

# 2007

# Christmas News from the Browns

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## MERRY CHRISTMAS !

*May the Christmas season fill your home with joy, your heart with love, and your life with laughter.* They say it's the time of year to get together with family, enjoy a holiday, have a rest, recharge energies, look back over the past year and make plans for the future—but it's never easy. After being overwhelmed by "joyous and merry" it's a relief to get back to work where it is quiet and restful !



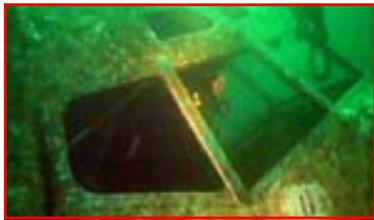
### Dive Trips



MV Mamro

The year started with what we fear will be one of the last live-a-board dive trips out of Port Hardy. The old 52 foot Mamro is a wooden hulled dive boat that sleeps 6 divers and the coast guard is making it tough for the owner to meet safety standards economically. The boat is very old now and a little "stinky" but they have been diving off of it for over 15 years and have garnered some great memories over the years. The only alternative is a land-based dive centre called God's Pocket ([www.godspocket.com](http://www.godspocket.com)) which is nice but not the same as being on the water for the whole dive trip. For this dive trip, Danny, who owns the Mamro, sailed down to Nanaimo which saved us the 5 hour drive to Port Hardy, located on the Northern tip of Vancouver Island. So we dived this time primarily in and around the Nanaimo area.

The highlight was discovering the new artificial reef at Chemainus, located 37 km south of Nanaimo. In January, 2006, they sunk a Boeing 737-200 at this site and it was the first time that I had ever dived on an aeroplane that large. They removed the seats and left the cargo doors open so that you could swim right



Gord at the Controls

into the cockpit. Not much has grown on it yet but it will soon. The Artificial Reef Society have sunk 7 ships and this aeroplane since August 1991 which is when they started with the G.B.Church and Gord has dived on every one of them. He and his buddies (*the Old Farts Diving Club*) were off diving at Quadra Island near Campbell River in July and again in November. Not Marilyn's cup of tea—Gord loves it.

### Bits 'n Pieces

**Gord's Retirement (still)** On April 1st, Gord officially retired from the office – well, almost retired. He brought his office phone and computer home and installed it on a VPN (Virtual Private Network) so, although he is physically not at the office, he is connected electronically through the network. Things started off quietly enough but he is providing consulting services which has escalated considerably during the course of the last few months. This should taper off over time but, at the moment, the projects will likely keep him busy for many months to come. **Marilyn continues to serve as a docent at the Stewart Farm**, mostly escorting groups of school children around the house and grounds and relating the history of the Stewart family and how the farm evolved. Gord took Ben and

Mathew to visit the resident Blacksmith one Saturday. He is available on weekends to give the kids a demo and teach them some blacksmithing skills. Afterward, they receive a certificate to validate their new position of assistant Blacksmith. Terry, the Blacksmith, also reviews the tools they used in the course of running the farm. At one point, he took out a long rod used for hooking a chicken's leg. He asked the boys how they would go about capturing a chicken. Ben said that he would use a net. Mathew said "Shoot him!" Certainly a one-step solution!



### We're Scheduled to Lead These 2008 Tours

Peru & Ecuador	- February 15 - March 7
Egypt	- April 24 - March 7
Greek Islands	- March 7 - March 21
Kenya	- October 4 - October 24
Egypt	- October 24 - November 5

### '07 Egypt Tour

During the month of May, we were off again escorting tours through Egypt and the Greek Islands. Our Egypt trip was uneventful except for a contingent of 6 Chinese (Mother, Father, Daughter, Son, Aunt & Uncle) who joined our group with 14 pieces of luggage - not only many pieces, but many "heavy" pieces! This became an issue with the poor Egyptians who had to handle the bags. They would arrive for their tip puffing and sweating and complaining about the heavy bags. These folks stuck pretty much to themselves and didn't take much interest in the historical aspect of the trip. "Father" would send his questions or complaints through his daughter as it appeared to be beneath him to speak directly to a



Marilyn, Hotel on the Nile

privately known to us) would set up a command centre in her room and all of the women in the group would assemble there to provide coiffure service for her. One night in Alexandria when the power in the hotel went out briefly during a thunder storm, the Daughter demanded that we guarantee that the power would not go out again in the hotel. We thought that was hilarious! Their main objective was to shop but, in Egypt, you don't go shopping, the shopping comes to you. There are markets and malls but, generally, the same stuff will come to you on the street. Of course, Egypt is home to the hardcore bargainers. Unlike Mexico where they might ask double the price, the Egyptians don't fool around – they ask at least 10 times the going rate. Some people just pay it because, even at 10 times the going rate, it's still a bargain for them. Our attitude is to pay what you feel it is worth to you. The Egyptians are very helpful in finding a place to shop. If you want to be taken to a jewellery factory, rug factory, papyrus or alabaster factory, just go out on the street and ask for directions for the internet cafe. The Egyptians will be quick to oblige but you will always end up in one of the "factories" that is owned by your new friend's brother or cousin. We can pretty much guarantee that **you will never make it to the internet cafe.**



Gord with Dina, our guide

lowly tour manager. Question from the daughter on the first day at the breakfast buffet: "Father must have toast every morning with his breakfast." Answer: "See that machine over there with the little slots in it? You just take the fresh bread the hotel has provided and put it in the little slots, then push the button in the front of the machine. A few minutes later, just like magic, out pops the toast." After their arrival at the hotel, "Mother" (the Princess as she was



**September marked the one year anniversary** of Gord's knee replacement. Although he was able to get around OK only weeks after the operation, he found it difficult to walk any distance without having a lot of pain in the knee the

next day. Finally, after a year of working out in the gym and swimming pool almost every day, he is able to do most things without discomfort. We were surprised that it took that long and hope that the other knee has a longer life.

## Greek Islands 2007



Port of Naoussa

The Greek Islands was lots of fun this year as we were graced with spectacular weather. In addition to sunny blue skies, many of our guests this year had either travelled with us before or were friends that we have known for close to 40 years. It was more like

taking a group on a family vacation. Most of the trip was the usual with tours on Paros, Naxos, Mykonos, Delos, Santorini and Crete but, on Crete, in the little sea side town of Hania, it started to rain. Normally, on the first day there, we would visit the ancient

city of Aptera which is located on a hill above Suda Bay. But it is out in the open and can be quite muddy after a rain so we decided to take everyone for lunch in a little town called Meskla. The guide knew of a family that ran a small tavern nestled in amongst groves of orange trees and we were told that the owners made their own sausage and meat balls. The journey to this little village took us over narrow roads through mountainous territory famous for the many caves in the area. It was raining when we arrived but we had phoned ahead and the folks that ran the tavern had reconfigured the seating inside to accommodate our group which filled up the whole taverna. It

turned out to be the best meal that we had on the whole trip. For dessert, the waiters went out into the orange grove and picked fresh oranges off the trees for us. The guide paid for all of the drinks which probably contributed to the rosy feeling everyone had when we finally left.



Orange Grove in Meskla

## Music City Tour—September

In September we were scheduled to escort a group to Ireland. Only 9 people registered so the owner of Royal Heights Tours, who has family in Scotland combined a family visit with the tour and escorted the small group himself. We had the time set aside so hooked up with a Music Cities Tour in the South of the US. This took us from Branson, Missouri, through Memphis, Tennessee, and ended in Nashville. It was a 10 day tour which included all of the shows, hotel accommodations, transportation and food. Having travelled on our own and guided tours as well, we find that the tours are much more fun. There are always some “characters” in the group and this one was no exception. The shows that we saw along the way were all first class. Branson is a small town of 6,000 people but there are also 20,000 tourists there at any one time and they mostly arrive by car. The result is that there is no public transit available. No taxis, buses or anything. The only way you can get around

is to phone a “shuttle” which is usually manned by a local entertainer. We paid \$7.00 to go 5 miles to old Branson with “Cher” who spent most of the travel time promoting her show. The tour company took us to the shows by bus and, before we went into the theatre (most held between 900 – 1,000 people), a “greeter” would come on to the bus to welcome us to their theatre. We would then be escorted right to the front of the theatre. The folks that bought tickets on their own got seats behind the tour groups. After the show, at least one of the entertainers would come on board the bus

and thank us for visiting – some even sang a song or told a joke before sending us on our way. We visited Beale Street in Memphis and also walked around the hotel (motel actually) where Martin Luther King was shot. Everything has been left as it was on April 4, 1968 when he was assassinated as he stood on the second story balcony. Even his car is still there and the site has been turned into a memorial in his honour. The highlight of the trip, particularly for Marilyn, was our visit to Elvis Presley’s mansion at Graceland in Memphis. They have done a great job of preserving the house as it

was originally. It was much like going through a show home at the PNE. They turned the racket ball court into what they called the trophy building in which they had all of Elvis’s gold records and famous jump suits. In the backyard beyond the swimming pool was Elvis’s grave along with that of his mother, father and aunt and a small stone to commemorate the death of his twin brother, who is actually buried in Tupledo. Of course, his music was everywhere and any one of the three gift shops could provide you with a piece of Elvis memorabilia to cart home for your next garage sale. It was in Nashville at RCA Studio B where Elvis recorded all of his music that our group made its mark. After one practice session, our little band of 33 people recorded “Can’t Help Falling In Love With You”. After the tour of the studio, we were each presented with a copy of the CD which is included in the DVD that we made to commemorate our trip.



Merry Christmas from Beale Street, Memphis, Tennessee

