

*Mele Kalikimaka is the thing to say
On a bright Hawaiian Christmas Day
That's the island greeting that we send to you
From the land where palm trees sway
Here we know that Christmas will be green and bright
The sun to shine by day and all the stars at night
Mele Kalikimaka is Hawaii's way
To say "Merry Christmas to you."*



Why are we saying Happy Holidays to you in Hawaiian this year? Because we spent a week there during our vacation in October celebrating our 10th wedding anniversary. Hawai'i is Priscilla's new favorite place. She always says that if we ever have enough dough, that she would like a house in Maryland near Washington, D.C. and one in San Diego, CA. Now she wants one in Hawai'i, too.

We stayed at the Hale Koa Hotel, an Armed Forces Recreation Center facility. It's a "top of the line" hotel on the beach in Waikiki right next to the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu. We had a corner room with wonderful views of the beach and the city. We arrived on a Sunday and the first thing we did after checking in was to take a walk on the beach and enjoy a romantic spectacular sunset... it lit up the sky with the brilliant warm colors of scarlet and pumpkin.

We spent Monday seeing Waikiki and shopping at the Hawaiian International Market Place. On Tuesday we went jetskiing and scuba diving. We loved the scuba diving! While others around us were having trouble adjusting to the gear, Priscilla and I took to it like old salts. As we descended 35 feet to the bottom of the bay, our hearts pounded harder and harder. You're in a completely different world down there, unique and beautiful, and so peaceful and graceful. Colorful fish swim all around you as if you're just another creature in the sea. Priscilla is a much better swimmer, but under water I seem to have the advantage. She says the diving instructor put too much weight on her belt and not enough air in her vest, so she had trouble staying off the bottom. We saw a little Buda statue on the sea floor, and Priscilla accidentally sat on it. We have a DVD of our dive that the instructor shot, and it is very funny watching her sit on the Buda's head. I witnessed a stingray gliding across the bottom and we both saw an octopus, which wrestled with an instructor and inked the man. We were told we just missed a sea turtle, as it went by after we started heading up. We're hooked! You can bet that future vacations will involve scuba diving. What an adventure, a thrill, a new world to explore.

On Wednesday we took an island tour which started with a stop at the Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. Being ex-Navy, this place has special meaning for me. Shuttle boats driven by actual Sailors take people from the visitor center out to the memorial which sits on top of the sunken battleship, the final resting place for most

of the ship's 1,777 men who lost their lives on Dec. 7, 1941. Oil still seeps from the Arizona sitting on the bottom of the bay off Ford Island. On the rest of the tour we also made stops at the Dole pineapple plantation, Sunset Beach on the North Shore near the Banzai Pipeline, the Nuuanu Pali Lookout, Halona Blowhole Lookout, Hanauma Bay and Diamond Head.

On Thursday, we went back to Hanauma Bay, named America's best beach for 2004. We rented snorkeling gear there and went swimming in safe, calm waters protected by an offshore reef. This is the top place in the country to go swimming with fish. The beautiful small, palm-studded beach is situated in the crater of an ocean-breached volcano. The white coral sand is accentuated by the azure blue water, underwater coral and lots of colorful fish, making it an ideal place to spend the day in the water. I think Priscilla enjoyed this more than the scuba diving.

Back at our hotel that evening, we met Elaine and Bob Romo, family friends of Priscilla from New Jersey who retired in Hawai'i. They joined us for the Hale Koa Luau. Each of us received an aromatic flower lei and we experienced an authentic imu (Hawaiian underground oven) ceremony. The feast included lomi lomi salmon, kalua pig, beef teriyaki, shoyu chicken, mahimahi, pineapple, poi (not Priscilla's favorite), haupia and coconut cake. The food was great and so was the entertainment, a musical journey through the islands of Polynesia. It included the fire dance and the hula. One of the beautiful hula dancers chose me to join a dozen other guys on stage trying to do the hula. It must have been very funny to watch.

On Friday we took our own driving tour around the island, joined the Romos for lunch in their condo, and returned to the hotel to get ready for our ceremony. At sunset the Romos joined us again as we renewed our wedding vows. It was a wonderful simple tribute where we promised once again to share our lives and future with each other. After the wedding, the Romos treated us to dinner at the top of a nearby hotel with an excellent view of the city lights and a fireworks display.

On our last full day in Hawai'i, we took a tour of the Big Island. The tour began in Hilo and included stops at Rainbow Falls, an orchid and anthurium nursery, and a macadamia nut farm. The highlight of the tour was Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. We saw many craters and steam vents, hiked through a rain forest to get to a lava tube, and walked on a two-year-old lava bed. From the lava field we could see steam rising from the beach where new lava was actually flowing into the ocean, but it was too far to walk and get back to our tour on time. So we didn't get a close-up view, but it was still exciting. What a grand experience.

There is no way either of us could have participated in half the activities we did in Hawai'i a couple of years ago. We were just too big and too unhealthy. Most of you know that Priscilla and I had weight loss surgery, and from our largest, I'm down 130 lbs and Priscilla has lost 105 lbs. I'm pretty good where I'm at, but Priscilla wants to lose another 40 lbs. We still attend our weight loss support group meeting just about every Thursday evening. We've made many great friends through our surgery support group and have had loads of fun at a few events with them, like dinners and birthdays and such. One such event was a Trisha Yearwood concert at the L.A. County Fair, and another was the Brea Improv where a few of us saw comic Ralphie May. He's had the weight loss surgery, too. He's been in contact with our friend Amy via email, and after the show we met with him, and Priscilla and Amy had their photo taken with him. We also organized two beach parties with our support group friends at Camp Pendleton's Del Mar Beach, one in July and another in September. Everyone brought food and drink, and we grilled and told stories. Some of us even hit the water and enjoyed the waves. I love to boogie board and have been back in the ocean many times. Priscilla even bought me a wet suit. I sure would like to learn to surf.

A couple of our friends from the support group got married in Laughlin in October, Bill and Pat. Both are in their early 70s and met at the support group meeting. Bill, or Curley as everyone calls him, didn't have the surgery but attends the meeting in support of his son Jim who did have the surgery. Pat had the surgery and so did her daughter and son-in-law, Jodi and Mike. In fact, Jodi now works for one of the surgeons at the clinic. She is a great friend and outstanding source of info

for all of us. Priscilla and I also attended a few other weddings this past year, including Jack and Laura's in late October. I work with Jack in Public Affairs at the City of Bellflower. He is our video technician. Another couple I know from work, Michelle and Tommy, also got hitched in August.

Work is great... I've now been with Bellflower for more than two years, as a public affairs specialist. The highlights this year included our BRAVO Awards Ceremony where I got to meet Faye Dunaway, she was the keynote speaker, and our Liberty Day Parade where I escorted our grand marshal comic Paul Rodriguez. I picked him up at his house in Studio City, drove him to the parade, met him after the parade and took him to our fair to meet people and sign autographs, and then drove him back to his home. He is a very funny man and has great stories. We had a nice conversation on the way back to Studio City, talked about our fathers and favorite writers. He invited me in for a beer, but I couldn't accept because I was driving and had to get back to help Priscilla pack for Hawai'i... we were leaving the next day.

Priscilla started her new job in August, at Cadillac of Whittier. She is basically their admin specialist, does some title and DMV work, but a lot of other things, too, like their deposits and payroll. She likes it that it's a small, private dealership, and the people are great to work for.

It's nice that we are both working now, because we bought a townhouse in March. It's a three bedroom with two and a half baths, and a full two-car garage. This is our first house ever. Both of us have either rented or lived in government housing our entire adult lives, so our walls have always been white. Now they have color... lavender living room, green kitchen, gold and orange-red master bedroom, and the other two bedrooms are blue and tan. We also put in new carpet, new lighting and new tile floors in the bathrooms.

To put a little extra cash in our pockets, Priscilla and I both have little side ventures going. She's into PartyLite candles and I have my website. I have recently renovated the website (FreedomExpress.net), made it easier to navigate and added pages, like a page about Cilla's Candles. I've also added new personal art and photos to the website's internet gift shop, which has more than 80 items like t-shirts, coffee mugs, bumper stickers, Christmas ornaments and framed prints.

Priscilla made a few trips back east to the Washington, DC, area and to New Jersey over the past year; one trip was for a PartyLite convention. So she's been able to see friends and family, especially her nieces, nephews and cousins, who she is especially close to. This is why she would love to have a house in Maryland near D.C. (also because it's just a short trip to Jersey from there). And she also wants one in San Diego, one of our favorite locals. In fact, we made a bunch of trips south to the border town, enjoying dinners with friends down there, visiting the Wild Animal Park and Sea World, shopping at the Navy Exchange and Seaport Village, and enjoying the military beaches.

The only other trip I took was to Portland in August for my 30th high school reunion. I hooked up with my old school friend Don Bly, and we joined the rest of our 40-something classmates, catching up on the gossip and telling stories about the 70s and our high school glory days. I saw a lot of teammates from football and wrestling, but my really good friends weren't there, mostly because most of my friends were in the class behind me. I should try to crash in on my brother Steve's reunion next year. Maybe I can just visit my brothers over the same weekend and meet some old high school friends for dinner on a night other than the reunion. Sounds like a plan in the making!

This past spring, Steve and Rosemary dropped by for a visit. Steve is a pastor at a church in east Portland, and every spring he travels to the L.A. area on church business. So he and his wife stopped in and saw our new home, and later in the evening we went out to dinner.

We saw Steve and Rosemary again over the Thanksgiving weekend in Sacramento, and this time they brought their daughter Amanda. We also saw my other brother Bob and his wife Lalita. We all traveled to Sacramento for a mini family reunion. Thanksgiving was at the home of our cousin Charles Price and his wife Karen. Their sons Bill and Charlie and their families were there along with some of Karen's relatives and friends. Plus another cousin, John Johnson (the 3rd) and his wife Michelle and their two young boys joined us for a feast of turkey, ham and a bunch of yummy stuff.

Over the weekend, we also visited more cousins who live in the area, Debbie and Zesto Baily and their two daughters. Debbie's younger brother Bob Johnson and his wife and baby were there, too. Debbie, Bob and John are siblings. Thanksgiving day, we played some basketball... it was Steve, John and I against Bob, Charles and Tom (Karen's brother-in-law). We decided to play to 11, but we played so poorly that it took us forever to get to 10, and then we were so tired by that time, that we decided to end the game in a tie. I wonder if that's an indication of how old we are all getting?

What we mostly did was play a friendly family game of nickel-dime-quarter poker, three nights in a row. I lost \$7 the first night, but won enough the next two nights to go home with an extra \$16 in my pocket. That paid for a full tank of gas in our Toyota Prius hybrid gas-electric car. It was great to see and talk with everyone, and we hope to get together again soon.

Let's see here, what else did Cilla and I do this year? ... we saw the national touring theatrical production of the Lion King. It was good, but I had heard so much hype about the musical, that I expected to be overwhelmed, and it didn't happen. Priscilla loved it, though. We did see a great concert at the Hollywood Bowl, John Mellencamp and John Fogerty. I had forgotten that Fogerty did all those great CCR tunes, and Mellencamp has always been one of my favorites, the best of the 80s in my book. They sounded great and rocked the evening. Our friend Barbie joined us for an outstanding outing. Check this out... most of you know that Priscilla is from New Jersey... well, sitting right behind us was a guy who was also from Jersey, and sitting next to him was another Jersey girl. The really weird thing though, was that we found out all their birthdays were one day apart in October, the 21st, the 22nd and the 23rd (Priscilla's is the 22nd).

October is always a big month for us, with Priscilla's B-day and our wedding anniversary on the 7th. And this year was even bigger with our trip to Hawai'i. We didn't leave, however, until the 9th because I had to work Bellflower's parade on the 8th. So on the 7th, I surprised my wonderful beautiful wife with dinner at Chelsea's seafood restaurant on the legendary ship RMS Queen Mary in Long Beach. The food and service was marvelous, and we had a window table with a stunning view of the harbor and the ever expanding city skyline. It was a very romantic evening, and I do believe I scored many points, especially with the Wyland dolphin diamond necklace and the flowers delivered to her work earlier in the week. Add in Hawai'i and I do think we made our 10th wedding anniversary very special and memorable.

We hope your holiday season will be very special and memorable, too. We'll leave you now with some of our favorite holiday quotes:

"What is Christmas? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal, and that every path may lead to peace."

- Agnes M. Pharo

"Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas."

-Calvin Coolidge

"He who has no Christmas in his heart will never find Christmas under a tree."

- Sunshine Magazine

"To believe in making wishes and have faith they can come true, to believe that you can find some joy in everything you do, to believe in giving gladly for no reason, just because, to believe in love... that's what it means to believe in Santa Claus."

- From a greeting card

Keep believing! Much love and affection,
Mele Kalikimaka, Bill and Priscilla