25 December 2001

Friends, family and loved ones,

Here's hoping the joy you received opening holiday presents continues throughout the new year and that 2002 will be much better then last year. 2001 was not the best of years for us or for many. Besides the 11 Sept. terrorists' attacks, my Mother passed away and we lost Uncle Chuck, too. But the holidays are a great time to remember with pleasure, a great time to start smiling again, a great time to once again open our hearts to friends and family, people we love and cherish all across the country.

I'll begin this letter with Christmas 2000. We spent Christmas Eve day with my Aunt Phyllis and Uncle Chuck in Vista, along with my cousins, the Bishops, on my Mom's side of the family, and their families, too. And then we spent Christmas day with our long time friend Greta Reafsnyder and her family in Garden Grove. We're seriously thinking about returning to Southern California after I retire from the Navy hopefully in less than two years. And if we do, then spending the holiday with the Bishops and the Reafsnyders will probably become a Christmas tradition with us. And what a warm, nice tradition it is… spending the holidays with great people and good friends.

On 29 Dec we were at the Holiday Bowl at the Q in San Diego and we saw the Oregon Fighting Ducks whip up on those Texas Longhorns. We went with my good friends from San Diego, Doug Stutz and Ray Mooney and a bunch of Doug's U of O friends. My "duck lips" were out and quacking away. How about them Ducks THIS year, ranked number two in the coaches' poll and in the sports writers' poll. They're playing in the Fiesta Bowl against Colorado on New Year's Day

We spent New Year's Eve day at Disneyland. The previous year Priscilla and I both spent the beginning of the new century in bed sick, but this time we did make it to the "happiest place on earth." We had a grand time... but we didn't make it to midnight... just too tired. We started our adventure when the place opened and just wore ourselves out. So we left Disneyland just after the fireworks and snow. The snow is actually soap bubbles, like from when you take a bubble bath, but it sure looks like snow coming down from the sky. The next day we went to the Rose Parade in Pasadena with Cheri Singleton. We had great reserved handicapped curb spaces, right up front. The floats, horses, and bands... we loved them all. Cheri bought me this great big green horn and I blew it the entire day. It was like going to a party.

We watched the Super Bowl last January at Todd and Lynn's in Sun City with Greta, Cherie, more friends and family. We sure do miss all those guys. What a great time they all are. As far as the Super Bowl, Priscilla was thrilled that her N.Y. Giants made it there but she was very disappointed in their performance.

You know, we really made some good friends in Southern California, like Bill and Jeanette. We went over to their house for a great dinner before we departed on our cross-country trip. Most of you know that I was transferred from San Diego back to Washington, D.C., where I am now the managing editor for the Navy magazine called Surface Warfare. But before I talk about jobs, let me tell you about our trip across the nation. All together we traveled 7,165 miles hitting 18 different states in 30 days. In total we were able to visit with 74 relatives and friends along the way. Now, the first time I wrote about the trip and included every single person, it went 10 pages. And that's also the reason this letter is late. It has taken me some extra time to edit it down. And in so doing I had to get rid of most of the names during the trip, and only mentioned, for the most part, the great places we visited. We sure hope you don't mind….

On 1 Feb. we packed up our cat Amore and departed San Diego. Our first stop was the Hearst Castle on the Central California Coast. It is a palace in every sense of the word. The estate's magnificent main house "Casa Grande" and three guesthouses are of Mediterranean Revival style, with the imposing towers of Casa Grande being inspired by a Spanish cathedral. The blending of this architectural style with the surrounding land, and the man's superb European and Mediterranean art collection, is just seamless and beautiful. In 1919 publisher William Randolph Hearst hired a female architect (unheard of back then), Julia Morgan, to design one of the world's greatest showplaces. It is in San Simeon off Highway 1 on what Hearst called "The Enchanted Hill." Even though it was never totally completed, Hearst and his family begin living there and entertaining celebrity guests in the mid 1920s. In 1947 the estate included 165 rooms and 127 acres of gardens, terraces, pools and walkways. We truly enjoyed the majesty, craftsmanship and attention to detail that makes the castle unique. On our tour, we first witnessed the Roman Pool, an indoor pool lined with blue Venetian glass and real gold tiles. Then we saw the Neptune Pool, a very beautiful Greco-Roman style outdoor pool that would look perfect right next to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. Around the main building we saw many wonderful marble statues. And we toured five main rooms of the Casa Grande, each totally filled with Gothic and Flemish tapestries; Spanish, Greek and Roman antiques; Roman mosaics; and even a carved antique Spanish ceiling. Probably the best part of the estate was the magnificent view of the ocean, the coastline and the surrounding hills. After Hearst Castle we headed for Palo Alto.

In the San Francisco Bay area we stayed with Priscilla's sister Laurene and her family. Late morning on Sunday, we drove over the hill through some majestic redwood trees and ended up at a great beach. Laurene has three precious children and we had such a great time with them. At the time, Reed was nine years old and just got

soaked playing in the waves, and yes, it was very cold. This kid is such a free spirit and I hope he stays this way when he gets older. Erin at the time was five years old and adorable. And the youngest is Eve, at the time only two years old, and she is talking up a storm and pushing Mom as far as she can, like all two-year-olds do. They are all so smart and sharp. Eve already knows the letters N-A-P means nap and told us point blank that she was not ready for a nap. We had a great time at the beach and then later that evening we joined Laurene and Steve with some of their guests for dinner. One of the guests was Diana Walker, who has been Time magazine's White House photographer for the last 20 years. The dinner was great but the conversation was fascinating. Steve is very sharp and listening to them talk... I was all ears and soaked it all in. It was a very nice evening.

When we arrived at my cousin's in Sacramento, we found out that my Uncle Chuck passed away. Priscilla and I got to know him and my Aunt Phyllis pretty well while we were stationed in San Diego. Aunt Phyllis is my Mom's sister and they live in Vista, just a bit north of San Diego. So we immediately headed back down to Vista. My Uncle's funeral was very nice. He was in the Marine Corps for 30 years and received full military honors. A retired Navy chaplain spoke and talked about his serving in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. I was very proud and moved by all of it. I hope mine is as nice some day. Afterwards, we headed back up to Northern California.

We spent time in Sacramento and Anderson, Calif., with friends and more cousins, then we headed north past Mt Shasta where there was about a foot of snow on the ground, but the roads were mostly clear. From Mt. Shasta and on up into Southern Oregon is just beautiful country. The trees and the mountains, the only place prettier is the Central Oregon Coast. Throw in the ocean and you have God's Country. It was good to be back in Oregon. We stopped in Roseburg to visit with some friends and then arrived at my brother Bob's house in Milwaukee (just south of Portland). We spent Monday afternoon with my Mom and her husband Paul talking about Uncle Chuck, old times and the future, and then we had dinner with my other brother Steve and his wife Rosemary. We all seem to be getting along pretty darn good and that hasn't always been the case. I think we are all trying real hard and that makes for great get-togethers.

While in the Portland area, Priscilla and I took a side trip and visited Mount St. Helens, which exploded on 18 May 1980 and killed 57 people. We stopped at the Visitor Center near Castle Rock and Priscilla learned what I already knew, that during the eruption 1,300 feet of the summit vanished in the explosion, leaving in its place a 2,000-foot deep crater more then a mile wide and nearly two and a half miles long. St. Helens went from being 9,677 feet tall to only 8,364 feet now, caused mostly by the avalanche-landslide and not the blast. The debris avalanche was more than half a cubic mile in volume, one of the largest ever recorded. North of the mountain, 235 square miles of land was devastated by the blast cloud and covered by hot volcanic debris. The blast tore down the side of the mountain traveling as a hot, churning mass of gas, rock, ash and ice. A scorching hot 680 degrees, the blast cloud passed at 250 miles per hour. It mowed down, shattered and splintered all timber like matchsticks, some trees 200 feet tall. Within six miles north of the volcano, where dense forest once stood, no trees remained standing.

The blast caused an avalanche that was deflected westward down the Tutle River. It left a deposit more than 600 feet deep in some places, and crunched downstream at speeds in excess of 80 miles per hour and in minutes filled 14 miles of the river channel to an average depth of 150 feet. The mudflow traveled at seven feet per second and its smooth surface was punctuated by trees, logs, buildings, homes, blocks of ice, burning wood, and logging equipment. Bridges were ripped from their supports. Twelve hours after it started, the river was 30 feet higher then it was earlier in the day. More than a hundred people had to be rescued. The eruption lasted a full day and a half and turned the once beautiful picture postcard symmetrical cone of a mountain into a jagged devastating moonscape. Twenty years later, nature is returning to the area but you can still see much of the devastation. It was a perfect day, so I was able to get some great photos of the volcano and the Tutle River cutting its way through the mud, ash and debris. I hiked down a couple of miles to what was left of the actual mudflow and the sight is just awesome. You can easily imagine what it might have been like. What a great experience to get within probably 10 miles of the volcano, up to the 3,800 foot level. Priscilla and I left the area in awe and with a new respect for the power of nature.

That evening we had dinner with one of Priscilla's friends at the Sexton Tavern on Marine Drive in Portland. Priscilla and Julie had a great time talking mostly about family and friends, while I ate oysters, drank Henry Weinhards and watched the Trail Blazers kick Minnesota on the big screen TV. It was great seeing all kinds of people rooting for and wearing Portland Trail Blazers clothes again. You won't see too many big Trail Blazer pro basketball fans outside Oregon. The next afternoon we had lunch with more friends and then that evening we had a great Valentine dinner with my brothers and their wives, and with my Mom and her husband. This is probably the first time we were all together since Bob and Lalita's wedding four and a half years ago not counting Mom's surgery two years ago. And everything was very positive and upbeat and we all got along very well... lots of laughter and teasing... just an outstanding time.

We left the Portland area on 15 Feb. and made a stop near Biggs at the Deschutes River Crossing. Beginning in 1843, and for just about the next 40 years, 50,000 emigrants, mostly farming families, followed the Oregon Trail to settle in the Great Northwest. Their 2,000-mile, six-month journey represents the largest and longest voluntary overland migration of families in America's westward expansion. It is hard to imagine that these

people packed all their belongings into a wagon about the size of a mini-van and headed off to face terrible storms, scorching heat, rain, snow, fast rivers, undrinkable water, starvation, disease and accidents.

Priscilla and I looked out across the river where the wagon trains crossed and could imagine the worn out people making their way through the water, the oxen pulling their wagons through the mud and up the bank. They had just completed nearly 800 miles of mountainous terrain from the Rockies to the Cascades. At Arlington I took some back roads to get to Four Mile Canyon. There we found deep rut wagon train scars where the emigrants climbed out of the canyon. It is hard to believe that 150 years later you can still see the ruts the wagons made. Seeing the ruts makes it more real and not just history or a story. Looking at these ruts you can feel the hardships the pioneers went through. From there we continued east on this gravel rode into nothingness. At times the road was no more then dirt between fields and Priscilla was a little more then concerned about where we were and where we were going. We were out in the middle of nowhere and at times there was nothing but dirt, plants and fields for as far as you could see. Finally we ran into a gate with a sign that read, "Warning, Keep Out, U.S. Government Land, U.S. Navy Property, Lasers in Use, Keep Out!" Priscilla thought that we had stumbled onto some new Area 51, but it was only the Boardman Bombing Range that I had forgotten about.

After a day chasing the Oregon Trail in the desolation of Eastern Oregon we arrived in La Grande. We met friends there for dinner and also spent the night. We next day we headed north to Joseph. Joseph is named for the famous Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indians. It is here in the Wallowa Valley and mountains that his tribe lived, and in 1877 he headed a group of Nez Perce who refused to leave land ceded to the U.S. through a fraudulent treaty. The U.S. decided to force his people to a reservation, but Chief Joseph and his people fought back. The group’s remarkable 15-week fighting retreat across Oregon, Idaho and Montana ended in surrender near the Canadian border. Many leaders and generals have studied his tactics and survival against overwhelming odds, including Rommel and Patton. Chief Joseph's grave is in an old Indian cemetery on the banks of the Wallowa Lake, just a few miles south of Joseph. We stopped to see where this great person was laid to rest. We also went on down to the south end of the lake near the Wallowa Lodge. That's where I was taking pictures of this sign, and then looked up this packed-snow road and saw a bunch of deer heading directly for me. I got Priscilla's attention and moved over by the truck, and 11 mule deer trotted down the road. Some of them stopped for a moment and checked us out as I took some pictures. Then they moved on down the road before disappearing over a hill. They went right by us. It was awesome. Priscilla and I couldn't believe it. They were beautiful creatures going about their lives in nature's world and we got a chance to peak in.

We did a lot of peaking in on nature that day. Including these 11, we saw a total of 27 deer on this one day. We also saw eagles, bald eagles that is, five of them. Priscilla was in total shock. She had never seen America's symbol, until now, and she was thrilled. That evening we made a stop in Baker City and visited another friend before we continued on to Idaho. We arrived in Pocatello on 17 Feb. and spent a couple of nights with friends at the Holiday Inn there. We all took another side trip here and visited Lava Hot Springs. This town looks like it use to be one great place to visit, but now it’s lost a bit of its luster. There are still some pretty cool gift shops to visit but they could use a decent restaurant. We visited the local museum and then took in the mineral hot springs. It was very nice to relax in the naturally heated 102-degree water.

From Pocatello we headed for West Yellowstone. It was snowing when we left Pocatello, but by the time we reached the mountains, the sun came out so that we could enjoy the splendid mountain scenery. The road was clear but there was snow all around us, and the snow glistened off the mountains, the Rocky Mountains. We climbed to over 7,000 feet and at about 10 miles from West Yellowstone, we stopped at the Idaho-Montana border, which is also the Continental Divide. Priscilla and I got out of the truck and took some pictures of each other in front of the "Welcome to Montana" sign. Then when we went back to the truck, it was locked. I had left the keys in the ignition, so we couldn't get in. First, Priscilla thought I was playing a joke and then I thought she was playing a joke. But no, we were locked out. The best that we can figure is that Amore, our cat, locked us out. She must have accidentally stood on the door arm rest and hit the lock button. When we figured this must have happened, Priscilla just started laughing. Here I am trying to get Amore to step on the unlock button and Priscilla is rolling. She is still laughing when this couple pulls up to also take some pictures at the border. When we told them what happened they also started laughing. I was the only one not laughing. Their names were Herb and Rita, and they seemed like some very nice people, so Priscilla went with them to town to get some help. We decided it was best for me to stay by myself out in the cold with the truck, and for Priscilla to go to town as Herb and Rita only had room for one person. After they left, I tried again to get Amore to step on the button to unlock the door, and I got excited when I heard the sound of the locks, but no, she must have stepped on the lock button again, because they were still locked. After another minute of me tapping on the window, Amore got bored, went to a comfortable spot, sat down and just looked at me.

About 20 minutes later, a locksmith came up from town, unlocked the door in less then five minutes, took my 40 bucks and then headed back to town. I'll tell you this, I will never leave my keys in the truck again. The locksmith told me where Priscilla was, so I picked her up and we went to check in at Days Inn. While we were checking in and checking on our tour of Yellowstone for the next day, Herb walks in. It seems he and Rita are also going on this tour, and we're the only four signed up. What a coincidence it is that the people who helped us out at

the border are also the people we went on the tour with. Our entire stay at the Days Inn there was a package deal, paid for with a monetary Christmas gift from Priscilla's Mom. We received two nights stay, a "Sno-Van" tour of Yellowstone to Old Faithful and back, two box lunches and two free coupons for dinner. We used one of the coupons for dinner on Monday night, and I had a very good buffalo meatloaf. The restaurant at the Days Inn is called Trappers and it was outstanding... friendly people and plenty of good food at good prices. Later that evening we took advantage of the indoor heated pool with a fun double-curve water slide and two Jacuzzis.

The next morning we joined our rescuers, Herb and Rita, at the Sno-Van. This vehicle we rode in for the Yellowstone tour is very interesting. It's a regular van, but instead of wheels it has tread shaped in a triangle form. It looked like some Star Wars adaptation. We were really looking forward to seeing lots of animals, but we didn't see as many as we thought we might. We did see a couple of coyotes, a couple of bald eagles, and some elk, but they were all far away. Our tour guide told us that it wouldn't be long before the elk in Yellowstone are all gone, just like the moose is now. And he said that was because of the recent introduction of the wolf. Of course we did see buffalo, lots and lots of buffalo, and some pretty close to the van. This is one of my favorite animals. They are smart, strong and majestic. They can handle winters that get down to -60 degrees and they've done well against the wolf, circling their young so the predators can't get them. There are more than 2,500 wild buffalo in the park, but at one time there were just 23 that survived in the wild, and that was for the entire U.S. The buffalo, after 60 million had once roamed the West, made Yellowstone their last stand. I think my favorite part of Yellowstone, though, was the volcanic items. A good portion of the park is a caldera, or like the top of a volcano. We saw four kinds of thermal features, gurgling mud pots, colorful hot springs, steaming fumaroles and active geysers, including Old Faithful. Although Old Faithful wasn't too impressive because it was snowing when it erupted, so we saw mostly steam against a white sky. I think what the other three passengers will remember most about Yellowstone, is the sno-van ride, which was very, very bumpy. The snow-covered roads were like washboards, created by the thousands of snowmobiles, and the sno-van ride was like being in a small boat on high choppy seas. I didn't mind it too much while the others were on the verge of getting sick. In fact, at one time, I fell asleep, and they couldn't believe that I was actually able to sleep during the long duration of continued bouncing.

By 22 Feb. we had made our way through Montana and not far from Billings we visited Pompeys Pillar. On the Yellowstone River is a large rock formation, a 150-foot sandstone pillar, and it is here where you can see tangible evidence making this place a national treasure. It's Capt. William Clark's carving: "Wm. Clark, July 25, 1806." His signature is the only remaining physical evidence on the trail of the historic journey. During Lewis and Clark's return from Oregon, the party split into two groups to explore different rivers. Clark and his party followed the Yellowstone. The National Historic Landmark, soon to be a National Monument, was closed for the season. But I didn't let that detour my desire to see history, especially when I may never cross this path again. So we parked the truck and I snuck across a field and over a fence, and around the riverside of the pillar. Near the building where there was a vehicle parked, I found the wooded stairs leading up to where the signature is protected by glass. I took many photos and then returned to my truck, feeling much joy in my success.

Next was the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. Picture if you can, 25 June 1876, the day when over 210 troopers of the 7th Cavalry fell in battle. The thunder of hooves, war cries of the Teton Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Indians, rifle fire and death chants softly echo across the plain. Sitting Bull was the leader of the Sioux, yet he wasn't in the battle, but Crazy Horse was there, and so was Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer. The legend makes Custer a hero, his "Last Stand," the last to fall in a brave battle at the top of a hill. A monument stands on this hill today and there are gravestones everywhere. These gravestones are suppose to be where troopers fell in battle and most are at the top of the hill. The legend was created because people didn't listen to what the Indians said happened. Now thanks to Native American descriptions, backed up by important archaeological surveys, firearms analysis and forensic pathology, we have a better understanding of what really happened. We know that Custer misjudged the number of Indians he was up against, we know he disobeyed orders from General Terry to not attack until Terry arrived, and we know Custer split up his command, not once, but twice. Most of the gravestone markers are wrong, and the last to die, about 28 men, did so not at the top of the hill, but in a deep ravine. And it wouldn't surprise me if Custer died early in the action, leaving his men without leadership and sure doom.

From the battlefield we traveled East on U.S. Highway 212 through the rest of Montana, Wyoming and on to South Dakota, somewhere on the way we saw a huge herd of antelope, must have been a least 200, and we also saw about 30 deer, not all at once like the antelope, but spread out along the entire length of the road. In South Dakota we saw Mt. Rushmore, or we tried to. It was covered in fog. But the Visitors Center is really outstanding and worth the trip. With large crisp photos, imaginative exhibits, and a 13-minute film, we learned how the great stone carvings were accomplished and a little about each of these great leaders. The mountain is 5,660 feet tall and each face is about 60 feet, or the height of a six-story building. We were there long enough to see the fog lift at times and uncover each of the four presidents. They are magnificent.

On 24 Feb. we stopped in Omaha, Neb. This is where Priscilla was born, so we did a pilgrimage. She was born in Nebraska Methodist Hospital and we found a Methodist Hospital at 86th and Dodge streets. But since this hospital had been built in 1968 it wasn't the correct one. However, while we were there, we did find out the old

building the hospital had been in was still standing at 36th and Cunnings. But before we headed there, I remembered there was an address on Priscilla's birth certificate, 3317 South 122nd, and figured that would not be too far from 86th and Dodge. Using my old cab driver skills, I was able to pull up in front of the very first house my beautiful wife lived in. This brought tears, as she was full of emotion for her father and mother, who must have been very happy in this tiny house with a brand new baby to love and cherish. From here we headed to 36th and Cunnings and found the old building where Priscilla was born. It is now operated by the Salvation Army and takes care of many needy people. After visiting Omaha, we headed back across the Missouri River into Iowa on I-80. At around dusk, we saw a sign warning us about deer in the area... then we came across a field and did see deer, not just a few, but what had to be at least a hundred white tail deer. I had never seen that many deer at one time. What a sight it was to behold. In Davenport, Iowa, we visited with friends and then stayed a couple of days with Priscilla's cousins near Dodgeville, Wisc.

On 27 Feb. we visited Chicago and the first thing we saw was Wrigley Field. It's just as it seems in the movies and on TV. We had our picture taken in front of the big red circus-like sign. It was pretty cool actually being there. Then we went to Gino's East for a gourmet legendary deep-dish Chicago style pizza. Inside there is graffiti everywhere and it covers everything... which makes the place very unique and cool. Their deep-dish pizza is famous for its golden crust and chunky tomato sauce, but to tell you the truth, I liked Zachary's in Oakland, CA, better. Gino's crust is too crispy and sweet, too much like a regular piecrust. Our next stop was the Navy Pier, a unique entertainment center and mall all on one pier stretching out into Lake Michigan. There are more than 50 acres of parks, promenades, gardens, shops, restaurants and entertainment attractions, including a 15-story tall Ferris wheel and an IMAX Theatre. Priscilla and I bought some souvenirs there, walked through a stained glass museum and enjoyed a live banjo musical group. From the pier we headed south to Grant Park and the Field Museum. There are some great views of the city and the "great lake" from that area on Solidarity Drive. Now I remember why they call this place the Windy City... the wind was biting cold coming off Lake Michigan, and I just about froze my ears off. This was the coldest part of the trip for me.

On our way to Ohio we had our picture taken in front of the University of Notre Dame, and then in Cleveland, the only thing we took time to see was the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Nothing captures the essence of the human spirit like music and no place captures the music like The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. We spent a three to four-hour journey through this remarkable history of Rock, the artists, the songs, and the legendary performances. We experienced incredible exhibits, classic films and rare collectibles. Priscilla and I truly enjoyed this museum. It is a testament to the remarkable history of rock and roll, a living monument to the music that changed our lives, a place to celebrate rock and roll in all its glory.

On 1 March, we made it to New Jersey where we ate New York style pizza and visited with Priscilla's friends and family in different parts of the garden state, including West Milford and High Crest Lake where Priscilla grew up. From there we headed on south to D.C., but we stopped in Beltsville, MD, and made a quick surprise visit with some of Priscilla's cousins, before finishing our trip. We were on the road more then a month and we saw some pretty cool sites and visited with some great people. Everybody who put us up for a night or two, thanks very much and we hope to someday pay you back for your kindness. Maybe we can start now by inviting you to visit with us in the Nation's capital, where the museums and monuments are all free.

We love our townhouse the Navy has provided us. It is in Landover, MD, and you can see the new Redskin stadium, FedEx Field, from the turnoff into our housing development. It is a military housing area called Summerfield, shared by the Navy and the Air Force. It is like San Diego in that the housing is not on a military base, but out in the community. Landover isn't the best community, but the government housing area is secure and safe. The three-bedroom townhouse is much better then our small two-bedroom duplex in San Diego. It was built in early 1995 so it is fairly new, and it does have carpeting in the bedrooms, living room and dining room. It also has two full bathrooms upstairs and one without a shower or tub downstairs. Here is our address and phone number: Bill and Priscilla Johnson-Miles, 521 Reading Terrace, Landover, MD, 20785, 301-324-1567. Our new e-mail address is johnsonmiles@earthlink.net.

Many of you know that my Mom passed away in May. She went into surgery for an aneurysm at Providence Hospital in Portland and didn't survive. When the doctors put her on the heart pump the artery burst and they couldn't stop the bleeding. I had flown in for the surgery so I was there, and I am very thankful that I got to spend some valuable time with her before the surgery. We had the memorial service and funeral on her birthday, 15 May (she would have been 67). Some cousins who we hadn't seen in a very long time came to the service, Charles, Karen and Staria, and it was great to rekindle this relationship. It was also great seeing Brenda, John, and Johnny and his family. Priscilla flew out when I phoned her with the bad news and she has been a rock for me during these tough times. I still have episodes where I miss my Mom terribly, and Priscilla, the love of my life, is always there to comfort me. She is such a sweetheart and I love her so very much. If I ever lost her I'm sure I would be a total wreck.

In late May, one of Priscilla's cousins, Erin Patterson, graduated from high school. We went to a great party for her and then attended her graduation. It was outstanding to see the diversity of her school; all schools should be this way. I was lucky enough to get some great memorable photos to share with her. Now she's attending

Frostburg College in the panhandle of Maryland. In early August we went to a surprise birthday party for Priscilla's Mom on Long Beach Island in New Jersey. Laurene actually gave her a house and Marge was so surprised, I thought she was going to have a heart attack. It was just fantastic, and what a cool thing to do for the lady who took care of you, raised you, and loved you unconditionally. This is the first time since Priscilla and I got married that every brother and sister, and their children, were together at one time. And the family reunion photo taken on the beach is wonderful. Priscilla's newest nephew was born 24 Aug., and Eric is Cindy and Peter's first child. Priscilla is head over heals for this kid and just has to pick something up at the store for him whenever she goes shopping. She also tries to get up to New Jersey as often as possible now, so those of you who live up there will probably be seeing more of us, too.

On 11 Sept. we will all remember where we were when it happened. Priscilla was at a doctor's appointment at the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda. She said it was scary hearing the announcements over the communication system as the hospital prepared for mass injuries at the Pentagon, which never came. I was actually working out at a fitness center on the Washington Navy Yard, watching television while I completed my 30 minutes on the cross trainer. I actually saw the second plane hit the WTC live as it happened. They immediately locked down the base and increased security. We were not allowed to leave until a few hours later. Priscilla finally got hold of me on her cell phone and we agreed to meet each other at home in Landover. But since they closed everything in D.C., and everybody was evacuating the city, the trip home took hours. I have volunteered to go wherever I might be needed, but I have yet to receive a phone call. So I'm still here at the Washington Navy Yard (they moved us from Crystal City in Arlington, VA), working for the Navy magazine *Surface Warfare*. I am actually the managing editor and enjoy it very much, although I've only taken one trip, and that one was to Maine to cover the last Navy warship to go down the ways at Bath Iron Works. I write and edit stories, but my main job is finding all the photos to go with the stories we publish. If you would like to see a copy of the magazine, let me know. Priscilla got a job working for Jack Taylor's Alexandria Toyota and she seems to like it enough, although she would rather not be working and going to school or doing volunteer work. We both still work part time at her brother Greg's auto auction in Tyson Corner, VA, too.

A week or two following the terrorist attack, the Pattersons, who live in Beltsville, went through a tornado. It didn't actually hit their house but it did take the roof off a nearby apartment complex and dropped it in their back yard. Nobody was hurt but it did wipe out a couple of sheds and a fence, and put a couple of small holes in their roof. I actually though it was fun helping to get rid of all the debris. We spent our 7 Oct. wedding anniversary visiting the place where we got married, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, and having dinner at the restaurant where we had our rehearsal dinner, a place called "That's Amore." For Priscilla's birthday, her friends Greta and Cheri flew in and then we all headed to New York via Atlantic City. We met Stuart Johnson, One of Priscilla's cousins who is now living and working in the city, in New Jersey and visited Cindy, Peter and Eric. Then we went into Manhattan and stayed in a very nice hotel there. We had dinner at a famous deli in Times Square and then walked around looking at the lights and some of the fire stations. They are like memorials to all the firemen lost at the WTC because of all the flowers, signs and memorabilia people are leaving. It is an emotional moving experience seeing the fire stations. The next day we actually got within two block of ground zero, and you could see some of the overwhelming damage, dust was everywhere and the smell was overpowering at times. Priscilla said she had to see it to believe it, for it to become real for her. We also went up to the top of the Empire State Building while we were in the city and we took a bus tour around Manhattan.

I am nearing the end of six pages so I have to wrap this up. As we usually do, we saw some professional sports again this year, the Orioles against the Yankees and the Mariners at Camden Yard, and the Redskins against the Seahawks at FEDEX Field. We also took in a concert, Neil Diamond, at the MCI Center. We're going back to the MCI Center on 27 Feb because for my birthday, Priscilla got me tickets to see the Washington Wizards and Michael Jordan take on the Portland Trail Blazers. We spent Thanksgiving at the Pattersons, and we spent the Christmas weekend in New Jersey with Cindy, Peter and Eric, and then the actual holiday again at the Pattersons. Well, that's the end to another holiday letter. We hope your holidays were full of joy and laughter, and we wish you a wonderful happy New Year. GO DUCKS!

All our love and affection,
Bill, Priscilla and Amore