

Christmas, 2003

Well, it's Christmas time again. Another year gone. It was a quiet year for us, other than John taking his 8 week sabbatical. We started the year with snow snowshoeing trips, a sport that we are growing fond of.

We decided to not hold our annual Mardi Gras party this year. We were busy preparing for our sabbatical trip and didn't have the time to invest. We do plan to put it on again in 2004.

In May came the event we had been looking forward to for years. Intel gives its employees an eight week sabbatical every seven years, in addition to their regular vacation allotment. John's was this year. Unfortunately, Janet's employer put a kink in our plans by informing her at the last minute that she could not have off the 6 weeks she had scheduled and could only take her 3 weeks of vacation. We had to shorten our planned trip and limit it to the western half of the country.

We loaded up our new motor home and headed to San Diego to visit our friends Vince and Susan Sheetz. We enjoyed several days with them as they showed us around the area and took us out to Catalina Island.

Then we headed east to Alamogordo, New Mexico. However, John's brother Chuck, who is stationed at Holloman AFB there, was sent to Iraq before we made it, so we missed him. However, John's niece Susan was there. She was just finishing her last year of teaching music in the school system there, and was packing up to move back to Memphis the weekend we showed up. Her dad, John's brother David, flew in to help and so we were able to visit with him as well, and assist in loading the moving truck with her stuff.

From New Mexico, we headed north and began our sightseeing trip in earnest. First, we stopped in Winslow Arizona along route 66. There is a picture of us in this years collage "standing on a corner in Winslow Arizona" next to a statue celebrating the famous song.

After a short stop at the Barringer Meteor Crater in Arizona (a crater blasted out by a huge meteor tens of thousands of years ago), we found our most important sight seeing destination, the Grand Canyon. We camped there and spent several days touring the area. We may go back and try the rafting trip someday.

We left the south rim and headed up to Utah for a few days. From our campsite in Utah, we visited the Grand Canyon north rim, Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon National Park. At the Grand Canyon north rim, we got a wonderful close up look at a California condor. He was no more than ten feet from us at one point.

We left Utah and headed home. Janet had to return to work, and John caught a flight to Memphis to spend time with friends and family. His sister Nancy picked him up at the airport gave him a tour of the Casinos in Tunica, and then gave him a ride to Jackson. He spent a while at his Mom's, visiting and building her a wheelchair ramp at the back door with some assistance from David and family. He also took a couple of days to drive to the New Orleans area to visit our old friends George and Nancy Parr.

In September, we finally got to see John's brother Chuck. He and a friend came up to visit, and they took us to the Saint's season opener against the Seahawks in their new stadium in Seattle.

In December, we both scheduled minor foot surgeries we had been putting off. John is recuperating now with the expectation of returning to work on the December 15th, and Janet's turn is scheduled for the 19th.

You can see our sabbatical travel photos on our web site at <http://home.comcast.net/~john.spain/index.htm>

Here's wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Please keep in touch.

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