



The Birman Letter 2008

Merry Christmas

Happy Chanukah



At the beginning of 2008, we undertook a two-week automobile trip, circling Florida clockwise to visit family and friends from Sarasota/Long Boat Key, Tampa, Tallahassee, Orlando, Lake Wales and Jupiter. It was pretty exhausting, but we did manage to visit with nearly all of our family and a great number of friends.



Nephew David Cooper, a professor of economics at FSU in Tallahassee, with daughters Becca, Sarah and son, Jack

On the way to Tallahassee, we visited cousin Harriet Ansell on Long Boat Key, her daughter, Pam and Jim Morrison and their children in Sarasota, and Tracy and Henny Morrison (different Morrison family) in Tampa. We enjoyed their daughter Sarah and Tracey's brother, Greg.



Rosemarie and Sarah

In St. Cloud, near Orlando, we visited our cousin (Tracey and Greg's dad) Harold Morrison with Louis and Brenda Morrison and their son, Evan. Harold has long been a model train aficionado –going back to his father, Irving, who had an impressive setup in Springfield MA, where Harold

grew up and Paul used to visit every summer. At Lou and Brenda's home, they have a nice model train setup that reminds me of the original.



Lou running the trains



Harold

We visited old friends from Paul's Army days in Huntsville Alabama, working at the Army Rocket and Guided Missile Agency. Ron and Sarah Lingwall. Sarah retrieved a photo of Ron and I, apparently receiving some recognition for our shooting on the Redstone Arsenal Rifle Team.



Ron and I are seated in the front row. He's on the left, I'm on the right, Our trophy is on the floor in the middle. Standing behind us are the company officers. The only name I actually remember is Capt. Woodall on the left. Sarah had written down the other names, but I didn't recall them. It was, after all, 48 years ago! I competed with that team all over the country and won a championship at the National

Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio, in 1959.

Following this trip, Rosemarie decided to have bunion surgery on her right foot, which pretty much confined her to the apartment for a couple of months, as the wound healed.

Niece Jean and our grandnieces Erica and Arielle, came for a week-long visit during spring break. I took them to a butterfly farm where they competed to get the butterflies to perch on their fingers.



Arielle got a book and was busily identifying the hundreds of different species we encountered.



Erica with a blue and black butterfly

We also went out into the Everglades for an airboat trip to get up close and personal with alligators.



And, of course, the girls swam from our little trawler, the **Rosemarie 3** anchored in a small cove called Lake Sylvia, a few miles from home port.



During the girl's visit I (Paul) was suffering intense pain from a pinched nerve in my lower back which affected the lower right leg. An MRI prompted several doctors to suggest surgery, a laminectomy, to relieve the pressure. I was less than thrilled by the prospect, as some 8 years ago I had a similar situation in which a disk herniated and sequestered (broke off) and landed on a nerve root. In my judgment, that surgery was less than successful, as the leg remains numb to this day. So I went "doctor shopping," until I found a sports medicine guy who was willing to take a chance on Physical Therapy. I began a fairly intensive three times a week schedule of PT ("pain and torture") designed to stretch the spine and relieve the pressure and to strengthen the right leg. An NSAID prescribed by the sports med doctor seemed to relieve the pain and I was glad to discontinue the Percoset.

At around this time Rosemarie began to experience episodes of vertigo, falling at one point and injuring her elbow. Her doctor recommended a special maneuver designed to move calcium crystal "debris" from the semicircular "vestibules" of the inner ear. As it turned out, my therapist knew the maneuver and agreed to try it on Rosemarie. It took several tries, but it did eventually work.

Because of our medical problems, we decided to postpone our annual migration up to Long Island. We had planned to leave at the end of April, but did not actually go north until mid July.



Rosemarie, Steffie and Paul at our favorite South Florida German restaurant

Before we left, sister-in-law Stephanie Cain Van D' Elden came for a week's visit to soak up some sun.

Steffie lives in Minneapolis and was happy to use our pool while we were doing our PT.

When we arrived at our summer house in mid July we found that a family of mice had set up light housekeeping in our pantry, chewing through the plastic that "protected" our non-perishable dry staples. They particularly liked a bag of Minnesota wild rice that Stephanie had given us some years ago. We had to throw out everything in the pantry and give the place a thorough cleaning. Next winter (now) there will be no food-stuffs of any description left behind!

We eventually got everything organized, actually launched our floating docks and brought our little New York boat around (through our nicely dredged inlet) to be moored in the creek behind the house. When Jo Fleming (a college classmate of Rosemarie) came for a weekend visit with a friend, we took them over to Shelter Island for a mini cruise.

We continued the Physical Therapy with a local therapist in Southold trying to overcome the weakness in Paul's right leg and to strengthen Rosemarie and to improve her ability to walk.

As always we continue to do a lot of volunteer work, maintaining websites for a number of organizations and editing monthly newsletters ranging from a 2-pager to a 24-page, slick, full color, magazine for the yacht club. We also did the annual 80-page advertising journal for the Greenport, NY synagogue which raised more than \$38,000 for the shul. Paul did the layout, Rosemarie kept track of the money!

E-mail and a video-conferencing protocol, called Skype allows Paul to do this wherever in the world he finds himself ... as long as there is a broadband internet connection available.

We decided to give up trying to fence the deer out of our garden. No matter how high the fence, the hungry deer always seemed to find a way over, under or around the fencing. This year our strategy was to rip out all the plants the deer like

and substitute things they either don't like, or grasses which are sharp edged and hard to chew. Without natural predators, the deer have thrived on the North Fork of Long Island and a 12-member local herd roams our peninsula, led by a big buck, pictured below.



During the summer, Rosemarie complained to her doctor that she had a pain in the left side of her neck. A CT scan revealed a subtle, non-displacement fracture of the C-1 vertebrae with edema, (swelling) of the marrow on the left. In plain English, a broken neck. No, we don't know the cause. It may be the vertigo-induced fall back in April. C-1 is the top bone of the spine, supporting the skull. She was ordered into a cervical collar to attempt to immobilize her neck. The doctors actually wanted her to wear a stiff collar that a friend said looked like a medieval torture instrument, but she's stuck with the soft collar, which makes her feel better as it seems to effectively restrict motion. She's been wearing it since the end of September and, since the neck still hurts, it will be a while longer. To the right, Rosemarie in Halloween costume with her collar.



Now we're back in Ft. Lauderdale, preparing for the holidays. For the new year, we wish for you health and happiness and for the world, peace, a successful new administration in Washington and regained prosperity. Should you find yourself in our neighborhood, we'd love a visit.

Rosemarie and Paul