of times, but instead to visit Yorktown and Jamestown.

Yorktown is where George Washington led his troops to victory over British General Lord Charles Cornwallis and his Redcoats in 1781, which ended the Revolutionary War, securing independence for the United States, and changing the course of world history. The original battlefield is protected by the National Park service, and you can still see earthworks where cannons were placed, although some of them were built up during the civil war, and some are reconstructed. They also have some pretty old cannons there, from both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.

There is also a place called the Victory Center nearby, a living history museum of the American Revolution. It not only includes an indoor museum about the war, it also includes a working 1780s farmsite with a tobacco barn, log kitchen, corn and other crops. I really got a kick out of the turkeys wondering around. Costumed guides there showed us how tobacco and crops were cultivated, meals cooked, and how rural life was lived back then on a small farm. There is also a working Continental Army Encampment, where costumed troops showed us how they lived and worked. It was all very interesting, and it all seemed like a very hard life for those that lived in that time.

Jamestown, Virginia... While Yorktown represents the end of Colonial America, Jamestown represents the beginning. This was the site of the first enduring English city in the New World, where the stories of Pocahontas and John Smith grew and became legend almost 400 years ago. Jamestown is the story of suffering and hardship, of political idealism and hope, and, ultimately, of the triumph of human spirit. At the actual park, we were able to see an archaeologist site and the items they found at the rediscovered 1607 James Fort. And the historic buildings from that time period and through the years since the 1600s. What I found really interesting was the reconstructed 17th century glasshouse, where costumed craftsmen demonstrated the art of glass-blowing. I have some great photos.

Nearby is the Jamestown Settlement, which is laid out similar to the Yorktown Victory Center. They have a working re-created colonial fort with a wood palisade encircling wattle-and-daub buildings, a Powhatan Indian village, but my favorite were the three tall-masted ships. I don't remember the number of people, but crowded ships like these were home to the colony for the 144-day Atlantic Ocean crossing. It's hard to imagine what that must have been like.

Fredricksburg, Virginia and Antietam, Maryland... I saw these Civil War battlefields myself. Priscilla was with me in Fredricksburg but she didn't walk back into the different sites because her knees were hurting her. Fredricksburg was "where uncommon valor was common place." In the Fredricksburg area, there were four different battles resulting in over 100,000 casualties. It's unnerving to be actually standing in places like the sunken road where bodies piled up on top of each other and filled the road. I had to fight to keep the tears inside.

I was at Antietam National Battlefield for the 135th anniversary. The battle of Antietam is known as the bloodiest day of the Civil War, and more Americans were killed or wounded here on 17 September 1862 (in just 12 hours) than on any other single day, 23,110. That number is overwhelming. At a farm nearby I witnessed a reenactment of this battle, with only 15,000 men (I think) and they filled the entire scene. The reenactment seemed so real and so big, I can't imagine what the real battle must have been like. At the battlefield itself, I have never seen more monuments and statues, except for Gettysburgh. What a sad day in American history.

Baltimore National Aquarium... Priscilla and I greatly enjoyed our visit here. We are big sea life fans, especially sea mammals. They have a dolphin show and some outstanding exhibits including the stingray, jellyfish, sharks and even puffins. They also had a South American Rain Forest exhibit that you walked through and you really felt like you were in a rain forest, humidity and all. Outside the aquarium was the submarine USS Torsk, which sank the last vessel of World War II. I got a chance to walk through this historic small diesel powered sub which carried a crew of only 80 men. I thought I had small living quarters on an aircraft carrier. That was the Fairmont Hotel compared to this sub.

Holocaust Museum... After visiting this museum, both Priscilla and I were very somber, low, depressed. It's hard not to be after seeing what the Nazis did to the Jews and others. The museum showed how the Nazis used propaganda and terror to spread their sick ideas of racism, anti-Semitism and extreme nationalism. They described the ghettos, deportations, slave labor and concentration camps, and finally the mobile killing units and the death camps. They used photos, films, and exhibits with the survivors telling the story, the story of how Nazi Germany murdered six million people, mostly Jews, but also Roma and Sinti, Poles, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet POWs, political dissidents, and even people with disabilities. If Priscilla would have been in Germany, she would have been a victim.

There was this one boxcar which was actually used by the Nazis to transport their victims, that you walked through. I stopped to try to imagine what it must have been like to travel in such a thing, to be so overcrowded you could hardly breath, and Priscilla couldn't handle it, she actually really had a hard time breathing and pushed me on through the exhibit. What an effect that and the rest of the building actually had on us. I'm sure we will never forget some of these faces and some of those voices, and the world needs to never forget. Although, after Bosnia, one really wonders what we have learned, if anything.

There are so many interesting things we did or saw, that I wish I had the space to talk about, but I want to keep this holiday letter to one page. We did visit the National Geographic Magazine and the Newseum, among others, but I'll have to tell you all about these places in another letter. We also got a chance to see some professional sports... The Portland Trailblazers against the Washington Bullets, the last game Washington played as the Bullets (in the playoffs against the Chicago Bulls), the Baltimore Orioles against the Seattle Mariners and the New York Yankees, a Naval Academy football game against Rutgers, the Washington Redskins against the New York Giants, and recently for my birthday, Priscilla took me to see the Baltimore Ravens battle the Seattle Seahawks. We also saw "The King and I" with Haley Mills at the Kennedy Center and one of the best theatre productions I have ever seen "Rent" at the National Theater.

Well, I'm soon going to be kicked out of the building where I am typing this, plus I'm at the bottom of the page, so I need to wrap it up. Here's wishing everybody a wonderful safe holiday season. May the spirit of the season fill your heart every day all year long. Priscilla and I both send our love and affection. Come visit us in San Diego!

Much Affection,
Bill and Priscilla