

Looks like it is my turn to do the Christmas letter. After many years of doing it herself, Marilyn has asked *me* to send you a note this year. So much has happened this year that it is hard to compose a short version of the years events. Let me start by saying that we are due to become *grandparents* in June. Paige made the happy announcement a couple of weeks ago, so her and Mitch are busy making plans for their new addition to the family. Paige will be missed when she has to leave her work, she has done so well and, after eight years with the company, has made many friends among her customers and colleagues. (mostly she'll miss the money!!) She has a new protege, however, and plans to be in touch with the office via her computer from home.

Comparing the disappointment of losing a good salesperson to the joy of gaining a grandchild, however, became academic when we sold the company at the end of October. Actually, we sold both Basic Business Systems and Prime Leasing to a large American company called Darka Business Systems. Darka grossed over \$500 million last year with over 200 branches in the US and was busy buying out Canadian copier dealers when I called them to see if we could make a deal. We started talking in March but were not able to put together a deal until October. They have paid us out for both companies and it is truly a thrill for us both not to owe any money to anyone. I negotiated a two year contract to help build the operation with the help of some much needed funding which they have now provided. I guess we just lost our enthusiasm for owning our own business during the course of the last few years when the Bank began to demand more and more of our personal equity to secure the lines of credit. The Bank issue is now someone else's problem!

Now that we have no financial ties to the company, thoughts have turned to what we might want to do if things do not work out in the big corporate world and on into our retirement. Lately I have been taking a series of courses to advance my scuba diving skills and have one more course to go to reach the Dive Master level. I would then be qualified to teach or take out diving tours so, who knows, we may find a Bed and Breakfast with Dive Tours that might fit into our future. Paige, Mitch and I dive regularly. Marilyn is our "beach support" person and in March we all went to a friends ocean front place on Pender Island for a little diving and fun. We discovered to our delight that our friends place was situated right in front of some huge scallop beds. Paige, Mitch, and I loaded up with scallops on the second of four dives and they were devoured with pasta that evening after being sauteed in butter and garlic.

In April, we trekked off to Morocco and Portugal with Adventures Abroad, the company that took us to Indonesia. We landed in Casablanca under warm sunny skies which remained with us most of the time that we were in Morocco. From Casablanca we travelled inland over the Atlas Mountains to the edge of the Sahara Desert. (within 50 kilometres of Timbuktu!) After travelling North along the edge of the Desert we headed back to the coast and South along the beach front resorts stopping along the way to shop or stay over night until we reached Casablanca once again. It is a country of spectacular scenery, changing from sandy desert, to lush orange groves, then stark mountains of shale, all within the space of a few miles. We discovered that the people, however, were not as appealing as the countryside. We were constantly being hounded by hawkers or guides who pestered us endlessly for the sale of their services. We could not get a moments peace outside of the walls of the hotel so toured mostly together with our small group of 15 people. Most of the women wore veils and both men and women became very agitated if we attempted to photograph them. We rarely saw women in cafes or restaurants which were predominately served by men. When we visited the rural towns, it was like stepping back 2,000 years in time. Men dressed in long hooded "djelabbas" lead donkeys laden with whatever product they had to take to market, followed by veiled women in black flowing robes. For the most part, the schools were few and far between and the people remain ignorant about health and simple hygiene. Marilyn had an opportunity to go on a camel ride while I remained behind to take pictures and beat off the rug salesmen! We then made our way to Portugal where we headed North from Lisbon by train to Porto. On the way, we visited old castles, beautiful sea side resorts, and,

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*Part of the joy of Christmas is remembering special people like you !*

of course, the vineyard wineries famous for their Port. Since I was not drinking (it will be five years this February since I had a drink) Marilyn graciously accepted my share of the samples. It was a fun time. The people were delightful and we sampled just about every kind of food there was to be had.

We spent most of the unusually long hot summer enjoying our home and yard. It was like going to Hawaii (without palm trees). As Thanksgiving rolled around it was time for my annual dive off the northern tip of Vancouver Island. I spent four days on the Sea Venture with Exta Sea Tours out of Port Hardy which is host to some of the most spectacular scuba diving in the world. We dove with Octopus, Wolf Eels, & Dolphins. After each dive we were treated to meals that were prepared by a professional chef . . . we ate ourselves silly. While I was doing all of this, Marilyn kept herself busy with a trip to Regina to visit the relatives.

A couple of days after selling the company we left for Switzerland with Sharp Electronics. This was a Dealer Incentive trip that we had qualified for and it proved to be one of the most memorable. It was a little more memorable for *me* at least since the last time that I was there (with Sharp also) I only saw the country out of the bottom of a bottle and eventually ended up in the hospital. We landed in Zurich on November 7th where we boarded a beautiful luxury train bound for Interlaken. The stewardess travelled up and down the car delivering samples of wine and hors d'oeuvres during the entire three hour trip. Marilyn's nephew, Ken Esplen from Supreme Office Equipment in Regina also qualified so we spent most of our time travelling in Switzerland with him and his wife Wanda. The next day we took the cog train to the top of Jungfrau, a mountain that rises 11,500 feet above the city of Interlaken. At the top of the mountain (the air was very thin there) we visited an ice palace carved right out of the glacier. Champagne was served as we entered, either to ward off the cold or dull the pain if you happened to fall on your head while walking through the ice caverns. We stayed in a grand old hotel at the base of the mountain, it was like a palace. In the morning, vehicle-trucks arrived with Mercedes Benz for us to drive for the next three days in a car rally. There were about 30 cars in all and we were amazed that they all lasted three days & 500 kilometres without a scratch! The first day we made our way to Lucerne. There were two couples in each car and we were lucky enough to get teamed up with Ken and Wanda. We quickly settled into our respective roles, one driver, one navigator, and two backseat drivers. Some gentle reminders from the navigator (me) helped to keep the back seat drivers from taking over other jobs like driving or navigating from their back seat positions !! From Lucerne, we headed for Luasanne via Bern (the capital city) and Gryueres (famous for the cheese) stopping along the way for pictures and sightseeing. In Luasanne we stayed at Le Beau Rivage Palace on the shore of Lake Geneva (this was a first class trip). We left the Palace the next morning to drive around Lake Geneva which was about 170 kilometres. This route took us first through Geneva then further along the south shore of the lake and across the border into France. Travelling about 70 kilometres through France we crossed the border back into Switzerland and continued along the shore until we arrived back at the Palace. The President's dinner was held in the grand ballroom under a sea of huge crystal chandeliers. . . it was a trip of a lifetime.

It will be our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in February, so we have booked a cruise through the Panama to celebrate. This 17 day cruise will start in Fort Lauderdale, Fl., and, after cruising through the Panama and up the west coast, will eventually take us right back to Vancouver. We will save the details for our next Christmas letter.

I'm off to Florida to attend Sharp meetings next weekend. I will be returning December first which is another reason why Marilyn wanted this letter to be finished this weekend. It will be a quiet Christmas for us this year. Paige is having Christmas dinner for the family at her place. It should be quite another story next year when I get a chance to test out all of the new electronic toys that Santa will be bringing the new grandchild!

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM OUR HOUSE TO YOUR HOUSE