



The Birman Letter 2004

Merry Christmas

Happy Chanukah



This is the season for catching up on one another's lives during the past year and for re-viewing our own activities. We, for example, have a collection of these letters (begun by Rosemarie long before we married in 1968) that comprise our history. When we try to recall what year was it that we did ... we consult the saved back issues of this annual letter. This year has been a particularly active one for us, we hope it has been a very good one for you, too.

As we sit down to compose this, we are back in Florida, caught up in the never-ending round of parties and cruises sponsored by our yacht club. Rosemarie is the retiring president of the Anc'Hers (a ladies group), Paul is webmaster for www.cryc.net, and has been nominated to serve on the Club's Board of Governors. We spent Thanksgiving with Paul's sister Sylvia and all her children and grandchildren who gathered in Morgantown WV.



2.5 year-old Jack and his big sister Rebecca. (David and Katrina's brood)



Jean's husband, Daron with his two girls Ari (left) and big-sister, Erica

It is fun watching the children grow up and develop distinctive personalities.

In the spring of the year, we traveled to Germany where we put 1300 km on a stick-shift diesel Volvo as we visited many old friends and family and former colleagues whom we have mostly not seen since we retired in 1998. We started in Rosemarie's home town of Frankfurt then



The river Main in Frankfurt. The restored old city is to the left.

south to Albstadt-Ebingen, over to Muenchen where we spent nearly a week and then back north to Wuerzburg. We were stuck on the autobahn for nearly 4 hours just south of Nuernburg, trapped by a bad truck fire that closed the highway a kilometer or two in front of us. There was a nice family reunion dinner for us at a restaurant just outside of Wuerzburg, where we later spent a day touring the grounds of the Residenz.

Leaving the hospitality of Wuerzburg, we returned to Frankfurt where Rosemarie renewed acquaintance with school friends. Including the daughter of her special friend (who visited us in 1975, and the grandson who spent a month with us 5 years ago).

We ended our trip with overnight stays in Niedernhausen (where the photograph of the rapeseed fields



Rural Germany was covered with fields growing rapeseed for its industrial oil.

was taken) and finally to Wiesbaden-Mainz. To enjoy the generous hospitality of yet another old friend.

The summer house on Long Island, Cedar Beach, came through the unusually severe winter OK, but not so the docks and newly installed pilings. The heavy wooden pilings that we sank into the creek bottom last summer were torn loose by the thick ice and needed to be reset. A neighbor had tied them to our bulkhead to keep them from floating away when the ice melted. One of the floating docks also had to be re-built. As we traveled around town, we saw waterfront damage far greater than ours, for which we were grateful.

Otherwise our summer at Cedar Beach was quiet. We had a few friends and family visit and enjoyed our Long Island boat in the waters of Peconic Bay. Again our endemic herd of deer chewed on anything green. Even marigolds, famously supposed to repel them, were ineffectual. All around our neighborhood, plants and shrubs were denuded to a height of about four feet.

Our summer passed fairly quickly since we signed up to join a Lindblad expedition to the southeastern coast of Alaska during the last week in

August and the first week in September. We flew to Seattle to see that city as a tourist for a few nice days before flying up to Juneau to join the 73-passenger *Sea Bird*.

Our route took us to Tracey Arm, through the fast-moving current of Peril Strait to Sitka, where we visited St. Michael's Orthodox Russian Cathedral. We spent a whole day exploring Glacier Bay. We stopped also at Petersburg and anchored in Misty Fjords where we encountered Brown Bear up close from our kayaks and zodiacs.



The bears were fishing for salmon, which were spawning, and stripping crab apples from low-hanging branches. It was an exciting encounter. We saw numerous other Brown Bear later, but from a distance. Although we saw a variety of wildlife, Bald Eagles, Sea Otters, Seals, spawning Salmon, Orcas (killer whales) Sheep, Deer and Mountain Goats. ... The highlights were the bear and some very close encounters with Humpback Whales. We watched the humpbacks hunting fish in coordinated groups. They would surround a school of herring with bubbles,

herding them into a compact group and then would lunge to the surface, mouths agape, to swallow them in huge numbers.



The upper jaw of this humpback is raised while the lower jaw, much wider, scoops up fish



After breathing on the surface some minutes, the whales dive deeply to find food.

Sea Bird entered Canada at Prince Rupert in British Columbia. As we neared Vancouver Island, we stopped in Alert Bay where we heard the music and dances of the Tlingit people.



Our return to Long Island was uneventful apart from the fact that Rosemarie had a sore throat that soon blossomed into a severe case of bronchitis. Other than that, and an occasional cold, we've been pretty healthy. Rosemarie is controlling glaucoma in her left eye with various eye drops after laser surgery did not work to relieve the intraocular pressure.

This year we shipped our car down to Florida rather than driving it down past the familiar billboards of I-95. It arrived a day after we got off the airplane.

The *Rosemarie 3* is in commission and at her yacht club slip. We've already cruised her down to Miami for a nice weekend with a dozen other boats. We again encountered a fuel-starvation problem, similar to one last spring on our way to Key Largo. Sludge in the diesel fuel clogs up the filters and impedes the flow of fuel. We've had the fuel expensively "polished" by dockside machines three times, and are now in the midst of installing an on-board fuel polishing system to improve our ability to filter the sludge out of the fuel before it slows us up. On the Miami trip, we ended up moving at a 6 knot speed maximum, where we should normally be able to do 20 knots.

We wish you all the blessings of this holiday season and hope that 2005 will bring peace to this troubled world.

Rosemarie and Paul