

December 15, 2007

Merry Christmas to all,

I realize in the past year or so, I have not really been keeping up with my correspondence, so I decided it was time to update you on what has been happening in my life. It has been very busy and eventful. Here are some of the highlights of the past year.

New Year's Eve – Razor Clam digging on the Pacific Coast. I spent last Christmas with my sister Jeanne in Washington State. She was dying to take a few days off and go to the coast. She had a nice hotel, right on the beach, all picked out. We planned on spending several days, including New Year's Eve, sitting in front of a roaring fire gazing out at the Pacific Ocean. Then we found out that the 31st



The Multitudes, digging for Razor clams.

was the one day you could dig for Razor Clams at a beach close to where we were staying. We thought, "Hey, why not! Sounds like something everyone should do at least once in their life." With dreams of clams in white wine sauce we headed off to the beach. On the way over, we stopped to

shop at several second hand stores, on the hunt for rubber boots to wear while clamming. Not only did we find eventually find boots, but we also found wool gloves. I had always heard that wool keeps you warm even when it get wet and I was ready to put the wool gloves to the test (They did keep my hands warm even though I was putting my hands in the cold sea water.) Adequately equipped, we, along with our cousin Gloria, joined my sister's bosses and multitudes of other people and headed for the beach to dig for Razor clams. Boy, was it tough. Those little critters are hard to get. At first, we tried to dig them out with a shovel, but they were too



Two perfect Razor Clams



Putting my rubber boots and wool gloves to good use.

quick for us and we ended up either crushing their shell or cutting off their neck. It was very tragic. Then we tried with a clamming gun. We had better results with that. A clamming gun is just a plastic tube with a handle and a small hole on top. When you see what you think might be an air bubble made by a clam, you push the clamming gun down into the sand with the air bubble in the center. When you think you are down far enough, you put your finger over the hole and pull all the sand, and hopefully a whole clam out. Most times, you had to quickly release the sand you pulled out and go down again to get the clam. I think that between the three of us, we ended up with twelve clams after four hours of clamming. The limit for each person was 14, I think. Obviously, the clams had nothing to fear

from us. We went back to our hotel with our twelve clams still trying to decide how we going to prepare them. My sister went to the front desk to ask for ideas and that's when we found out that you didn't just throw these things in boiling water and eat them. Oh, no, you had to gut them and clean them. I volunteered to run to the store and find mix to make clam strips with and left my sister to the gutting and cleaning part. Some of clams were still alive and kicking when she got to the big sink outside where she was suppose to clean them and she just couldn't do the deed. Luckily for her, she found someone who took pity on her and cleaned them for her. I am glad I was off at the store. So after someone gutted and cleaned them for us, Gloria proceeded to slice them up in to nice little strips and we had clam strips and clam chowder for dinner. Very delicious after a hard days work at the beach.



Four Humans, one clam.

February – Margie’s 50th Birthday. In celebration of my sister’s 50th birthday, we rented a house in Borrego Spring, CA close to the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park for a long weekend. It was quite a crowd. There was Margie and her family, Jeanne, Keith. Mom, me, my cousin Cara and her husband Cliff. The house was huge with three bedrooms and four bathrooms, a large kitchen, dining room, living room, fireplace, pool and hot tub. The back yard was right up against the



Front: Melinda, Mom, Margie. Back: Jeanne, Me, Keith, Cliff, Cara

desert and there was nothing between the back yard fence and the mountains, except the desert. My cousin was the only one brave enough to get in the pool (she is from Washington state and part polar bear). Margie’s birthday was celebrated in style with fondue and a cake frosted with marzipan (her favorite). We took several long hikes in different areas of the desert. One hike was to some ancient pictographs and another was a guided tour up a canyon. For the guided tour, everyone piled into an old army truck with wooden sides, wooden benches and a canvas top. We went about 20 miles down the highway and then headed off road. The turn we had to take off



Me, hiking up the canyon.

road had to be at a 340 degree turn and a 45% slope, it was almost like driving off a cliff, except there was a road there. Was very glad nothing was coming up the road! After hiking in down the canyon, we returned to the truck and got a nice tour of the badlands. We arrived at the plateau above the badlands just as the sun was setting. Coming to the plateau to see the sun set seems to be the thing to do as there were quite a few people complete with chairs and bottles of wine. After returning from the hike, Keith made us paella for dinner. Yum, yum. It has become a family tradition for him to make paella for special family occasions. And he does it very well.



Sunset on the plateau over the badlands.

July - Capital Fourth and Margie and Family visit. The summer was a busy time for me with visit from both my mom and my sister Margie and her family. Mom was here for about two weeks and attended the biennial of the American Baptist Churches which was being held in Washington DC. I took her down by metro the first day to show her the ropes and then sent her and the Emmerts (parents of a good friend from Congo) off the second day all by themselves. Luckily, I was able to drive down in the evening and pick them up so they didn’t have to try and negotiate the metro on the way home. Mom decided to stay around for the 4th of



Me and Mom at the White House July 4th.

luxurious with flushing toilets and running water. My only regret is that I forgot to take some White House grass home to my cat who thinks grass is a treat. Mom left the next day from Baltimore and Margie and family arrived two hours later at Dulles. It was a rush to get Mom dropped off and then over to Dulles to pick up Margie and family. We spend a couple days touring DC, Mt. Vernon and the surrounding area. They rented a car and took a couple days to visit Williamsburg and Yorktown, Virginia. I was busy working away while they were out touring. But when they came back, I took off a couple days and went to Philadelphia with them. We had a nice time visiting museums, Independence Hall and the old sections of Philadelphia. I had a nice time and was sad to see them leave after two weeks.

July so that we could go to the Mall and see the fireworks. She got a little more than that. A good friend of mine started working this year for the Office of the President. One of the quirks (benefits?) is that he was able to get four tickets to sit on the White House lawn to watch the fireworks. So he took his wife and me and Mom. It was raining when we got off the metro, but we were bound and determined not to miss this opportunity and the rain stopped soon after. So we joined several hundred other White House employees and their friends and family to enjoy the exclusive seats on the White House lawn. We were entertained by the Marine band and had free ice cream (Dove Bars) and soda that came in a commemorative plastic cup printed with "Fireworks at the White House, July 4, 2007". It was lots of fun. And the porta-potties were down right



Philadelphia - Melinda, Me, Jillian and Margie on the oldest residential street in the US.



Me, Melinda and Jeanne at Grandma's and Grandpa's grave.

August – Glacier National Park, Montana

I had barely recovered from a month worth of company when I was packing my bags and heading to Glacier National Park with my Mom, my sister Jeanne and my niece Melinda. We all met in Seattle, rented a car and drove to Montana. Of course, along the way we had to stop and visit our Grandparents and Great Grandmother's graves in Ellensburg, WA. Ellensburg is where my dad grew up and rarely do we head east without stopping to see either the graveyard or the house where he grew up. Next stop was Missoula, MT where my mom's mom grew up. Her father built this wonderful old house that is now a bed and breakfast. (Blossom's Bed and Breakfast, if you happen to be passing through). We stayed there for two nights, climbed Mt. Jumbo, which is two blocks from the house, and took Melinda to the courthouse and introduce her to the joys (?) of researching family history. She handled the excitement of seeing her great-great grandmother's signature on land documents very well.



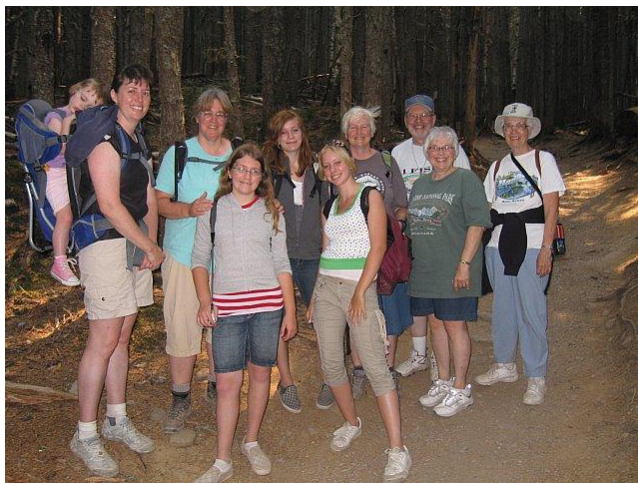
Me, hiking Mt. Jumbo with Missoula in the background.

path in the direction of the hikers and the hikers were strolling down path in the direction of the bears. A small bend in the path kept one group from seeing the other. Talk about suspense! But, everything turned out just fine. As soon as the bears saw the hikers, they headed uphill while the hikers were standing stock still taking small steps backwards. The next day we met up with my Mom's cousin, (who lives in MT) his wife, his niece and her three children to hike a couple miles into Avalanche Lake. The lake was nestled in among the mountains and quite picturesque, even with all the smoke hanging around. The next day, we hiked to Hidden Lake with my second cousin and her three kids. Then, the following day, we, (Mom, me, Melinda and Jeanne), headed north to Canada and Waterton Park which is just north of Glacier and had breakfast at the Prince of Wales Hotel which is a gorgeous old

The next several days were spent at Glacier. Jeanne and I took the hike up to Grinnell Glacier while Mom and Melinda enjoyed a stroll along the flat shores of Grinnell Lake. I was nervous thinking of all the bears around and was glad that we had a ranger with us on the hike up to the glacier. Made sure Mom and Melinda had one also. We stuck to the rules of talking loudly to warn the bears that we were coming. Must have worked, because we didn't see any. Don't think Jeanne and I have talked to each other so much in our life. I was quite distressed to find that Mom and Melinda had taken a stroll – without a Ranger – along the lake by the hotel. Especially as we saw a bear not too far from where they were on our way back. It was quite a gripping scene. We were in the boat on the lake, the bear was in the berries by the lake just down from the path on which there were two unsuspecting hikers walking along. The bears left the berry patch and were strolling along the



Mt. Jumbo and house built by Great-Grandfather West.



Descendents of Grandpa Washburn and his sister, Dolly Dillon, on the way to Avalanche Lake

wooden hotel over looking a lake. While we were in Canada, we saw two bears from the safety of our car (which is the only way to see them, in my opinion). One kindly strolled across the road in front of us. We probably would not have seen it if it hadn't. The other was sitting in a lone bush, along side of the road, munching away. It was very exciting. We hiked through a red rock canyon and then to a waterfall. It was interesting how different the landscape of Waterton was from Glacier even though it was just a few miles north. We made one last stop at the gift shop at the hotel before heading back to Glacier. Our time was up and we headed for Mom's cousin's house where we spent the night before heading back to Seattle through Canada. It was a nice two day trip with plenty of new scenery to enjoy. Melinda enjoyed her trip with her two aunts and grandmother and her presence added a small bit of drama when we entered Canada the second time. The first time we crossed into Canada there were no questions asked. The second time, the boarder guard demand "Where is her father?" to which I replied truthfully, "California." She must have thought that one

of us was Melinda's mother, because then she asked if her parents were divorced. At some point I handed her the letter that we had from Margie stating that Melinda was traveling with us and had the permission of her parents. I don't think the boarder guard even looked at the paper, because she gave us a little lecture about letting us go this time, but to make sure that we had her father sign the paper next time. I had presented the letter as a letter from her mother, not realizing that her father has signed it also. Boy, what drama! I am glad that they check, but I felt a little like a criminal and we had everything we needed!

December and another trip to the White House



Me and Ayah at the White House.

My White House connections was able to get me into the White House one more time for a viewing of the Christmas decorations when there was an Open House for all the employees of the White House. So on a cold Saturday evening, all bundled up, I went down to DC with Mike, his wife Beth and their Filipino foreign exchange student, Ayah, to take a tour of the White House. We stopped by the Pageant of Peace and the National Christmas Tree on the way in to the White House. It was very crowded. After a quick look around, we headed off to the White House. The tickets to get in were timed, so there were not that many people there and we were able to stroll around the rooms and take pictures to our heart contents.

Big News of the Year – Of course, the big news of the year is that I have decided to leave my job of 18 years and head off to Congo for a year to fill in at a Non Profit Public Health organization as Grants Manger for the current Grants Manager (Wayne Niles) who is returning to the states for six months for a short furlough. I was originally going out for eight months, but since then, they got a year long vaccination project and asked if I would be willing to come out for a full year and manage that. So, I am busy getting my vaccinations, my tickets and packing up my house, getting it ready to rent. I have no plans for after the year is finished. There is a possibility that I could stay in Congo and continue working, if I can handle leaving there after being gone for so long. If not, I come back to the states and find a new job. I keep thinking that I should be worried about not knowing what is happening in a year, but I am not. I am looking forward to going out to Congo. I will be living on the American School campus, where I went to High School, staying in one of the apartments that, no doubt, I either baby-sat or house-sat in

while I was in High School. My last day of work is the 18th of January and I will be leaving Maryland on the 3rd of February, driving across country with my cat. I am taking my cat up to my sister in Olympia, WA who will love and adore her while I am gone. It is not a trip that either of us, me or the cat, is looking forward to, which is why I am taking my friend Beth and her exchange student, Ayah, with me. We are hoping to take some time to show something of the United States to Ayah. We will be taking the southern route to Southern California and are hoping to get up to the Grand Canyon on the way over. It should be fun, yowling cat excluded. And to compensate Ayah for all that, we have a trip to Disneyland planned when we get to California.



Me on the way to Grinnell Glacier

I should be reachable next year at either my mom's address
2613 W. Shadow Lane
Anaheim, CA 92801

Or at my email address congokid26@hotmail.com

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



Jeanne, Mom, Melinda, me at Waterton