

# 2006 Christmas News from the Browns

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## Merry Christmas to All

Looking over last year's news letter so that we didn't repeat ourselves in our old age, we noticed with surprise that we had not once mentioned Christmas. And, it seems, we are so busy doing "things" that we never have time to sit down any more without feeling that we should be doing something. Where has the time gone? Weary of the political correctness of today, we would like to take time this year to wish everyone a very **Merry Christmas** and all the best for the coming **New Year**.



Paige, Marilyn, Mitch  
Ben, Gord, Mathew



## Visit To Texas

On the spur of the moment in March, we decided to visit with our friends in Texas. The weather in Vancouver had been dull and rainy for weeks and, fed up with the wet and cold, we decided to take a break and do some visiting where the sun shines. We met with our friends Ron & Jean in La Porte near Galveston and had a wonderful time. We always feel so welcome in Texas and, on this trip, we were not disappointed. Ron and Jean along with one of their daughters, their son and their kids (a real entourage!) took us to the Houston Astrodome where we took in the Houston Rodeo. Just a little bigger than the Cloverdale rodeo!! Ron and Gord took a quick trip just across the border to, what was, a small town in Louisiana. Devastated by hurricane Katrina, there was not much left to see. Buildings torn apart by the fury of the storm stood empty like skeletons. Abandoned vehicles lay half buried in the sand. It looked like a bomb went off. On the way back, they picked up three sacks of crawfish and, that evening, we were

treated to an old fashioned Texas crawfish boil. They set up two very large caldrons fired by propane to bring the water to a boil. In one, they loaded potatoes, carrots, onion, corn on the cob, sausage and a whole bunch of Cajun spices. In the other, they dumped the three sacks of crawfish. The picnic tables were covered by plastic table cloths and the crawfish and veggies served on cardboard trays. For the uninitiated, crawfish are like small prawns with claws like a crab. One breaks off the head and claws and extracts the meat from the shell that is left over. Huge mounds of shells, heads and claws began to grow in the middle of the tables and, after everyone had finished eating, the debris was folded into the plastic table cloths and disposed of. What a feast! After La Porte, we drove off to San Antonio where we got re-acquainted with "River Walk", met friends and were treated once again to the good ol' Texas hospitality and, Marilyn's favourite, mega shopping the San Marco outlet centre.



Crawfish "broil" in South Texas. No need for forks here!



## Spring Tours

What can we tell you about Egypt and the Greek Islands that we haven't done already? Although we go to these same places many times, it is always with different people who often have a much different perspective on the country we are visiting. Doing the same tours, of course, makes it so much easier for us because we know the timing, the tour guides and, most importantly, the restaurant owners. Getting the meals right is always a challenge but knowing the restaurants and the menus makes it less stressful. We see the same restaurant owners every year so they are happy to see us back and treat us like family. They are so anxious to make sure things are right for us that they often over do it and we end up with more food than we can eat. In addition to the meals, we han-

dle all of the tips and most of the entrance fees so being familiar with the finances also makes it more relaxing for us. Unless we are escorting a completely new tour, these trips have become more of a working holiday for us and a very enjoyable one at that. During the first part of our Egypt/Greek month long tour, Gord's knee finally gave out. About 20 years ago, he had arthroscopic surgery on his knee to repair a meniscus tear. Over time, the rest of the cartilage wore away leaving him with less than 3% . . . almost bone on bone. The outside of the knee was in good shape as were the ligaments so he had the option to have the inside of the knee (only) replaced with a unicompartimental prostheses instead of a complete knee replacement. Sort of half of a knee replacement. UBC Hospital had a new program where they just do knees and hips so he got in very quickly. Recovery, however, is taking some time. He was able to get around without the aid of crutches in only a couple of days and hung out in the basement suite for the first week so that he didn't have to climb stairs. Mobility was restored in about 3 weeks but total recovery is taking some time.



MMB, GB & Dina, your Egyptian Guide



## Marilyn's Retirement

Marilyn's retirement officially began in December 2005 and, since then, she has shown no signs of wanting to go back to work. She is still kept busy with the day to day chores but also finds time to do volunteer work at the Stewart Farm which is part of the Surrey Heritage Society. The volunteers dress in Edwardian period costume and escort classes of school children around the farm which is complete with blacksmith's shop and marina. Normally, we picture a farm in a valley or on the plains. This one, however, is on a river and part of the farm's income was derived from crab fishing. In addition to escorted tours, the Surrey Heritage Society also hosts a picnic each year to thank the volunteers. This year's bash included a local jazz band that set up and played

from the porch of the old Stewart farm house while the guests dined at tables set up on the grass lawn to the side of the 112 year old home.



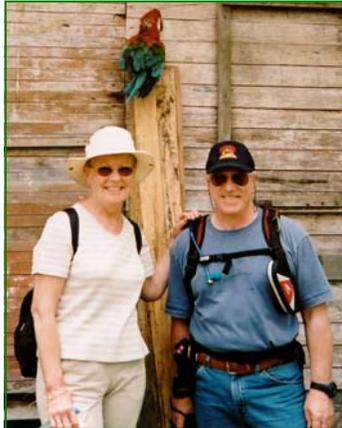
Marilyn in period dress

## Fall Tours

This fall, we were due to escort a group to Egypt followed by one to Kenya which would have taken us out of the country for over a month. Royal Heights asked us if we would also do the Peru/Ecuador tour which followed Kenya but we said **EITHER** Egypt/Kenya **OR** Peru/Ecuador not both. That would have put us away for eight weeks which is a bit much for a part time job. Although we love to escort these tours, one month at a time is the longest that we would want to baby sit a group.

They chose to send us on the Peru/Ecuador tour which was the third for us. It is always an inspiration to see Machu Picchu once

again and, although it was the rainy season, we got lucky and it only rained while we were on the road or in a building. We arrived



Gord & Marilyn—Amazon Jungle



in Lima, Peru close to midnight along with four other flights. It is better organized than past visits but, getting through immigration always takes time. We happened to get in a VERY slow line which is particularly irritating at that hour of the evening after a long flight. The immigration officer seemed to be looking at every page of each passport, pausing, it seemed, to study each one. When it was finally our turn, she started to write on one of our visa cards. As we watched her write, the pen came to a slow stop mid-word. We looked up and found that she had fallen asleep. Gord knocked on the counter and she woke with a start. The pen began to move again and, with a brief apology for

the delay, she sent us on our way. A new experience for us.

Of the two countries, Ecuador is our favourite and we certainly see the whole of it. We travel from Quito in the North to the Amazon basin West of Quito where we take canoes up the Napo river to a lodge in the jungle. We then go South all the way to Quenca, a two day journey. After two days in Quenca, we fly back to Quito, then go North again to Ibarra and on to Otavalo, said to be the largest Indian market in all of South America. If it sounds exhausting, it was. Arranging the meals, keeping the tour on track and on time, and handing all of the financing along the way kept us hopping.



### March 21st, Paige's 40th Birthday

Paige celebrated her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in March this year. The office staff covered everything in her office with foil so it looked like something out of a science fiction movie. There were lots of balloons and everyone had a good laugh over it. It is a little shocking to realize that she has spent more of her life out of our home than she did in it. She moved out at 19, unhappy with the rules and ready to set the world on fire. She only returned home for a brief period between apartments but we now see her often as Gord works with her every day and they live only 10 minutes away from our house. Their family is growing up. Ben is

now 11, Mathew is 8 – both now go to private school. Paige and Mitch were disappointed with the discipline in the public school system and are noticing quite a difference now that they have made the switch. Ben is very much involved with football. They haven't won a game yet but he is enjoying the practices with his buddies. Mitch has taken him to a couple of BC Lions games and, now that he knows the game, he enjoys the outing as much as his dad. Mattie on the other hand, is more interested in his game boy. Both are growing up fast and it won't be long until they are teenagers. Paige and Mitch were off to

Palm Springs in September so the boys spent a few days at our place. One sleeps in the suite down stairs and the other upstairs in the spare bedroom. Having a floor that separates them cuts down on the horseplay. We realize that we no longer have a kid-proof house and that any amount of wrestling has the potential to do damage. We forget how hectic it is to getting lunches ready, homework done and clothes clean. Not to mention, baths and bedtimes delays. That's why you have kids when you're young (or hire a nanny if you're old).

