

December 17, 2007

Friends and Family,

This is one of our favorite times of the year because we get to wish you a very happy Holiday Season and a New Year filled with comforting peace, good health, great success and much prosperity. It's also a tradition for us to reflect on the past year, especially remembering those who have helped to shape our lives.

It's actually been a pretty tough year for Priscilla in regards to health. Not long after finishing up her rehab and physical therapy following the second replacement of her knee, she had to fight her way past three different medical issues, a kidney infection, a benign tumor that resulted in a hysterectomy, and a staff infection. We want to thank everyone for your support and affection during these tough times, especially the latest episode. The staff infection put her in the hospital for 11 day, and then she had to receive IV antibiotics through a PICC line for many weeks.

This medical emergency also caused me to miss a planned trip to Oregon to go hunting with my brothers. The last time I had planned to go hunting with them I had my own medical emergency. Well, I am planning to go again next year (so keep your fingers crossed) and maybe bring some cousins with me who have shown some interest. Both my brothers have had medical issues in their families as well, especially Steve. Our love filled with positive thoughts and energy go out to him and his wife Rosemary. The holiday season is a good time to share affection and to expect miracles.

Like most our holidays in the Capitol Region, we spent Thanksgiving at Priscilla's cousins' place in Beltsville, MD, and we'll spend Christmas there, too. Along with us, the Pattersons and Johnsons have had their tough times this past year, medical troubles and losing a close friend. But we all seem to be on the mend and 2008 looks bright and sunny. One good bit of news is that Sean and his girlfriend Cory announced their engagement recently, although they're not planning to tie the knot for some time.

The main reason we returned to the East Coast was to spend more time with family, especially Priscilla's young cousins, nieces and nephews. We've attended birthday parties, graduation ceremonies, swimming and diving meets, football games, cheerleading performances, variety shows, and probably additional events that we can't remember at the moment. I especially enjoyed watching Kaitlyn and Brittany perform in their high school plays, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Cinderella*. Kait was great as the wicked stepmother. She is now a Wahoo college student attending the University of Virginia. For birthdays or Christmas, we quite often give the kids a day with Aunt Cill (and sometimes with Uncle Bill), at the spa, going to the movies, shopping or out for a nice meal. Priscilla loves these special days when she gets to bond with her kids. Cill also makes it a point to drive up to New Jersey as often as she can to visit family and friends up there. Her nieces and nephews are very precious to her.

This past summer we spent some time with Priscilla's mom Marge and her husband Rick at the Jersey Shore. We've done this a few times now, and we really enjoy visiting with them every summer. They have a beach house on Long Beach Island, and Priscilla and her family visited LBI every summer when she was younger. So going back to LBI every year is becoming a tradition for us, too. This past trip I rented a kayak and absolutely loved it. I've asked for a kayak for Christmas, and since I've been pretty good this year, I bet Santa will bring me one. The beach house is only about an hour north of Atlantic City, and my last time there I pocketed a few hundred dollars at the craps table, so I still get to feed one of my vices every once in a while.

As an extension of our trip to the Jersey Shore in early July, on 7-7-07 we were in Giants Stadium in East Rutherford for the historical event *Live Earth*. What an absolutely great day that was. Most of you know that protecting the environment is one of our passions, and to feed this passion and see some great entertainment, well, it was just an experience we will never forget.

Live Earth was a series of worldwide concerts initiating a three-year campaign to combat climate change. The concerts brought together more than 150 musical acts in 11 locations around the world and were broadcast for 22 hours to a mass global audience through television, radio and the Internet. The event set a new record for on-line entertainment with over 15 million video streams during the live concerts alone.

At the U.S. concert, we heard encouraging words from Dhani Jones, Petra Nemcova, Zach Braff, Rachel

Weisz, Abigail and Spencer Breslin, Rosario Dawson, Jim Hansen, Randy Jackson, Kevin Bacon, Cameron Diaz, Alec Baldwin, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jane Goodall, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and of course Al Gore. The Academy Award and Nobel Prize winner asked us to support the following seven-point pledge:

- To demand that my country join an international treaty within the next two years that cuts global warming pollution by 90 percent in developed countries and by more than half worldwide in time for the next generation to inherit a healthy earth;
- To take personal action to help solve the climate crisis by reducing my own CO2 pollution as much as I can and offsetting the rest to become 'carbon neutral;'
- To fight for a moratorium on the construction of any new generating facility that burns coal without the capacity to safely trap and store the CO2;
- To work for a dramatic increase in the energy efficiency of my home, workplace, school, place of worship, and means of transportation;
- To fight for laws and policies that expand the use of renewable energy sources and reduce dependence on oil and coal;
- To plant new trees and to join with others in preserving and protecting forests; and,
- To buy from businesses and support leaders who share my commitment to solving the climate crisis and building a sustainable, just, and prosperous world for the 21st century.

The atmosphere was electric, and the music soared and moved each and everyone in the stadium... we enjoyed tunes from Kenna, KT Tunstall, Take Back Sunday, Keith Urban, Ludacris, AFI, Fall Out Boy, Akon, John Mayer, Alicia Keys, Dave Matthews Band, Kelly Clarkson, Kanye West, Roger Waters and the Police. I think my favs were Bon Jovi (Priscilla's favorite) and Melissa Ethridge, but I really liked Fall Out Boy and the collaborations... Urban and Keys singing "Gimme Shelter" and the Police with Mayer and West singing "Message in a Bottle." The only group I really didn't care for was the Smashing Pumpkins.

From a concert in New Jersey to a New Jersey icon... Bruce Springsteen. We saw the E Street Band in Washington, thanks to friends Debbie Shalom and her husband having extra tickets. I love the Boss and had heard that his concerts were awesome, but while I did enjoy the concert, it didn't measure up to my expectations. There wasn't an opening act, the performance started very late, the sound quality wasn't the best (although that might be because of the location of our seats), and the band didn't perform anywhere near as long as they are known for playing.

We saw Bruce at the Verizon Center in downtown D.C., and have actually spent a lot of time there this past year. Priscilla gave me a package of WNBA Mystics tickets for my birthday last year, and I saw six games, five with Priscilla and one with a good friend from work Dedra Jones. I love women's basketball because I think they really play a more team oriented game. The Mystics started off the season horrible but then came on late and missed the playoffs by just one game.

Sports is a big part of our lives. Besides the Mystics, we saw the Wizards destroy the young Portland Trail Blazers (my favorite basketball team), we watched the Mets (Priscilla's favorite baseball team) beat up on the Nationals (plus I also saw the Nationals win against the Astros with my coworkers), and earlier this month we witnessed the greatest rivalry in college football, the Army-Navy game, this year played in Baltimore. This is one game everyone should see... it's very patriotic with the Cadets and Middies marching on the field and then up to their seats, military parachute teams, Army helos and Navy Hornet flyovers, honor color guards and many other traditions. The game was great, too, with Navy sinking Army for the sixth straight time, earning the Commander in Chief trophy and a bid to play in a bowl game in San Diego.

My favorite college team the Oregon Ducks had a great football season going this year reaching a number two ranking until Heisman favorite Dennis Dixon went down to injury. Now they've lost three in a row, including the civil war game to Oregon State. I saw that heartbreaking overtime loss at Glory Days Grill with Dedra (her dad is a OSU alum and played with Terry Baker).

Priscilla is a huge N.Y. Giants fan and she's been able to follow them on TV many times this year. They haven't played the best, but they are in the hunt for the playoffs and Cill is excited about that. As of the writing of this letter they are 9-4. Priscilla would love to go to Giants Stadium and watch them play. I may have to work on

tickets one day.

We did go up to New York last December, not for football, but just to visit the city during the holidays. We met up with cousin Stuart Johnson who lives there, and also with Stuart's sister Karen Paterson and two of her kids Erin (who is now 24) and Lynn (13). It was the first time Karen had ever been to the Big Apple over the holidays.

You can't visit New York at Christmas without going to Rockefeller Center, home to probably the most famous ice rink and Christmas tree on earth. The giant colorful holiday decorations overwhelm you as you approach the tree, and quite simply, the tree is a crowd-stopper. Skaters swirl beneath its branches while shoppers and sightseers stop to stare. Carolers serenade beside limbs adorned with brilliant ornaments, their voices climbing to the shining star on top, and people are held rapt by the thousands of lights that blanket the evergreen, glistening like fresh snow in the moonlight.

While there, we visited the "Top of the Rock," the top of the building that NBC claims as its home. The view of the city 70 floors up above this beautiful art deco complex is nothing short of magnificent. You can easily see the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building and Central Park. I thought all the taxicabs on the streets below looked like yellow bugs skirting about.

One of the highlights of our visit were the windows at Macy's all dressed up for the holidays. We had to fight the crowds, but I think it was very worth the effort. Each window along Broadway featured a different theme, including a Tree of Harmony, a Tree of Joy, a Tree of Friendship and a Tree of Love, with animated characters and music. Some of the windows had interactive features, where we activated movement and music within the window displays. Of course, along 34<sup>th</sup> Street, the window displays featured the classic film "Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street."

We also visited Grand Central Station where we enjoyed a holiday train show with model trains running through a beautiful holiday landscape that included models of NYC landmarks. Even more impressive was the spectacular laser light show displayed against the famous "Sky Ceiling," walls and pillars of the main terminal concourse.

And you have to shop and eat when visiting the city. My favorite shopping was at an outdoor market in Bryant Park, and nearby we ate lunch at Giuliano's, a real New York Jewish Deli. That night I probably had the best steak I ever had in my life. I think it was at a place called Ben Benson's Steakhouse, but I'm not sure. We had actually wanted to go to another place but the wait was two hours, so we chose a steakhouse across the street and I really didn't notice the name of the joint. All I remember is seeing a waiter bring a customer a great looking steak, and so I didn't even look at a menu. I just told the guy I wanted what the other customer received. It was so good that I just took my time savoring every bite. I'm sure I was the last to finish. It cost more than \$40, but well worth every penny.

Karen's son Sean turned 21 this past year, and shortly afterward we took him and his dad Red (Mike) to a new place we discovered in Silver Spring, MD, called Piratz Tavern. The place is all decorated with swashbuckling paraphernalia, and the wood-paneled walls are adorned with cutlasses and pistols. Small lanterns and huge, lethal-looking knives sit on each table. Overhead, a collection of historic pirate flags do their best to hide the fluorescent lights. The male servers wear ruffled shirts and female servers sport wench-style lace-up tops.

They serve a pretty good mix of seafood and Caribbean fare, but rum drinks and special entertainment fill the joint to capacity. "Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum," indeed. The best libations here are the ones made with distilled sugarcane. I ordered a house grog and Red did, too, after the waiter with a patch covering one eye dared him and called him a name I can't repeat on these pages. The entertainment included a roving songster belting out bawdy chanteys, plus a belly dancer, fire eater and sword swallower. After performances you quite often heard "Huzzah! Huzzah!" with tankers of rum hitting hard wood tables. We definitely drank too much at a place where it is way too easy to be loud and crazy. A great time was had by all, and we all made it home safely with Cilla as our designated driver.

From a birthday event at a tavern that celebrates low class antics to a birthday event that exemplifies nothing but class, and we enjoyed the evening just as much. We dressed to the hilt, me in my tux and medals and she in her beautiful evening gown, and stepped out like two kids going to the prom. I'm talking about the Marine Corps Birthday Ball at the grand Renaissance Hotel in downtown Washington on Nov. 10th.

I am a volunteer member of the Ball Committee at Marine Corps Systems Command where I work and I'm

responsible for the audio visual portion of the show. The ball begins with a traditional march on of Marines in their elaborate dress uniforms, unveiling the giant birthday cake, patriotic readings and moving speeches by the commander and guests of honor. To make sure the audio, lighting and video presentation are in sync I attend rehearsals earlier in the day. So Priscilla and I checked into the hotel before noon.

During the traditional opening ceremony I was in back directing traffic with the lighting, audio and video techs. Following the uplifting Marine performances I joined Priscilla and others at our table, including some of my coworkers and their dates: my boss Mack McLaurin and his wife, Dedra and her long-time friend Kesh (an Army officer who drove up from the Norfolk area), Pam King and her friend Brad, and Capt. Sandy Styles. Kara Hayes, who also works in our office, is the co-chair of the Ball Committee, and she and her husband Mike sat at the general's table next to ours. I have to tell you, my wife and the ladies I work with were stunning, just beautiful and elegant, and the guys cleaned up pretty nicely, too.

We filled the evening with good food and wine, great conversation between close friends sprinkled with plenty of smiles and laughter, and dancing to favorite sounds delivered by a live dance band. Many of us even met the next morning for breakfast extending the celebration and comradery just a bit.

We have created some nice friendships with the people I work with at Quantico, and I enjoy my job tremendously. I am the editor of the command magazine and responsible primarily for internal information, but I do assist with media queries and other duties as needed. During the turnover and filling the gap between public affairs officers (Capt. Jeff Landis transferred out and Lt. Gin Carey reported aboard) I served as the de facto PAO for MRAP (program producing new armored vehicles providing protection from IEDs) handling most of those queries for a couple of months. I also assist at times with special events, like the ball. We have a great team and sometimes work late hours, which I think brings a closeness to the team. Many of us get together after work for happy hours or to celebrate birthdays and other happenings.

One of those happenings was a murder mystery theater birthday party organized by coworker and friend Sheena Stitt. Priscilla and I were members of the cast; she dressed like Marilyn Monroe, and I was a hoodlum dressed in all black. We had a great time reading our lines and playacting, and didn't know who the murderer was until we got to the last page of the script. Come to find out, it was neither of us, but someone else in the cast. We received many accolades from the other party goers and had a great time.

I have always been a fan of live theater, especially since I took part in theater productions in my 20s and 30s. Priscilla and I attend shows and plays whenever we get a chance, whether they are high school productions with nieces or friends performing, or professional presentations with well-known actors and actresses. We recently saw the musical "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change" at the Bethesda Theater in MD. It was Priscilla's birthday gift from her sister-in-law Tracey Powell and her family. We enjoyed this comedy about dating, mating and marriage, and everything you've secretly thought about but were afraid to admit. The first act is full of clichés, but the second act is moving and touching.

We don't always have the same views as some of our family and friends, especially when it comes to politics. For instance, Priscilla is a big fan of John Edwards and has attended some of his events in the D.C. area this past year, including a Democratic National Party meeting where she got to see and hear all the Democratic candidates running for President.

Most of you know my politics, especially if you've checked out any of my websites: [FreedomExpress.net](http://FreedomExpress.net) and [UniversalNexus.org](http://UniversalNexus.org). *Universal Nexus* is the title of a new book I wrote this year on spirituality, religion and positive thinking. It hasn't taken off yet, but it is available at Amazon.com and you can find out more about it at the book's website. I also recently created a new website... [PosRef.com](http://PosRef.com). This is my new Positive Reflections site, where I offer gifts, t-shirts and apparel with my unique original creative designs and historical quotes. I'm always looking for new ideas and positive quotes. If you have some favorite quotes or some creative suggestions, send them my way. Our email address is [johnson-miles@cox.net](mailto:johnson-miles@cox.net). I also do custom jobs and personalize gifts for friends and family, like a coffee mug I recently created with photos of a mom and dad with their newborn baby, with the baby's name and birth date.

Photography is one of my hobbies and there are many of my favorite shots on the Internet. My best photos this

year came during our vacation and trip to the Carolinas. We headed south in early September, first stopping at Jamestown near Williamsburg in Virginia. I wanted to stop at this historic location because they celebrated their 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. In 1607, 13 years before the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts, a group of 104 English men and boys, sponsored by the Virginia Company of London, began a settlement on the banks of the James River. The community suffered terrible hardships in its early years, but managed to endure, earning the distinction of being America's first permanent English colony and more. The nation's first representative government, free enterprise system and culturally diverse society began at Jamestown.

We visited Jamestown Settlement, a living history attraction telling the story of the people who founded Jamestown and of the Virginia Indians they encountered. Inside the actual museum, through film and exhibits, you can trace the first century of the Jamestown colony and learn about the cultures of the Powhatan Indians, Europeans and Africans who converged in 1600s Virginia. Outside we boarded replicas of the three ships that sailed from England to Virginia in 1607, we explored life-size re-creations of the colonist' fort and visited a Powhatan village. All along the way there were costumed historical interpreters describing and demonstrating daily life in the early 17th century.

We next stopped in New Bern, NC, and visited the Tryon Palace. We actually arrived just as they were closing, but talked the security people into letting us explore the grounds and gardens. Known in colonial times as one of the most beautiful public buildings in America, the original elegant Georgian-style mansion served as both home of Royal Governor William Tryon and the capital of the Colony of North Carolina. It also served as the capital of the state and the residence of North Carolina's first four governors. The palace catch phrase is "Where governors ruled, legislators debated, patriots gathered and George Washington danced." The grounds are beautiful and devoted to extensive gardens ranging from English formal gardens to a kitchen garden to wilderness garden areas. It was a great place to take photos.

We next made a stop in Myrtle Beach, SC, and enjoyed a nice lunch at a seafood restaurant on a pier overlooking 60 miles of warm sandy beaches. This area gets nearly 14 million visitors a year. I'm glad we were here in the off season.

In Charleston we stayed at the Indigo Inn, located in the heart of this 300-year-old city's historic district. Eighteenth century charm and warm southern hospitality abounds at the inn. Our room, which looked into a lush tranquil courtyard, was elegant and beautifully decorated in period antiques and reproductions. It was a great place to recharge the batteries.

If you get thrills by capturing images of historic buildings then this is where you want to be. Old-world homes with colonial architecture shines against a beautiful backdrop of harbor scenery. Six hundred buildings and houses aging 167 plus years, including more than 70 pre-revolutionary and 130 late-18th-century, have survived war, fires, earthquakes and hurricanes. One of the homes still standing once belonged to Thomas Heyward Jr., a Patriot and signer of the Declaration of Independence. One of his visitors was George Washington.

We took a bus tour of the city, but my favorite time was going out before daybreak and then watching the rising sun wash these magnificent structures in a morning glow of yellow and gold, the very best time for photos. Imagine strolling cobblestone streets or riding in horse-drawn carriages, slipping past palmettos trees and waterfront mansions, that's the charm of Charleston. This is also a city of churches, a place where religious freedom truly lives. Steeples and towers of 12 historic churches, temples, meeting places and synagogues grace the skyline and easily catch the eye. The representation includes Circular, AME, Baptist, Presbyterian, French Huguenot, Judaism, Mt. Zion, Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal and Unitarian with each dating back from 1681 to 1882.

Being a history buff, I had to check out Ft. Sumter. It's on an island in the middle of the bay so we took a harbor cruise vessel out to visit the place where America's most tragic conflict was ignited. With only 60 cannon and 85 Federal troops on hand to defend the new fort, the 2.4-acre Union fortification withstood 34 hours of Confederate bombardment before surrendering. The South hurled more than 3,000 shells at the fort with thousands of Charlestonians crowding rooftops and wharves to watch the bombardment. At the time of surrender, no one had been seriously injured on either side. It's ironic that this would begin the Civil War, our deadliest war, a war where at least 618,000 Americans perished.

While the history and photo taking were probably my favorite aspects of the largest South Carolina city, I think Priscilla found the shopping the most fun, especially browsing the worn, wooden vender tables of the Old City Market, an open-air bazaar covered with unique items from local art to handmade jewelry and sweet grass baskets.

While we enjoyed Charleston, our favorite part of the trip was a stop we made as we left the city. At Cypress Gardens South Carolina we explored a freshwater swamp in a flat bottom boat. Priscilla was very surprised that they actually let us go out into a dangerous swamp paddling this boat all by ourselves, using posted arrows as our only guide. The scenery was spectacular, forests of bald cypress and swamp tupelo trees reflected in the black swamp water, and huge swaths of lily pads with the fragrant white Water Lily in bloom. The most awesome site, though, was an alligator resting and sunning on a log. It was five to six feet long and we got pretty close before it slipped into the water and disappeared. You should see the images we captured of this wild and free reptile.

Our trip to the Carolinas was our only real vacation away from home this year. We're still in our apartment in Lorton, but the construction of our new home, a condo townhouse in southern Woodbridge, finally has a start date, two days after Christmas. We're told we will be able to move in during the summer. We love the floor plan... it's a two-bedroom home, but it also has a loft overlooking the living room. I'm going to use the loft as an office. We also have a large basement, making the house 2200 square feet, not including the single-car attached garage. We're really looking forward to moving in, and Priscilla has great plans on how to decorate for the holidays next year.

Well, I think we're ready for the holidays this year. All our gifts are purchased, and there's only a few odds and ends to get to finish up, like this letter. So to wrap this up, we'll send along this special holiday message...

May the closeness of friends, the comfort of home and positive reflections renew our spirits this Holiday Season. May the universal spirit of love gently fill our hearts and homes. And may the connection and energy of life take us on a grand journey, fulfilling all our wishes and making all our dreams come true. In this brightest of all seasons may we find many reasons for much happiness. Wishing you and your loved ones Happy Holidays along with peace, health and prosperity in the coming New Year.

Warmest thoughts, best wishes, and much affection,  
Bill and Priscilla Johnson-Miles