



Life & Times, 1980 – 2014

Kate V. Scott

Edited by Carli Scott



Life & Times, 1980 – 2014



Kate V. Scott, 2001

Cover photo: Letter Kate wrote to long-time friends Polly and Dil Clarke in 1996

Book 2

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The four books in this series are dedicated to the people of Belize, who received the Scotts with a warm welcome and lasting friendships, and who accepted our family as an integral part of the community in which we made our new home.

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Forward

Back when people relied on letters sent through the world's postal systems to keep each other informed, my mother, Kate V. Scott, was a prolific correspondent. For decades, her delightfully written, newsy letters and reports enchanted and entertained family and friends. Following her death, and with the help of family and friends, I collected as much of Kate's writing as I could find. This is the second in a series of four books that I assembled from the collection:

1. *Life & Times, 1922 – 1979*
2. *Life & Times, 1980 – 2014*
3. *Travels, 1961 – 1994*
4. *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

Books 1 and 2 consist of letters of general interest and other descriptions of incidents in Kate's life; Book 1 also includes a draft memoir and essays describing her first few years living in Belize, British Honduras. I've organized this material into chapters that I present in roughly chronological order to tell Kate's life story in her own words. Books 3 and 4 consist of Kate's reports of her various trips, mostly vacations but some including business as well; again, the reports are ordered chronologically.

For additional information about the source material that I worked with, see page 373 in Book 1: *Life & Times, 1922 – 1979*.

When a narrative in this book refers to material in a different book, a footnote gives a reference to the relevant chapter in that book.

I have maintained Kate's usage and spelling. Readers from countries other than Belize will notice that she followed the Belize custom of using anglicized Spanish adjectives for people or things from nearby Spanish-speaking regions. When Belize was still a colony, a person from British Honduras was called a *British Honduran*; in contrast, a person from the Republic of Honduras was, and still is, called a *Honduranean* to reflect the Spanish word *hondureño*. Similarly, a person from El Salvador is a

Salvadoranean, from the Spanish *salvadoreño*; a person from the Mexican state of Yucatán is a *Yucatecan*, from the Spanish *yucateco*. (Although many people in Belize refer to a person from Guatemala as a *Guatemaltecan*, from the Spanish *guatemalteco*, Kate always used the standard English word *Guatemalan*.)

I have modified Kate’s original text only where necessary for clarity or to remove redundancy when combining related material from different sources. On the first occurrence of any acronym or foreign word that may not be familiar to all readers, any word whose use in Belize is different from its use in standard U.S. English, or any word or name whose pronunciation may differ from what some readers expect, I have added a footnote to “translate” Kate’s meaning or to indicate how the spoken word or name sounds. My occasional comments on her narrative or her wording can be found in separate editor’s notes (page 363).

— *Carli Scott*

Back to Work

1979 – 1993

From Kate's recap of her life, written in 1993

After the death of my beloved husband, Bucher,* I gradually returned to the business. I decided that a daytime in the office was a big improvement over looking at four walls. I always had acted as comptroller. One of my biggest surprises was finding that this lit major could become enchanted with the tidiness of accounts. To my surprise, I then discovered that I am a first class salesman.



Kate in office with son Alex and Glenda Crawford, mid 1980's

We have been CGM (The French Line) ship's agents for years. Throughout Central America, Air France has selected CGM agents as their representatives. At the strong urging of our counterparts in Guatemala and Salvador, I wrote to Air France suggesting our appointment as their agents.

* *Bucher* is pronounced *BOOK-er*.



Kate supervising loading of fresh oranges for shipment to Martinique

We were made General Sales Agents for Air France in the country. It has been slow promoting Air France because no one thinks of his friendly neighborhood shipping agent when planning a trip. However, we finally have been given some competitive Belize / Europe / Belize rates and are beginning to attract travelers.



Now that I'm in my early 70's, friends regularly ask when I intend to retire. The question makes me feel as if the floor is dropping out from underneath. Fortunately my son, Alex, and I work well together. I have a wonderful time working and intend to continue as long as I am an asset, rather than an embarrassment, to him.

Flurry of Visits

Early 1980

From letter dated March 24, 1980

My cousins Helen Anne de Geus and Jo Lee came from Saginaw to visit. As you would guess, we had a perfectly marvelous time. Helen Anne and Jo were delightful house guests, and we kept a fast pace.

I had a cocktail party for them fairly soon after they arrived, to introduce them to my friends. Then there were coffee mornings and tea afternoons and two more cocktail parties to which we all were invited. I offered them a chance to get out of the parties, but they insisted that they knew people by this time and were enjoying them.

Alex took us out to St. George's Caye* one Sunday, with a short detour out beyond the reef to show them the glorious color "on the blue." Helen Anne, who was sitting in the front seat turned around in terrified amusement at the mountainous waves...actually a modest swell...and Alex



Kate's cousins, Helen Anne de Geus (left) and Jo Lee (right), 1980

* *Caye* is pronounced *key*.

put us back inside the reef quickly. Being used to one- or two-foot waves at Higgins Lake, she was *not* pleased to see what looked like the entire windshield fill with blue water as the swells moved toward the boat. We were riding smoothly over them, but they were a little startling.

We drove inland to San Ignacio, where there now is a charming little hotel. The rooms are rather bare but clean and comfortable, each with a private balcony. After lunch we drove across the Western border...the only formality was having our names entered in a register at British Honduras Immigration; the Guatemalans simply waved us ahead with a friendly greeting.

Melchor de Mencos is a drab, dusty little border town, but at least it is a foreign country. We went through all the shops in town, and Helen Anne and Jo stocked up on *bolsas*, string bags of various styles and sizes. Back in their Saginaw shop, they are now selling the bags filled with a bottle of wine, loaf of French bread, etc. We all were astounded at my success in arguing the merchants into giving discounts; I think I took them by surprise. My Spanish only saved about US\$1.80 in all, but I was terribly pleased with what I had accomplished.

Back at the hotel in San Ignacio, we had our private cocktail hour in the dusk on one of our balconies overlooking the hills, then went in to a surprisingly good family-style dinner.

The next day we left early in the morning, and I detoured down the Hummingbird Highway so that they could see some jungle scenery. We went back to the dismal capital, Belmopan, which is looking even more depressed with age. I covered myself with glory and blood by tripping down a three-inch step in the shopping plaza, a frequent error of trifocals. Tore two holes in my leg...which would heal...and one in my new surgical stockings...which wouldn't. I limped over to the snack shop, which fortunately had a restroom. Cleaned up and stuffed my stocking with Kleenex to soak up the blood.



Kate (left) and Helen Anne (right), 1980

My leg took weeks to heal, since I had to use bandages longer than usual because of my stockings. Ultimately, after putting it off as long as I could, I darned the stocking, not beautifully, but better than I had expected.

One Sunday we flew up to San Pedro on Ambergris Caye, which adjoins Mexico, and spent the day at one of the tourist lodges. We rented one of their cabañas, a charming thatched hut, so that we would have somewhere to change and shower. Spent the day in and out of the sea and sitting in the semi-shade of coconut trees enjoying sun, sea, and sand. I was pretty careful about staying dressed except when I was actually swimming, and used plenty of suntan cream, since I no longer am supposed to be in the sun at all. The lodge served quite a decent lunch, and we had a lovely day of it.

It was hard seeing them leave. I loved every minute of it, of course. I still am just delighted that they took it in their heads to come down to visit me.

[Editor's Note 1 on page 363]



I just had recovered from our rather busy schedule during Helen Anne and Jo's visit when I found out what happens to good little girls who go to

church regularly. They are “invited” to keep one of the visiting clergy in town for the installation and enthronement of our new bishop. It was a request that I simply could not turn down. More clerics than expected were arriving, and some of their promised hosts had let them down. However, I considered it highly improper for them to have asked a widow to take in a strange man, and Mother’s and Grandma’s ghosts perched on my shoulder the entire time.

I could not have been luckier. Canon Gordon of Jamaica was an attractive, intelligent man and the most considerate of house guests. I had a lot of chauffeuring to do, which was no problem; at social gatherings he did not want me hovering, but wanted to be off among his friends from various islands, whom he saw rarely; at home he took advantage of his leisure to take naps whenever he could. During the weekend we managed some delightful visits, and I thoroughly enjoyed our conversations.

I picked him up at the airport at 8:00 on a Saturday morning...some of the visiting bishops had started arriving on Thursday, so I was lucky. Since I had to leave the house at 7:30 and since my day is ruined without leisure for several cups of coffee and my Miami Herald, I had set the alarm for 5:00.

Sunday, I assumed, we would not have to get up early. Guess again. Canon Gordon was asked to read the Gospel at the 7:00 AM service at the Cathedral. So I set my alarm for 4:30 to give myself time for my morning indulgence. I assumed it would be the short communion service, but they have changed that in the years since I attended, and it was the full-dress business with choir, chanting of the service (which I hate), and a packed congregation. Four visiting bishops and the Canon participated in the service. I can manage the short communion service (which I go to on Tuesday mornings), but an hour and a half of cramped sitting and kneeling was too much for my leg. Furthermore, my disposition suffered from the atrocious hymns and vile singing. I quite agree with Bucher that Anglican “music” is unspeakable. (I remember so well the beautiful singing in my sister Mary’s Methodist church when I visited her in Toledo, Ohio, last September.)

There was a lovely luncheon for the visiting clerics and their hosts that noontime, and later in the afternoon, I drove the Canon back to the Cathedral for the Installation. I did not attend, ostensibly because of my leg, but I would have dreamed up another excuse if that one had not been available. I knew it would be long, crowded, and hot. But I understand it was a beautiful and touching service. The new bishop is a tiny man, possibly only five feet tall, a Jamaican, and very pleasant personally. He is very well liked, according to Canon Gordon, and comes with a fine reputation as an administrator. We have been without a bishop since a year ago December, when ours was killed tragically in a car accident.

I came back to the house and listened to the service on the radio, following with the printed pamphlet that the Chancellor of the Diocese had given me in sincere regret for the fact that I would not be able to attend the service due to my disability. I passed up the reception following and arranged for friends to bring the Canon back to the house afterwards.

So could we sleep in Monday? Not at all. He was to be picked up at 7:00 AM to drive to Belmopan for the morning and be back in time to go to lunch with the new bishop. So 4:30 saw me drinking coffee and 6:30 saw me fixing an unaccustomed man-size breakfast. They came for the Canon at 9:00, after the two of us had spent an uneasy two hours assuming that he had been forgotten.

He left on the late afternoon plane Monday. The weekend was a little hectic, but I loved knowing the Canon and found him most congenial.

[Editor's Note 2 on page 363]



I recovered from the Canon's visit, and a couple of weeks later, seven minutes before my bridge group was due to arrive, I had a call from a Dr. Chang, a friend of a friend of my daughter, Carli. Carli had written that Dr. Chang, a professor of anthropology at University of California at Davis, and his son, who just had graduated in anthropology, were traveling through Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize and might call.

Dr. Chang said that they were at the bus station (translation: wide spot in the road) and I wailed that I had guests arriving momentarily and could not go get them. He protested that they were quite all right on their own. I asked if they needed the name of an hotel...established that they did not want one of the expensive ones...and on an inspiration helped by the yellow pages, sent them to the Golden Dragon, a centrally located, decent, clean place that we often have used for seamen, with one of the best restaurants in town. I arranged to pick them up at six to bring them back for a drink.

We had a delightful evening. He is Korean, not Chinese as I had assumed, and the boy was a fine-looking bright young man. Dr. Chang grew up in Manchuria (and had words to say about what the Russians really are like). They returned to Korea, and his mother was killed in a bombardment when their house took two direct hits. He and his father came to California, where he was educated. He is a fascinating person, and it was most interesting talking to him.

I had them for dinner the next midday, then gave them the guided tour of Belize (not a lengthy project). They left early the next morning.



I had the most wonderful and touching surprise last week. Carli sent me an airline ticket to meet her in New Orleans late in April. She has to be there to give a demonstration of her project at a medical convention and had suggested that I meet her. I really had not thought about it since I did not want to intrude on her trip. To have her do this was absolutely thrilling. I have never felt more “wanted.” She has set the time so that I will arrive after she is through with her part, on a Wednesday, and we both will leave on the Sunday. It is hard to accept a gift of this sort, but as I’m sure you realize, I have to because it is something she wanted to do. You can imagine how thrilled I am.

Belize Independence

September 1981

Inevitable, dreaded, longed for, mistrusted...it was a celebration best characterized as ambivalent.

Government made elaborate plans, and with only minor problems, all went off as scheduled. The Opposition, in utter disarray and virtually leaderless since defeat at the last elections, nattered and moaned. A small group of activists calling themselves Belize Action Movement (BAM), who were responsible for whipping up most of the violence connected with the spring riots, brought in guns and ammunition, but were arrested, disarmed, shaken up, and turned loose by police, who proceeded to watch and harass them. All remained publicly peaceful.

The traditional Tenth of September was celebrated by both Government and Opposition with modest parades and ceremonies, made poignant by the feeling that they would be the last to celebrate the Baymen. Official pre-Independence celebrations began two days later and continued nightly for the ten days to Independence Day, September 21st, 1981.



A modest cultural exhibit with Mayan artifacts, local paintings, exhibits of indigenous butterflies, herbs, and handcrafts, etc., was sent to each of the Districts, ending in Belize City, where the Jade Head recovered from the ruins of Altun-Ha was added to it, complete with a sleepy policeman dedicated to guarding it from would-be thieves.

There were sporting events, dances, concerts, a military tattoo by the Belize Defense Force (BDF), beauty contests, body-building contest—a host of “entertainments,” three or four each night. Interestingly, although they allegedly were given for the people, admission fees were set as high as five dollars for some events.



Housing for dignitaries was a critical problem, haunting the government until the last moment. Ten “Independence Houses” were rushed to completion on pumped-up land outside Belize City, and other houses, intended ultimately for civil servants, were built in Belmopan to house chiefs of state. The Independence Houses were finished...barely. Just before delegations began arriving, a strip of sod was laid edging the muddy road in front of the houses, and five-foot-high coconut palms were planted along it to give a touching impression of landscaping. We heard that before the first guest arrived, the refrigerators were stolen from four houses, but do not know that it was true. However, large groups of BDF troops were seen guarding the area from the next day onward.

One of the key items needed for the celebrations was a red carpet...for use by arriving delegations and for The Royals at Government House. There was one in Belize City...and Holy Redeemer Cathedral found itself bare for the holiday weekend.



Dignitaries began arriving on Friday, September 18th. The key ones, of course, were Prince Michael of Kent and Princess Michael, the Queen’s cousin, to represent her for the handing over. They stayed in Government House, and Mrs. Hennessey, the Governor’s Lady, had been in Belize City for almost a month overseeing the refurbishing for their visit. The poor old house had been allowed to deteriorate badly, but certainly looked dignified from the outside, with fresh paint and newly tended grounds.

Allegedly we had over two hundred guests from 75 countries. One of the best stories of the arrivals involved the Nicaraguans. This was reported by a businessman who happened to be at the airport as their plane was about to land. Minister of Energy and Communications, Louis Sylvestre, was on duty receiving guests when our Communist minister, Assad Shoman, drove up, accompanied by Juan Duran, another Communist, with a truckload of followers. They swarmed over the airport apron with placards bearing leftist welcome to the incoming Sandinistas. Sylvestre went to Shoman and ordered him to put the signs and men back in the

trucks and get them out. "Everyone gets the same welcome here." He further said that if the men weren't in the truck instantly, he would confiscate the vehicle and let them walk back up-country to the District they came from. Shoman, Duran, and mob left.



In his ecstasy at finally having achieved the Independence he had spent twenty-five years fighting for, Premier George Price sent invitations to every country that had voted for him in the United Nations...which was everyone but Guatemala. He failed to specify the number of delegates who could be accommodated.

Most countries, of course, sent one or two or three, especially the more distant countries, such as Yugoslavia, Denmark, etc. Mexico carefully sent only five, knowing how difficult it would be to get rooms, and made early reservations at the Fort George Hotel. There was no question of Mexico's President coming. In the first place, he had to be in Grand Rapids at the same time for the opening of the Gerald Ford Museum, but also, he travels with so many security men that there was no way he could have been accommodated here.

The U.S. sent about ten, led by Under-Secretary of State Thomas Ender. Panama sent two plane-loads...one with officials and one cultural (dancers, singers, musicians). Mexico also sent a cultural group. Cuba sent a planeload of officials and a Folklorico group and band. The Nicaraguans sent a planeload. Maurice Bishop, the leftist Granada leader came...Fidel Castro did not. Edward Seaga, the new moderate leader of Jamaica came; Mr. Price had invited former Prime Minister Michael Manley privately, but he did not accept.



On Saturday, September 19th, the dignitaries were to visit the Cultural exhibit at the Bliss Institute and then go to the Festival Grand Market, an annual exhibit of local crafts and industry. It was held at a school on Cemetery Road and accounted for the strange note I had read in Alex's

list of activities (he was on the Logistics Committee) that the delegates would be viewing cattle at a school.

Callie Young and I went to the fair late in the morning and found it a complete shambles. The Public Works Department had dumped several loads of red clay in the grounds, obviously to fill holes, and then it had rained. It was a sea of mud. They did have both cattle and horses, however...well constructed thatched pens on either side of the grounds, with some very handsome animals that I wanted to linger over as Callie pushed past them as rapidly as possible.

There was a typical local band, some minor food and drink stalls, and a group of Garifuna Jankunu dancers, who were interesting. But for some strange reason, the exhibits had been spaced one to a building, with no signs to tell you where to go.

Ford Young exhibited the Belizean agate jewelery that he and Callie have done very well with; there were some handcrafts; and the Prison System had a nice exhibit of carvings, cookies, jams, and needlework done by prisoners. And that was about it. We waded in...looked about...and waded back out.

That evening the BDF had a barbecue at their headquarters adjacent to the Police Training School, but although the weather was better, it still must have been muddy for the guests and disappointing for the hosts.

Sunday, Government had an ethnic luncheon for dignitaries, held at the gym at St. John's College in Belize City. They had Belize Creole and Garifuna food and the waitresses were dressed in native costumes (which isn't easy in Belize). Reportedly, The Royals insisted on rice-and-beans, chicken, and *dukunu* (corn, grated, mixed with this and that, wrapped in a leaf, and steamed.) I understand the luncheon really was very well done and most effective.



The main activity, of course, was the evening of Sunday, September 20th, at Government House. I was not invited...had not expected to be, given the crowd of dignitaries and people with a real claim to invitations. However, some of my friends went, and the following description is taken from their accounts.

Belize City was at its dressiest. For days, decorations had been going up...colored pennants, patriotic banners hung across streets, colored lights festooning buildings and draped across Albert Street so that you drove through a multicolored tunnel of lights. The banks had added extensive colored floodlighting. Flags everywhere. The new flags could not be delivered on time by the U.S. company from which they had been ordered, so substitutes were whipped up by a local company on blue of any shade available, an interesting confusion for the new flag. Government had made duty-free paint available, in an attempt to get people to redecorate, and several main businesses had redone their facades.

Albert Street was blocked at the southern end to all but Government-House traffic, then divided into vehicles delivering guests and those parking. The gates were manned by British troops and left just ajar so that guests could show their invitations and then be allowed to enter. As guests walked up the driveway along the side of Government House toward the sea, they walked between sailors from HMS *Ariadne*,* the frigate here for the occasion. The sailors were stationed opposite each other at about five yards distance. As guests came abreast of them, both sailors would snap to attention so that guests were saluted repeatedly on their progress toward the Premier—soon to be Prime Minister—George Price, who stood at the corner of the drive, greeting guests.

An area at the foot of the flag pole had been cordoned off, and the party took place on the entire lawn between Government House and the sea. It was well after the guests had gathered that The Royals appeared. Prince Michael, dour, with a full beard, and (some said) resembling his

* *HMS* before the ship's name means *Her Majesty's Ship*.

grandfather King George V, wore dark red, tight-fitting trousers, long white uniform jacket with decorations, and the flat military cap. Princess Michael reportedly was beautiful, her blond hair pulled back in a large chignon surrounded by a braid. She wore a grayish-blue ball gown, off the shoulder, coming to a V neckline, huge puffed elbow-length sleeves, and enormous skirt. She had a diamond tiara, elaborate diamond necklace, and diamond drop earrings with huge sapphires.

Fireworks began at eleven. Public Works Department had been working with Alex for three weeks about supplying barges and getting them into position as platforms for the display. The first burst was a multicolored shower, more elaborate than any ever seen in Belize. And then the heavens opened up. It was a sudden, heavy squall that sent guests fleeing into Government House or under the front steps and veranda overhang and kept them sheltering for forty minutes. They tried later to continue the fireworks, but apparently everything had been ruined. It was a great and expensive disappointment

The skies cleared just in time for the flag ceremonies. There were prayers and speeches...the flood lights were turned off and only one left, lighting the flagpole as the Union Jack was lowered to the playing of *God Save The Queen* by the Gordon Highlanders...and the new Belizean flag was raised to the Belizean National Anthem, *Land of the Gods*.

Dress for the occasion was long dresses for the ladies, their most elegant, and lounge suits for the men. Naturally many of the women wore short dresses...the Prime Minister and some of his cabinet wore guayaberas...and some of the Cubans showed up in blue jeans and sweat shirts.

Friends had worried about our dear, elderly friend, Lady Wolffsohn, during the rain. A search discovered her surrounded by British soldiers who had provided her with a chair and were enjoying a brisk conversation.

Lady Wolffsohn remarked to the Governor's Private Secretary...or one of the civilian British top people...that it had been "rash" to lower the lights

since anything could have happened in the darkness. He replied, “Madame, we are prepared for every emergency.” He also remarked that it had been Mr. Price’s decision to lower the lights, in deference to people’s sensitivities at an emotion-filled moment.



Final documents regarding the handing over were signed in Belmopan on Monday, Independence Day, and the new Governor-General was sworn in. There had been endless speculation about who would be appointed. The announcement finally was made just a few days ahead of time...Dr. Minita Gordon, a stalwart of Price’s party, who not long ago got her doctorate in education. The one person I know who has met her says she is lovely.

Following the ceremonies, there was a seated luncheon for about 300 in the Civic Center at Belmopan. There were several speakers at the luncheon. One of them was Edward Seaga of Jamaica, and he received a standing ovation.



Meanwhile, back in Belize City, both Albert and Regent Streets allegedly had been blocked off from midnight on and throughout the day, though obviously the Government-House guests were allowed to leave. Food and drink stalls were set up the length of both streets; bands played in locations just separated enough so that one never was out of range of music; and it was a day-long street festival. Actually, friends say that the streets were full at two in the morning following the flag raising.

With friends, I drove into town at midday, and it was a sea of people from the bridge-foot down both Regent and Albert. Somehow our driver made his way across the bridge and down Water Lane. We drove along the canal and looked down each cross street to see the crowds on Albert. Our impression was that the people we passed going toward the festival were well dressed, quiet, and happy. It was loud and drunken later, but I have not heard of any incidents. It simply was one massive blast.

~ ~ ~

Post-Independence...no change that I can see in the way things are going or in the attitude of people on the street. Mr. Price hot-footed it off to New York early in the week, applying for entrance into the United Nations.

With Independence, we get a British High Commissioner, who will be living in Belize House in Belmopan. He is a Mr. Trew, and apparently is very highly thought of. No one knows what will happen to Government House in Belize City.

~ ~ ~



Carli, Bibba Hurst, Alex, and Kate, Christmas 1982

Update on the Scotts

1982 – 1983

From letter dated November 26, 1982

It has been a bad year and a good one.

Started literally New Year's Eve, when I returned from the annual party...at a reasonable hour, 1:30, and in a festive but ladylike condition...to find my leg swollen double. I was in bed for most of January and February fighting a new attack of thrombophlebitis. Had to get well for March because...

When I opened Carli's birthday present in January, it was the expected Sierra Club Engagement Book, but stuffed untidily with papers. The first was a round-trip ticket to New Orleans. The second was a brochure of the *Mississippi Queen*, the most luxurious of the paddle-wheel steamboats running the river. And the third was Carli's invitation to be her guest on a cruise celebrating our Ninetieth Birthday...my 60th and her 30th. The trip was glorious.*

The only other thing I have done this year was spend three weeks in Atlanta in September / October. Stayed with Bucher's oldest sister, Bibba, but commuted to Jefferson three times to visit his youngest sister, Becky, so I really had time to see everyone. They are all fine.

The exciting news is that Bibba is coming for Christmas...and so is Carli.



The "children" are doing well.

No news about Alex. Probably exactly what I said last year...doing a good job running the business...not married, not courting, but busy social life...small-sailboat racing.

* "Mississippi Queen with Carli" on page 83 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

He took advantage of a local holiday last weekend to spend three days in Mérida, Mexico with friends. Had a glorious time, managed lots of good Yucatecan food without getting the bug, and brought home tons of loot...guayaberas, hand-tooled belt, and huaraches* (which he acted as if he had discovered).

Carli has changed jobs. She decided she had gone as far as she could at Stanford. The promotion they offered her involved a lot of administrative work that she did not want. After a number of job interviews, she accepted an offer from Teknowledge, the company set up a year and a half ago by some of her Stanford associates, of which she is a founder and for which she already was a consultant.



From letter dated December 3, 1983

1983 has been a dismal year for Belize. The economic situation has been disastrous. Fortunately, however, we are an island of peace and stability, in contrast to our Central American neighbors. The only direct effect of their tragic turmoil that we have had is the advent of refugees from Guatemala and Salvador.

Since Easter, when the city generating system disintegrated, we have had four- to eight-hour daily blackouts. Years of mismanagement, non-maintenance, and corruption finally caught up with the Belize Electricity Board. We all are waiting for a Black Christmas.

With Independence, the U.S. diplomatic presence was upgraded to an embassy, of course. It is mushrooming beyond any possible correlation with the needs of Belize. Nice people...the Ambassador is a career diplomat and top flight.

You may remember my mentioning Muriel and Don Stauffer; they're the friends with whom we bought an airplane in the 1960's. I am off to meet

* *Huaraches* are sandals, typically made with woven leather uppers and soles cut from old tire treads.

them in Mexico City this week. We will be driving through Michoacán, visiting the Colonial towns off the main tourist trail. I will leave them in Guadalajara to return. Have not seen them since they flew over from Holland to meet us when Bucher and I were in London some years ago.*



Alex is doing well here, running the business, getting into some civic committees, and doing some small-sailboat racing. He came home from the last race of the season with an impressive trophy.

I went out to California to visit Carli in the fall. Had a glorious time with her. We had side trips to Monterey Peninsula, Yosemite (spectacular beyond my imagination), and twice trips into San Francisco for lunch and theater.

This was my first chance to visit Teknowledge, the company of which she is a founding member and which she joined a year ago. I was impressed by the people I met and understand why she is so happy in her work.

* “England with Bucher” on page 59 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*



Carli and Kate in Yosemite National Park, 1983

Queen Elizabeth's Visit

October 1985

We will now discuss the visit of (as Radio Belize says) “Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, by the Grace of God, Queen of Belize...” (and, we trust, of other slightly grander realms).

The Royal Visit was announced in June, to the overwhelming delight of the people. While the general thought is that this new government immediately invited Her Majesty—which the former, anti-colonial government had *not* done during its 25 years in power—it also is said that the Queen had set herself a personal task of visiting each country in the Commonwealth, and that Belize was last on the list. Whatever the reason, the result has been universal excitement and joy.

The weather cooperated. Periodic heavy squalls before the Queen's arrival had everyone worried, but the days of the Royal Visit were sunny, with brief showers descending at times and in places where they disrupted nothing.



Normally, arrangements for a Royal Visit would be coordinated by the government in consultation with the British High Commissioner (the British equivalent of ambassador to a Commonwealth country) and, in this case, with the British Garrison commander. However, our Governor-General, Dame Minita Gordon, said thank-you-no-thank-you to all offers of help and kept a rigid grip on all details.


Governor-General is an appointive position. When Belize attained independence, the then Prime Minister, leader of the People's United Party (PUP), selected her and submitted her name to the Queen. Her Majesty gave routine approval and announced the appointment.

Dr. Minita Gordon has a PhD in education, has taught and been in administration, and is a PUP stalwart. Until the Queen's visit, she

appeared to be earning the honor of the title *Dame*, bestowed upon her not long after her appointment to the Governor-Generalship. Dame Minita is a large woman, probably in her 50s. She wears becoming dowager-type dresses and hats, usually in bright pastels. She speaks slowly and well, moves with dignity, and graces her position.

Usually.


Now, however, the formal coolness of the new United Democratic Party (UDP) government to an antagonistic holdover from the old PUP government has broken into open warfare.



But back to the build-up to the Visit. The Royal Crates duly arrived, well ahead. Wherever the Queen goes, the boxes precede her. They contain crowns to be placed on Royal Vehicles, china, silver, crystal, linens, and most important of all, the red carpet.

On the subject of Special Facilities for Her Majesty, the army has built a tiled lavatory adjacent to the Sergeants' Mess at Airport Camp for her personal use, since the Queen would have a drink there before adjourning to the Officers' Mess for a final luncheon. Reportedly, army wives are delighted since the new facility will revert to them after the Royal Visit.

Even more interesting is the fact, which apparently is common knowledge—but not heretofore to me—that whither goeth the Queen, there goeth her private toilet seat. Apparently the Royal Household lives in fear that someone somewhere somehow might gain possession of a seat which had been graced by the Royal Bottom and auction it off or perhaps frame and mount it on his wall.



Queen Elizabeth stayed at Government House while in Belize City, but as recently as ten days before her arrival, the government had no idea where she would be housed, because the Governor-General had not seen fit to mention her plans to them.

Government House, traditional residence of British Governors before independence, has not been occupied for some years, and the upstairs then was decorated in Early Barn. I understand that the antediluvian plumbing was replaced for Her Majesty by a modern tiled bathroom, and can only hope that the Royal Bed Chamber was redecorated with more color-taste than has been shown by recent government repainting around town.

One of the Ladies-in-Waiting was booked into the Bellevue Hotel, not far from Government House. The hotel manager / owner, Roger Dinger, completely refurbished the room for her and was pleased with results—until a security officer demanded a fire escape. Apparently none of the Queen's Household may stay in a room with only one exit. Roger had to cut a door from his newly painted room through to his bar, the only possible egress. (I have had a lovely mental picture of Lady Whatever fleeing in her shift in the middle of the night through a busy Belizean bar.)



The big excitement, of course, was who would be invited to what event. Invitations were slow in arriving. Some were received only the day before the Queen's arrival. The Old Guard, who took it for granted that they would be invited to everything, had to content themselves with invitations to be at the airport when her Majesty arrived—if that.

Of late, formal invitations have included an embarrassing amount of instruction about correct dress, since the people invited don't necessarily know what is expected. Invitations to the Prime Minister's luncheon in Belmopan included instructions to the ladies that hat and gloves were required. Invitations to the State Reception specified evening gowns and gloves.

Belize City shops are not long on hats and gloves these days. What they carried sold overnight. The neighboring shopping mecca of Chetumal, Mexico, was stripped of gloves and hats within days. One of our more enterprising merchants, José Shoman of Odette's Fashion Center, advertised on the Sunday before the Queen's arrival that they had received a new shipment of evening gowns, hats, and gloves. Translated,

that probably meant that José had taken the first plane up to Miami, bought out the closest shop, bundled all into his arms, and dashed back to Belize to Fill a Need.

In the matter of dress, the Governor-General (or GG, as she is locally abbreviated) decreed long dresses for the women who would be presented to Her Majesty during airport ceremonies on her arrival. She was gently persuaded that these would be inappropriate and gave in to the point of specifying cocktail dresses. I am sure everyone dressed correctly, but I had a fascinating mental image of the Belize airport apron ablaze with satin and sequins sparkling in the setting sun.



There was a huge boggle about vehicles for the Visit. The Garrison commander tried for weeks to get GG's requirements, but it was not until a few days before Her Majesty's arrival that she finally let him know what vehicles and drivers she would need. By that time, it was too late to get what they wanted. Public information was that a closed vehicle with tinted glass would have to be used for the Queen.



Decorations exploded throughout Belize City. Red-white-and-blue banners, caught up in the middle with a medallion, and streamers stretched across all the streets on the Royal Route. A sort of Gate to the City was erected across Queen Street between the Post Office and the Vogue—tricolor columns holding a graceful arch with “Welcome Queen Elizabeth” and the names of all the major towns and pictorial symbols of the country. British and Belizean flags and bunting in a variety of colorful shapes hung everywhere.




Queen Elizabeth flew into Belize, on time to the second, at 4:30 PM, Wednesday, October 9th, 1985. Ceremonies at the airport included a 21-gun salute, both national anthems, presentations, and reviewing an honor guard of the Belize Defense Force (BDF). As the Queen was about to get into her vehicle to be driven into town, she realized that the guests seated row after row for the ceremonies could not see her clearly, so she made a point of walking clear of the car, standing where they could see her, and waving acknowledgement of their welcome.

The Queen, with Dame Minita beside her, drove to the gates of the city at Pallotti Convent for another ceremony. Thousands had gathered there to greet her. Alex was there, since he had spent the afternoon filling balloons with helium, and he stayed to watch. Unfortunately, one of the men working with him misunderstood a signal and let the balloons loose before the Queen's arrival. However, the many hundreds of soaring spots of color were a huge success with the crowd.

Alex was horrified at the apparent laxness of security. They saw two vehicles, one a closed van, which could have contained anything, and no police, BDF, or plainclothesman went near them. It occurred to me that the defenders all probably recognized people in the vehicles and realized that they were no more threat to the Queen than the school children. However, Alex was deeply unhappy that security was not tighter.

A small dais with a throne had been erected on one of the traffic islands in the middle of the wide intersection. According to the rehearsal the day before, the Queen was to ascend and be seated, and then the mayor, Frank Lizama (the sculptor), was to climb the steps, give his speech of welcome, and present Her Majesty with the Key to the City (which he had carved of ziricote).


The Queen duly climbed the few steps—and Dame Minita trudged up right behind her. When GG went, the Prime Minister had to follow. There was barely room for His Worship the Mayor to mount the steps and give his speech as the four balanced uneasily on the tiny dais intended for two.



One of the features of the ceremonies at the entrance to the city was the playing of a welcoming composition written by Dr. Coleville Young. Allegedly it had been written in four-part harmony for the Belize Chorale Society to sing. However, GG decreed that instead it would be sung by 500 school children. Reportedly, Dr. Young was wild and the Chorale Society, hurt.

I happened to go to the library a couple of days before the Queen's arrival and found myself wading through a tide of uniformed small fry. They were there to rehearse, so I stood to the side and listened. The music seemed uninspired, the words awkward, but the young voices were sweet and enthusiastic so I decided privately that perhaps the right decision had been made.

The afternoon of the Queen's arrival, however, the music, played by a steel band and not the rehearsal piano, proved a catchy calypso-type tune, perfect for the occasion. The children's voices were lovely and true, and it made a perfect musical reception for Her Majesty.



I went to Callie and Ford Young's home on Princess Margaret Drive to watch the Queen pass. We listened to the airport and city-entrance ceremonies on the radio, then went outdoors and across the street (since we understood that the Queen would be seated on the right). By that time, the street had been closed off. A police constable and BDF soldier were stationed in pairs at each intersection. Banners were waving in the wind. St. Catherine's school girls were lined up two deep on both sides of the street as far as one could see around the curve to the East.

Police vehicles...lights...motorcycle escort...a large, closed Rover...and then, to everyone's delight, a tiny open car. I saw Dame Minita and my mind registered that if GG were there, I'd better quickly see who was sitting next to her.

As the car came alongside us, almost within arm's reach, a familiar face smiled directly at me. It was one of those Technicolor snapshots that will remain in memory forever, as if a frame from a film had materialized within speaking distance. My first thought, then and now, and the one echoed by almost everyone, was, "She's so *pretty!*"

The Queen looked a good fifteen years younger than we know her to be. Her skin was the clear pastel English complexion of tradition. She was wearing a tailored silk dress of her favorite cornflower blue and a white straw sailor hat with wide matching blue ribbon.

The entire route to Government House was thronged with people: school children in uniform ranked at attention in specified locations, and eager citizens of all ages and sizes everywhere else where it was possible to catch a glimpse of their Queen.

At Government House, where a crowd of hundreds waited, the Queen ended her arrival ceremonies having the Government House staff presented to her. Later there was a private dinner for the Queen and her Household with, I believe, the omnipresent GG.



The next morning, the cavalcade moved off at 10:00 AM. We were waiting outside our office to see the Queen pass. She was wearing a royal-blue printed silk dress with one of those unfortunate toque-style hats of matching blue and emerald green. Not nearly as becoming as the hat the day before. Later Lady Wolffsohn, who had seen her from her veranda, asked me, "What *did* the Queen have on her head? It looked like a crash helmet."

The Queen was flown first to Dangriga (formerly Stann Creek) for ceremonies, then back to the capital, Belmopan.

The Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel and Mrs. Esquivel were hosts at a luncheon for Her Majesty. My housekeeper, Jean Olivera, was on the serving staff. She had been absolutely distraught over the uniforms made for the occasion—bright aqua semi-fitted shifts with collar and cuffs of a

multicolored denim with wide stripes of pink and lime and aqua and gold and green. I agreed that it was the worst thing I ever had seen until Callie Young suggested that it might be intended as a cross between a uniform and a costume, something bright and tropical to suggest a native dress (which we don't have). The theory suited me, but Jean did *not* buy the pacifying explanation.

Jean said that before the luncheon, one of the staff started past her with a gin and tonic for Her Majesty in her hand. Jean grabbed the girl and told her to use the silver tray set out for that purpose. The girl asked Jean to serve the Queen herself, that she was too scared, but Jean just laughed and sent her on.

Guests at the luncheon were members of the legislature, senate, and diplomats resident in Belmopan, and their wives. The menu (Jean brought me a copy, attractively printed in gold on white) was:


Shrimp Remoulade
Belizean Roast Beef with Dressing
Stuffed Tomato Waterlilies
Potato Salad on Lettuce Bed
Tropical Fruit Cocktail
Belizean Candy Tray (tableta,* fudge, and a bite-sized cake)
Tea or Coffee



After lunch, the Queen went to the National Assembly. The formal procedure normally is for the Queen to knock ceremonially for admittance, for the Speaker of the House to open the door, welcome her, and escort her to the podium to address the joint sitting of house and senate.

Not a bit of it. The Governor-General simply blasted her way to the front, threw open the door, and led Her Majesty in. I was told that she did not even introduce the Speaker and did not give him a chance to speak to the Queen.

* *Tableta* is a coconut candy.



Again that evening, I went out to Callie's so that we could watch the Queen return to the city. She looked surprisingly fresh, considering the long day she had had.

That was the big evening—State Dinner and State Reception.

State Dinner guests numbered sixty, but only two members of the Cabinet were included...none of the handful of Belizeans knighted by Her Majesty...not leading businessmen...not the American Chargé d' Affaires (which did not worry me, but upset some of my friends). However, the manager of a defunct airline was included.

To GG's credit, she had invited representatives of the Chinese, East Indian, and Garifuna communities (so designated in the official booklet detailing invitees and presentees). That is something no previous government ever considered.

The former Prime Minister, George Price, was among the guests seated at the Queen's table. In past years Mr. Price was very anti-Royal family, anti-British, and once was indicted for sedition for some scurrilous remarks about Queen Elizabeth herself (acquitted thanks to brilliant defense by Sir Harrison Courtenay). Mr. Price made a point of never inviting the Queen to Belize. It has been reported by someone who was there that when the Queen first met Mr. Price on this visit, her blue eyes were chilly as she said firmly, "I am here."

Another report on the dinner, picked up by the BBC, also involves Price. The dinner was an all-Belizean menu including gibunut,* sweet potato pone, etc. Price was seated next to a gentleman of the Queen's household who asked what the meat was. Price, who allegedly had been almost hectically talkative, explained that it was "a jungle rat." That was the end of the meal as far as the visiting gentleman was concerned.

* *Gibunut* is a medium-sized nocturnal rodent, *Agouti paca*.

As the dinner was finishing, guests for the reception were assembling on the lawn between Government House and the sea. Invitations were 9:30 for 9:50 and Callie said that when they arrived exactly on time, the line stretched all the way around the curve to the front of the Cathedral. Invitations were checked against the master list, and entrance was a slow process.



The guest list for the State Reception was eclectic. Many of the Old Guard, most prominent citizens, widows of leaders of the community were not invited. The list was heavily loaded with members of the rejected PUP and with Dame Minita's old school friends.

There was grumbling at Dame Minita's having selected as her own Lady-in-Waiting a sister who left Belize so long ago that no one even remembers her. And of course, the Lady-in-Waiting accompanied GG to all ceremonies and functions.

The number of invitations allotted to members of the government followed no recognizable pattern: some got 15, some 25, the Prime Minister reportedly 45. The Ministers did the gracious thing and recognized the people who had worked hard for them, so that a Coca Cola truck driver, my laundress, and a shipping clerk had a chance to see Queen Elizabeth. To my mind, this made up for all the exclusions—some of them obviously malicious—of people who had had their share of prime invitations in the past. With 1,000 attending the State Reception, it is inevitable that people would be left off the list and feelings would be hurt.

In the matter of presentations throughout the various events, the people introduced to Her Majesty on each occasion were the right ones, selected for their positions, not for who they were personally. While some of us felt it would have been an obvious courtesy to the Queen to present those few individuals whom she had honored with knighthoods, this was not done.



Before going out from Government House to greet the reception guests, the Queen paused to permit her official portrait to be taken. Dame Minita moved up closely alongside her to be included. It took firm words to convince her that the portrait must be of the Queen alone.

Her Majesty—to the disappointment of most, but not to the surprise of those who had seen films of her State Visit to Cayman—dressed down for the evening. She wore a pale blue gown with lace top, dropped waistline, and chiffon skirt. It had short sleeves, open neckline to display a diamond-and-ruby necklace, and may have had touches of silver embroidery. She wore a dainty diamond tiara. Several people noted that she looked tired and did not smile as much as they would have expected.



Next morning the Royal Party was off at 9:30, with the Queen looking well rested, en route to Orange Walk. Clever backstage managers had dressed Her Majesty in soft orange, a printed silk dress with matching straw hat with a narrow brim, the band trimmed with small flowers.

From Orange Walk, the queen returned to the airport in Belize City. It had been her stated wish that the formal ceremonies of her trip be completed there. She then would go to the British army camp adjacent to the airport, with just her Royal Household, for an informal luncheon and chance to visit her troops in the country.

When the Colonel explained this to the Governor General, Dame Minita said, “No way.” She announced that she expected to be invited. He was forced to ask her, her Lady-in-Waiting, and thus by protocol the Prime Minister and Mrs. Esquivel, completely changing the character of the luncheon. We understand that the Queen was not amused.

When the Queen reached the Army Camp, she chose to retire momentarily to refresh herself. Dame Minita surged forward in her rear with every intention of accompanying Her Majesty to the Loo. One of the officers had been delegated...not necessarily to his delight...to deter GG in the event that this unheard-of situation arose. It was not simple, barring

force of arms, to convince the Governor-General that the Queen not only requested and required moments of privacy through the day, but that only over his (ingloriously) dead body might GG proceed.

Army wives reported that the Queen simply could not move to speak to people without Dame Minita's being right alongside her.

The Queen had sent instructions that she preferred not to have wine with lunch. However, she was so unnerved by the time she was seated at the army luncheon table that she requested a glass of wine...to the accompaniment of elevated eyebrows from her Household and hosts...and downed it as if she might not have survived without it.



The Queen left by air in the early afternoon Friday, October 11th, for the Bahamas, where she was to meet Prince Phillip in the Royal Yacht *Britannia*.

Her visit was a dream-come-true to Belizeans, most of whom, regardless of local politics, are proud of their ties to the British Royal family. It was a grueling three days for Her Majesty, but she made each person she passed feel that she had made the trip specifically to see him.

Mosquito Coast

April 1986

As you probably know, the movie *Mosquito Coast* is being filmed here. Harrison Ford is starring in the part of the father. He has brought his yacht down and is living in solitary ease anchored off the Fort George light.

Alex did not enjoy the book so I never started it. Now I have read it and found it fascinating. The early part moves so slowly and without dramatic tension that I could not imagine how...or why...anyone could make a movie of it. However, the part of the father is a role any ambitious actor would sell his soul for. As a matter of fact, the pressure is on to have the film wrapped up and ready to go by November, before the deadline for Academy Award nominations. The producers' last major effort was *Amadeus*, which won 8 Oscars.


Most of the key technical people as well as Harrison Ford had been nominated for Academy Awards for their work in *Witness*, and one won an Oscar (for film editing, I believe). When the award was announced in March, there was much rejoicing in the Fort George Hotel bar.

From all reports, Ford is an affable, unassuming person, something of a loner. He wanders about Belize, disguised only in sun glasses, and nothing about him is anything except ordinary. We have heard nothing but good about him...and nothing good about the actress who plays his wife, someone whose name we neither recognized nor remembered, who allegedly has a severe case of Thirtyish Star-itis.




Much of my information comes from Ann Crump, who is operating the dispensary for the filming. She is British and a highly trained nurse and did the same thing when *The Dogs of War* was filmed here two or three years ago.


The group is a mix of Australians, British, and Americans, and Ann says they are positively paranoid about water and food. In the beginning, a few had brief bouts of illness, which happens anywhere, but they all acted as if they were dying of Rare Tropical Diseases. One man did get very sick, I think from some chronic condition, such as heart, and was flown out. Aside from that, there have been only minor scratches, infected bites, etc. Harrison Ford scraped a knee badly enough for attention, but returned to shooting the scene, which involved climbing and swinging on ropes off his “Fat Boy” refrigeration machine. As I understand it, they shot the scene a dozen times, and Ford never complained or appeared tired.



Recently, one of the Belizeans working on the film lost his Belize City house in a fire. According to Ann, the minute the film crew heard about it, they set out a jar to take up donations. It was filled so quickly that it had to be emptied several times a day. Harrison Ford quietly tucked in a check for \$4,000.



One of the more colorful members of the cast is Butterfly McQueen, who played the maid Prissy in *Gone with the Wind*. She is now in her early 70's, but has the same high, squeaky voice. Ann says she is a real pro and completely business-like about her work, cheerful and friendly with everyone. However, she operates like a bag lady, collecting food scraps for the 7 cats she is keeping in her room at the Fort George.



The children in the cast all are delightful, according to Ann, though she would not venture the same evaluation of their parents. There are red-haired twin girls, absolutely indistinguishable, long-time professionals from the East Coast. The young boy lead, about 12, I think, has been a professional since before he was a year old, discovered by an ad-agent friend of the family's. He has modeled in ads and has been in a soap opera for years.



Most of the filming is being done at Gracie Rock, where they have built four “Geronimo’s,” the main jungle establishment...assumedly each in a certain stage of development. That means four “Fat Boys,” the crazy, huge invention of an ice machine.

They also are shooting in San Pedro, Manatee Bar, and at various points on the Belize River, Sibun, and Haulover. They will finish filming in Atlanta...obviously the opening scenes. When they filmed in Belize City, the government was so cooperative that they routed traffic over the Belcan Bridge for two days to clear their location at the intersection by St. Mary’s Church and the City Council.



Kate and Simba, 1986



Kate with Simba, Alex with Doña, Christmas 1986

Family News

1986 – 1988

From letter dated November 27, 1986

My life is office work and bridge, both of which I enjoy thoroughly, but neither of which makes entertaining conversation.

Ian McIntosh, a Jamaican who has retired here with his Belizean wife, Althea, has adopted me as his Pygmalion bridge partner, somewhat to my surprise. Ian is a delightful soul, probably about 50. He has written a book and is a tournament-level player, an absolute monomaniac. Althea does not play and is wise enough not to consider learning the game from Ian. She is perfectly happy to have him out nights, even to supper-bridge parties. My game is improving, I enjoy the extra socializing, and I shall continue until Ian gives up on me and finds a more dedicated acolyte.

Ian does things like describing a strange convention and then adding, “You don’t have to learn that one. It’s played by only two couples in the world.” Or, “You need to learn that convention if you ever intend to play with the Chinese.” I hadn’t the heart to tell him it was not in my immediate plans.

Just last week, he convulse me by asking wistfully if I didn’t intend to go early to our Duplicate session. I replied that I was sure our hosts did not want us one minute before 7:30. Ian’s idea would be to go thirty minutes early, sit down, deal some hands, and discuss them by ourselves while our hosts took their baths. Everyone loves Ian and laughs at his peculiarities.



My current Major Problem (or Project) is training our year-old Golden Labrador, Simba. He is a beautiful dog, enthusiastic and amenable. I adhere to the books that recommend frequent five-minute sessions...and ignore the word *frequent*. Simba’s attention span and my strength usually expire at the same time. It would be so much easier if he spoke English,

and I could discuss the fact that all the commands he obeys so well on a lead in the yard should be obeyed equally enthusiastically in the house.

Actually, he is pretty good, except for the fact that he is not good around people. It isn't as if I had a houseful of children-and-friends in and out all the time. He is friendly, but skittish, so there is no reason to invite him in with friends. I only hope I live long enough to accomplish what the book recommends—a sit / stay so that he is pinned to the rug while guests settle themselves without his bumptious attentiveness. What probably will happen is that I will get too old and tired to continue at about the same time he gets so old and staid that it doesn't matter.

Meanwhile, he is a delight to our lives. His arrival resurrected our aging Rhodesian Ridgeback, Doña, and now she runs and plays and spars with him like a juvenile instead of like the arthritic spinster she really is.



As for Alex and Carli...

Alex is unmarried, has an apartment under my house, and works with me in the shipping business. He has a nice girl, María Villanueva, but I have no idea what their intentions are. (She was in Carli's class at school here.) He is busy, seems happy, takes a month off every summer to visit family in Georgia plus his old friends in Louisiana.

Carli and a friend, Tom Rindfleisch, bought a house together in Palo Alto almost two years ago. Tom is director of an extended version of the computer research department Carli worked for at Stanford. Like her, he is a founding member of Teknowledge, the company she now works for. Translates to: they-can-talk-to-each-other. Marriage is not mentioned (by me, especially) and aside from a tiny corner of my heart, I am completely happy with them both. Their house is lovely...gorgeous dark oak floors and paneling, a large fenced yard, vegetable garden, on a cul-de-sac surrounded by huge old trees.



Carli and Tom came for September national festivities. I suggested that if they could ignore earthquakes in California, they could ignore hurricanes in Belize. With all the decorations, nightly entertainment, parades, it seemed a good time to moderate the culture shock for Tom. Actually, he had a marvelous time and enjoyed everything.

Alex and I had a cocktail party soon after they arrived...mostly the younger group with a select few of my good friends. There were times when I had the two to myself, either on a jaunt when Alex was tied up with a ship, or for an occasional evening. Then Alex and María took them to dances, parades, all sorts of things, as well as a couple of trips upcountry. And of course, we all were together other times. It worked out nicely for everyone.

I was amazed that they were able to stagger back to California with their hand luggage—two bottles of Belize rum, ten pounds of frozen lobster tails, and a great bronze port hole that Alex salvaged from Bucher's scrapped tug *El Torito* and gave them.



From letter dated December 9, 1987


Things are about the same this year, with the shipping agency perking along.

I finally made it north this year to Ohio to see my sister, Mary, and then on to Michigan to see a favorite cousin, Helen Anne, who is fighting cancer. She is doing remarkably well, and we had a gorgeous time re-living our early years when we were as close as sisters. Marvelous arguments when we remembered things differently, and endless giggles.

I did manage five days in Guatemala for the first time in years.* The ostensible reason was to get some native fabric and a throw rug for my guest room. It gave me a chance to catch up with old friends who used to


* "Guatemala on My Own" on page 99 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

visit Belize regularly in the Fifties. The brief holiday was a lovely mixture of relaxation and stimulation.



A lot of my activity this past year-plus has involved Duplicate Bridge. My partner Ian's system has come through more by osmosis than by study, because I find that reading bridge books fractures my attention and concentration. Anyway, I finally am playing fairly reliable bridge with him and...also finally...enjoying it. We play hard, but not a deadly game. It all is fun. Have met some delightful new friends through this.

Only one regular Duplicate game at night a week, plus sometimes an extra, and one afternoon bridge game with old friends who do not play the same system. I have to go back and forth, and sometimes it gets confusing. Still it is pleasant, and I am lucky to have acquired a good partner.



Alex's "friend" María is one of the kindest, nicest girls in the world. I have no idea what, if anything, are their plans, but meanwhile, I can only be pleased that Alex is happy. (As you say: it is a new world. I certainly am glad I wasn't faced with these irregular situations when I was thirty years younger. I need all my present wisdom—i.e., "mileage" to cope gracefully.)

Haven't seen Carli and Tom this year, but will in 1988.



From letter dated November 9, 1988

In May, Carli and Tom married quietly at a court house. I am completely happy about them, though I missed being Mother of the Bride. Tom is exactly the man I always hoped would walk into Carli's life. He is about ten years older than she and a delightful person with a keen mind, fine sense of humor, and far more good qualities than I will bother to



Kate with son Alex and his friend María Villanueva, 1992

enumerate. I love him dearly. Carli and Tom are delightfully happy themselves.



Carli wrote me in March a year ago to say that Tom and she wanted me to go with them to Africa as their guest. It is the trip I have dreamed of since I was a child and the one I knew I never would have. The trip was even more wonderful than I had dreamed; I returned last week. The entire trip was perfect. Nothing went wrong, not a bad moment, it was a joy to be with them.*

* “Africa with Carli & Tom” on page 107 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*



Kate with Carli and her husband, Tom Rindfleisch, in Tanzania, 1988

Laptop

March 1991 – December 1992

From file written April 6, 1991

Early this year, Emilie Bowen and I started talking about going to Australia and New Zealand together. One part of my mind told me that financially it was well out of reach, but I figured that with an Air France agent's discount, I might be able to manage it. As time went on, I rather cooled on the idea. When I finally got some travel literature, I realized that my extravagant budget figure was probably one-half to one-third of what such a trip would cost.

At about that time, I happened to mention to Alex that the one thing I really wanted was a laptop computer. He said that I had better make up my mind, because there would be no better time than now when Carli could help advise, pick it out, and bring it when she and Tom came for a visit in March.

Of course, once I went into action, Alex admitted that he had wanted a laptop since we got the office computer a year ago. Result: Carli arrived with two laptops.

Considering what I had intended to pay for the Australia trip (which might have gotten me as far as mid-Pacific) and what the laptop actually cost, I have the smug feeling that I could not have afforded *not* to get it.

Carli and Tom both spent time setting it up for me and helping to train their computer-illiterate relative. They did something essential, which I prefer not to know about, called *setting the defaults*, that is, setting up some built-in instructions that I had no idea I wanted. They each worked with me from time to time, patiently suggesting that I learn the correct (easiest) way to do things, now that I had figured out that by punching certain keys over and over again I could get from Point A to Point B. I'm learning, I'm learning.

Tom gave me what probably was my best lesson: When in doubt, fold your hands in your lap and don't hit anything; if you get into trouble, read the instructions on the screen. This was an alternative to my system of hitting every key in sight in hopes that the right thing would happen by accident.




From file written August 23, 1991

Alex was in Miami on business last week, and in some trepidation, I asked him to pick me up a computer bridge game. I am delighted with what he brought back. I am just beginning to use it and have not ventured into the more advanced procedures.

It is very flexible. I can set conventions, deals (random, game, slam), and degree of aggressiveness.

There is a *hint* key, so that I can ask the program what it would bid or lead. I use this sometimes, deciding what I would do, then checking it with the "hint." Then I do as I like. On occasion, I have played a hand twice to see whether the hint or my play worked better.

Anyway, it is fun and stimulating, and I may learn something from it. The night Alex put it in my machine I stayed up (unsuspectingly) till 11:30 with the fool thing.



From file written September 27, 1991

I am coming along quite creditably with my laptop. There are hundreds of wonderfully useful procedures that I haven't gotten around to playing with, but I am becoming comfortable with the things I do know.

It helps inordinately to be able to work in privacy at home. We got a computer for the office about a year ago, but 1) I am afraid of it, 2) my fooling around is an intrusion when people need it for work, 3) Alex is a wonderful son and a vile teacher.

Thanks to an array of books, which cost about as much as the computer and which Alex seems to have memorized, he is charging about doing miraculous things with our office accounts. He is a born hacker, and the world is probably a happier place because he came late to the game. His idea of instruction is to lean over my shoulder and punch fifteen keys in rapid succession, which makes all sorts of things blink on and off the screen. And then he says triumphantly, "See!" Of course I haven't seen the first thing.

The one thing I have learned to do is to move blocks of material from one location to another. This means that I can build letters around pre-written material. It feels like cheating, but means that I can write more often to more people. So you may look forward to hearing from me again soon.

I did not expect to become a monomaniac, and have not, though I finished last evening with my eyeballs in the next room.

Actually, I am having a marvelous time, learning as I go.




From file written March 22, 1992

There is something I had better warn you about, since I have had charmingly reticent comments from several friends. I seem to send the same letter to people more than once.

As you know, I write letters in my laptop computer now. Normally, I print them right away and then go back and zap them out of the directory. Sometimes I don't. On occasion it is not convenient to print the letter immediately. By the time I get around to doing it, I haven't a clue whether or not I have sent the letter. My decision has been when-in-doubt, send it again rather than fail to send it at all.

If you get the same letter twice, now or in the future, please be tolerant. I'm trying. The trick is zapping the letter as soon as it is printed, so it doesn't hang around in the directory waiting for me to notice it again. I shall try to be more organized; I assure you, I shall try.




From file written July 26, 1992

In the process of restoring the main computer in the office, Alex acquired (on a temporary basis) a program called *Global*. He says that Fred Heaney, María's ex-boss, had a copy; he was utterly enamored of it and spent hours with it.

Alex called me back into the computer room, a smug grin on his face, and brought up the program. A few key strokes later, I was looking at a map of Belize with its flag, and listening to the national anthem, improbably coming tinnily from the computer. I could not believe it.

The program has to have almost every country in the world, if it has Belize. It also has information about major cities, products, and the usual stuff, for each country. It is a lovely little play-pretty (that's Georgia for *toy*) but I can't imagine its being of use to anyone beyond the fourth grade. Not that I didn't stand spellbound watching it.



From file written October 10, 1992

I have neglected you for an inexcusably long time—unless I have written and failed to mark it on my correspondence chart. That sounds pretty stodgy, doesn't it? The reason for it is this beloved laptop computer of mine.

As I have told you, some anecdotes that I intend to send to more than one person are stored in a special file. I can pull them out, put them into the letter I am writing, edit to suit the circumstances, and have part of my letter pre-written. Saves a lot of time.

When I started this, I found that I couldn't remember what I had written to whom. So I made a chart with a column for each person I write regularly across the top (it stretches on and on and on past the screen to the right).

Anecdotes are listed down the side. I then can mark each person's column when I send them a particular story.

I started out using X, but found that it would help to know when I had written. Started putting down the month. Then I decided it was just as easy to show the date (i.e., 27/8). The system works beautifully—when I remember to mark my chart.

What has helped even more is learning something about the software it runs on (Lotus 1-2-3). I work mainly in Word Perfect and haven't bothered to learn how to use 1-2-3 with any degree of assurance. All the commands are different from the ones I know, so I get terribly frustrated. A little time with *The Book of Words* (as Bucher used to call instruction manuals) would help.



From file written January 17, 1992

For Christmas, Alex, bless his heart, found a book written with his mother in mind: *Word Perfect For Dummies*. I have not bothered to learn all the goodies my computer has to offer, and it drives him crazy.



Carli and Kate on Kate's veranda

Carli & Tom's Visit

March 4 – 17, 1991

Carli and Tom visited me in early March; it was the first time we had been together since our trip to Africa three years earlier. It was a busy two weeks. First the highlights, then the details...

They arrived in the early afternoon of Monday, March 4th. We had ample time for the initial rush of conversation. Tuesday was complicated by the unexpected arrival of the new double window for my hall—glass to replace the aged and unworkable wooden louvers that I always had hated. The attendant carpentry ran us out of the living room and onto the veranda for our continuing reunion conversation, but that was a minor inconvenience, considering the light and sea view that resulted.

On Wednesday, our March gales had abated so Alex and María took Carli and Tom out in the boat for the day. They went through the Haulover Creek, down to the Burdon Canal, through Jones Lagoon to the Sibun River, then back (because they could not cross the sandbar in the River) and down through Belize City, giving Tom the river view of the town, and then out to sea to St. George's Caye for the rest of the day.

On Thursday, I took Carli and Tom to the Belize Zoo. Friday both Alex and I had to work because of a container ship due on the weekend; Carli and Tom entertained themselves. That weekend, they went with Alex and María to Placencia. The second week they had excursions with me to Chan Chich and across the Guatemalan border, then one last day on the sea with Alex and María before packing to return to California.

I am back in the Real World now, full of happy memories. Carli and Tom are so wonderfully happy that I could not even feel sad to see them go, only grateful that I had been able to share a little of their time.

Belize Zoo

Thursday, March 7th, I took off from work and drove Carli and Tom up to my adored Belize Zoo. They had visited it before, but still enjoyed the exhibits of native animals and birds in their rustic, vegetation-filled enclosures.

When we had finished our tour, I spoke to one of the guides whom I knew, asking if it were possible to see the area where a new zoo is under construction. Moments later we were on our way to see it, accompanied by Tony Garel, one of the first local employees. He has been sent to the San Diego Zoo and other U.S. zoos for training and has studied with Gerald Durrell in the Isle of Jersey; he could not have had a better guide.

I had been afraid that the new zoo would lose the sense of naturalness and intimacy that the old zoo has, but instead, it will increase them.

Enclosures are wire, painted black so that they are barely visible. Posts and stringers are the ubiquitous small tree trunks locally used for fencing. Aviaries have black nylon netting stretching up from the fence to enclose huge trees. Small twigs and leaves grow through the mesh, further obscuring it so that the birds will appear to be flying loose around the foliage.

Much of the heavy ground greenery will have to be pruned so that the animals can be seen more clearly, and Tony told us that they will change some of the plants for ones typical of the region where the animal is found. They plan to move the animals in October, even if the main reception / office building is not completed. Veterinarians from the U.S. will come down to help with the move.

From the zoo, we drove on up the road a few miles to JB's, a small rustic restaurant much loved by the succession of British Army regiments stationed in Belize. Walls and ceilings are draped with their banners. We sat on an open deck looking out over the rolling country toward lumps of limestone hills, with the Maya Mountains in the distance.



Carli and Tom at JB's

Placencia

On Saturday, March 9th, Carli, Tom, María, and Alex flew down to Placencia to spend the weekend at Rum Point Inn. It is a delightful resort operated by Americans, parents-in-law to one of María's sisters.

Our group took a tour to the Coxcomb Basin jungle reserve, the only jaguar reserve in the world. Returning to Placencia, they were entertained by a beer-drinking competition at a local hangout, and later as they were trying to leave, Alex was dragooned into taking part in a sailboat race. The whole thing was something of an unplanned lark, and he won, finishing two laps before one of the boats finished the first one.

Monday was a holiday, so they did not return until late that afternoon.

Chan Chich

Early morning on Tuesday, March 12th, I took Carli and Tom to Chan Chich, Barry Bowen's place near Gallon Jug. We drove up in Alex's truck at his insistence. (He just admitted the other day that his front end has never been the same, so I am feeling very guilty after the fact.)

It was a beautiful drive through the Mennonite country, up the escarpment, and into the rain forest. Barry has cleared a huge area at Gallon Jug for farming and cattle, but despite the first-class way it has been done, I had to regret the loss of the wilderness I remember there from years ago. However, he has kept about 35,000 acres around Chan Chich as forest reserve and does not even allow guns inside the area.

Chan Chich is built in the ball court of a small Mayan ruin. The grassy mounds surrounding the resort reveal the shape of the old Mayan buildings and remind you of the life lived here centuries ago. These mounds are backed by tall trees full of parrots (and other birds less familiar to my undiscerning eye).

Accommodations are in large thatch-roofed cabanas linked by curving walkways made of round cuts of hardwood laid like stepping stones. Walls on three sides of a cabana are floor-to-ceiling-wide wooden louvers, so that one can open up completely. The fourth side houses a large bathroom with a long counter made of logs from one of the trees that had to be felled in clearing for the resort. Actually, all the trees were made into lumber or stepping stones, or utilized in some way in building Chan Chich.

The cabanas could not have been more charming, restful, or convenient. Sitting out on the wide open veranda, looking at a nearby mound, and listening to the multitude of bird songs, I felt a million miles away from Belize City.

The main lodge has a small lounge area and bar and an informal dining room with windows all around. An open porch surrounds most of the

building, with chairs, small tables, and even mounted telescopes for bird watching. Food was ample and very good.



After getting settled in our cabanas, we had a fine lunch. In the afternoon, we took a guided nature walk along part of the eight-mile network of trails through the jungle surrounding the lodge. The ruin itself is built up on a steep plateau. The first segment of the trails was something of a trial to me and a worry to the guide, who expected me to catapult past him to the bottom as I peered through my bifocals and minced over tree roots. We passed wide marshy places inhabited by large tortoises and brilliant birds. One of the trails, which we did not take, winds past a creek to a lake. I had thought to take my binoculars, so we shared them to watch birds and wildlife, remembering their last use in Africa.



Carli and Tom were out for another walk at six the next morning while I enjoyed coffee in bed as I played with my new laptop. We spent a leisurely morning, much of it with Carli instructing her computer-illiterate mother in the intricacies of her new plaything.

I managed to manipulate Carli and Tom into deciding that we would take advantage of the stables at nearby Gallon Jug. Off we set in the afternoon for a riding tour of the fields and forest. When we booked the horses earlier in the day, the receptionist had asked (tactfully) about our level of competence. At Carli's reply, she had reported by radio to the stable that we would want "mild" mounts.

For me, the afternoon was a dream. It had never occurred to me that I would ride a horse again in my lifetime. I was not at all sure it was something I should be doing, and discussed the matter with God, begging him not to let me fall ignominiously off a walking horse. Not only were my prayers answered, but my early training came back instantly. Admittedly I spent the entire time telling myself "grip with the knees; toes in, heels down, elbows in." My mount *Manzana* (Apple) and I early

decided that trotting was not a good idea. His Quarter-Horse trot was too short for easy posting, and my knees too rusty for the gait. He settled on a pleasant lope for those moments when he preferred not to walk, and I could sit that easily.

It was a beautiful ride and lasted longer than we had expected. At one point, Carli rode up alongside me to remark that she was finding riding a strain on 40-year-old knees and to wonder how 70-year-old knees were doing. We both had a tiny sharp pain at the exact place in our left knees and decided that it was genetic.

Back at the stable, I realized that there was no way the far-off ground and I would reunite without my having assistance. Antonio, the affable Salvadoranean cowboy who had accompanied us, put two steadying hands at my waist as I swung my leg over Manzana's back to dismount, and he effortlessly lowered me to the floor.

There I stood, feet planted flatly, knees locked, like Frankenstein's monster. In an attempt to bridge the moment, I told Antonio that I had not been on a horse in fifty years. I thought the poor dear was going to pass out. He aimed a machine-gun fire of Spanish at other nearby hands, and they rushed off to bring a stool for me to sit on. Carli later reported hearing use of the word *viejita* (little old lady). By this time, I had managed a couple of awkward steps and had decided that, given time, my knees would remember how to bend for walking. I assured them in Spanish far more flexible than my reluctant joints that I did not need to sit, that I needed to move. By the time Carli and Tom had dismounted and we all had thanked Antonio for the ride, I was able to exit the stable with jerky dignity.



Back at Chan Chich, Tom let me off at the path to my cabana, where Carli soon joined me. He parked and returned with three celebratory and revivifying beers while we discussed our prowess on my veranda. The Mayan mound just beyond the path with parrots darting through the jungle behind it was a soothing backdrop. Carli and I moaned about

aching joints while Tom's only complaint was the hardness of the saddle. Carli and I had been spared problems in our nether regions by padding which most certainly was genetic as well as common to our gender. We laughed and relived our exploits on the ride as twilight made massive shadows of the mounds around us.

It was hard to leave Chan Chich the next morning to return to Belize City.

Guatemala and Back

On Friday, March 15th, Carli, Tom, and I drove up to the Western border and into Guatemala to visit the little craft shops at the edge of the town of Melchor de Mencos. After a happy hour or so of browsing among the striking hand-loomed fabrics, C&T acquired a bulging bag of gifts and goodies to take back with them, single-handedly improving Guatemala's economic status by a couple of percentage points.



We had made lunch reservations at Warrie Head Lodge, the new resort being developed by Bea and Johnny Searle. Our shipping agency represents a cruise ship whose tour group has been stopping there for lunch, and I especially wanted to see it. Warrie Head is the opposite of Chan Chich in atmosphere. The old Colonial buildings have been converted into a small hotel with lounges and restaurants. A huge *palapa* (concrete slab shaded by thatched roof) offers a breezy place to relax and enjoy the rolling lawns and the movement of birds attracted by the nearby woods that Johnny has left to encourage wildlife. Along one side, the waters of Warrie Head Creek tumble noisily down a series of small waterfalls, forming swimming holes as they go.

The warmly welcoming local women who served us lunch made us feel like family. It was an imaginative combination of food that included traditional Belizean things, such as fried plantain and breadfruit, and was as good as any meal I ever have had in a restaurant in this country.

There is a wonderful feeling of openness and peace at Warrie Head. The Searles gradually are building nature trails back through the woods and improving the two swimming holes. However, it is a restful, rather than active place to stay.

Ups and Downs

Mid-to-Late 1991

I think I told you about my quandary regarding our midday meals now that María is living downstairs with Alex and working just down the street. I recently suggested that she have midday dinner with us on the days she does not go to her parents' home, and that she plan and cook one meal herself each week.

That may have been the best thing I could do for María. She has all the instincts of a good cook and does things beautifully, but she doesn't get much practice. I think the idea terrified her at first; however, she has surrounded herself with cookbooks and is having the most glorious time planning meals.

Every Wednesday morning, Alex arrives proudly bearing a large, interesting-looking casserole, usually the largest of a beautiful set of classic white, fluted, covered casseroles he gave María last Christmas. My cook, Glenda, heats it according to instructions and does the rest of the meal.

María has had a series of successes: Sweet and Sour Chicken, Chicken Provençal, Mexican Meatloaf, Chili, Beef Bourguignon, a wonderful sort of Shepherd's Pie made of well seasoned ground beef topped with fluffy mashed potatoes. Alex works with her when they are fixing things, helping with the chopping and stirring. I am utterly charmed. They both are proud of what they are accomplishing, and I am satisfied at the arrangement after months of agonizing.



More than half of this year was a dead loss to me when I had a recurrence of thrombophlebitis. I was in hospital in Atlanta, then stayed with Bucher's sisters for about ten days, recuperating, before returning to a circumscribed life in Belize. I finally am back where I should be now. I

have lived with this foolishness for sixteen years, and can cope a while longer.

One interesting note: In recent conversation with a visiting friend, I learned something that I should have figured out earlier and that I find highly amusing.

She had insisted on hearing full details about my illness and remained so concerned about me that I told her that my doctor had decided to install a Greenfield Filter to prevent clots in my legs from moving to critical locations farther north. I ended by saying that the hospital staff had made a great point of giving me a card saying that I was the proud owner of said filter.

My friend asked why, and I told her I hadn't a clue. Then she asked what the filter was made of...titanium...and she brightened up and said that I would set off the security alarms in airports.

Actually, I did on the way home, and it didn't register with me. I think it was in the Atlanta airport. The guard asked if I could get out of the wheel chair and walk through, so I did. There was the briefest *ping*. I remarked that it never had happened before, pointed to the metal buttons on my suit, and asked if she wanted me to go back through. She said not to bother, so I returned to my wheel chair and proceeded on my way.

In Miami, they used the hand-held scanner without asking me to stand, and it obviously missed my midriff. I think the whole thing is very funny, but am getting the card both copied and plasticized, since obviously I am going to need to carry it.



The last Sunday in July, I was up early, eager to do all the little goodies that I leave for weekends. The dogs refused to go out after I fed them, which is fairly usual. Around 9:00, Amber looked a little uneasy, so I asked her if she wanted to go outdoors.

That was a mistake.

We were in my back hall. Amber bolted past me just as I was taking a step, and I crashed down on my face, as rigid as a felled tree. After leaping wildly out of the way, Amber returned to kiss me in guilty sympathy. I lay still for a moment to make sure all the parts were intact.

My glasses had flown off, but had not broken. I pulled myself erect slowly and found no permanent damage. My left knee was bruised and swollen. My left hand hurt slightly on the pad at the base of the thumb. And my left jaw was distinctly swollen and painful. I used ice briefly, but it was too much of a nuisance, so I decided to thank my stars for another escape from harm and get back to work.

I have lectured myself about this sort of thing. The odds are against me, at my age. I have given up ladders (reluctantly). But what to do about dogs?



In October, a week after Alex and María returned from a delayed holiday (postponed in deference to my weakened condition), I took off for one of my cherished little R&Rs—five days in Florida for combined business and shopping, with the pleasure of luxuriating in an hotel, dining by Room Service, and enjoying being off on my own. This trip was also a celebration of my return to full strength.

For some time now, I have indulged myself in the odd spree of this sort in Miami; however, the stores there have been an increasing disappointment on recent trips. I had to paw through racks of clothes in the gaudiest of prints and shiniest of materials to find anything suitable for a shirtwaist-type like me.

Alex and María took a similar quick business trip in July and returned raving about a huge discount shopping mall they had found near the Fort Lauderdale airport that had everything in the world available at wonderful prices. So, I made reservations at a nearby Holiday Inn. I picked up a car at the Miami International Airport and drove from there.

Choosing Fort Lauderdale was the best thing I could have done. The discount mall was glorious, and I spent two full and happy days there,

saving money as I spent it. I did not even have to feel guilty. My office wardrobe had become scruffy; shopping was a necessity, not an indulgence. There were two other good malls in the same general area, so I had access to just about everything I needed.

My Holiday Inn was not as close as I had expected, but I enjoy driving. The problem was that the hotel was nestled almost under a major overpass, and there was only one obscure little way to get to it. I managed twice by passing the hotel on the wrong side of the highway, going over the overpass, and making my way slowly onto the opposite side of the six-lane highway to get back to the hotel.

And then came Saturday. On my way back to the hotel after an exhausting (stimulating) day of shopping, somehow I found myself in the wrong lane at the wrong time, and before I could do anything about it, I had passed my hotel, off to the side on its inaccessible street, and was whizzing north on a major expressway.

I got off at the first available exit and, in making a series of graceful loops on the interchange, found myself whizzing south past the hotel on a second major expressway. This time I exited and drove through a staid neighborhood where I was not threatened with traffic and interchanges. I knew exactly where I was and where I was going...I just couldn't figure out how.

I took a third expressway back to my original highway, passed the hotel for a third time, eventually made a U-turn, and found my way back to home-and-hearth shortly before dark. That was the evening that my traditional twilight glass of iced coffee had a healthy shot of Scotch in it.

Next morning, I had sense enough to ask the front-desk man how to get to the hotel from my shopping direction, and he showed me a neat little bypass that looped under the overpass and back to the hotel door. I would never have found it in a million years because it was an unmarked leg of a Y-split on the entrance ramp leading to I-95 South, the one expressway I was determined to avoid.

Life was simpler thereafter, though my returns never were as relaxed as my morning departures.

In the course of my driving to find various malls, I located another Holiday Inn close to all of them. I may try that on my next visit, though it doesn't offer me the opportunity to speed thrillingly back and forth on unfamiliar expressways forever, like a motoring Charlie-on-the-MTA.

All in all, it was a successful shopping trip, especially right before Christmas, and made a pleasant break for me just before the cruise ship we are agents for returns for the season.



My best news is that Carli and Tom are coming for Christmas. I called her two or three weeks ago, when I knew they were back from their trip to Australia.

“Now, Mom, I have a proposal, but you must be sure to tell me if it isn't convenient...”

All these years I have never even hinted about their possibly spending Christmas in Belize, both because Tom's children all live close to them and because they plan holiday activities with their friends. To have them ask to come—and in a year when they already have visited—is joy untold. Scratch that last word. Joy shouted.

My initial reaction was, “I'll have to paint the kitchen,” but sanity returned. That's a major project I will tackle some time, but I am not about to give myself a nervous breakdown just before C&T arrive.

I talked to Carli again a week ago when I was in Florida and when she told me the dates of their visit, it confirmed my unspoken suspicion. Alex and I had assumed it would be just a four- or five-day visit because they were here in March and just have had a lovely (and expensive) trip to Australia. However, Carli said that they would arrive on the 22nd and stay until the 6th. That keeps them here over my Seventieth birthday. She is being coy and not mentioning it, and I am doing the same...which is probably nonsense.

Now I am trying to do all my December chores in November so that I will be relaxed and carefree when Carli and Tom arrive. Who's dreaming? No matter how well I plan, I'll be on the edge of a nervous collapse, but will rally to have a glorious time with them.



Kate on her 70th birthday, January 4, 1992

Family Christmas

Early December 1991 – Early January 1992

Belize Christmas trees are brought into town only a day or so before Christmas. They are so sparse that we always had to buy two and put them up back-to-back to get anything approaching a full tree. They had to be guyed extensively, not too difficult a task in rented houses with wooden or wallboard walls. Within a few days the tree assumed a shape Carli and I referred to as “The Christmas Bush.”

After Bucher died, I realized that 1) there was no way I could manage a real tree by myself, and 2) I could not survive without a tree. I always had loathed the idea of an artificial tree, but in my new circumstances, the idea of a tree that would go up easily and hold its shape began to make sense.

My first Christmas alone, on a last-minute impulse, I bought the last artificial Christmas tree available in Belize City. It was a pretty little tree, said to be six feet tall by an optimistic manufacturer. It has been a joy to me for fourteen years. It had a lovely shape, though it was not as full as I would have liked. Would I rather have a real tree? Certainly. But the wonderful thing about my tree was that I could set it up, put the lights on, and decorate it by myself. I adored that tree. Through the years, the odd branch broke off now and again, and I had begun wondering about its potential useful years.

At bridge a couple of weeks ago Ann Crump, whose husband, John, is the part-owner / manager of Hofius, our leading hardware store, remarked that they had Christmas trees, that the most expensive had sold out immediately at more than \$400 apiece, and that Government just had raised the duty so that they would cost even more next year.

The morning after bridge I was in Hofius and saw their remaining stock of trees. They had a lovely, very full six-foot tree, a bit taller and much fuller than mine, so I ignored the price tag (well below the \$400 range) and bought it.

After I had it home, I read the folder enclosed in the box and learned that I could not use my usual lights because they might damage the tree. It told me to use either the miniatures (which this purist does not much like) or “cool bulbs.” I had never heard of the latter. Furthermore, just last Christmas I realized that my light strings were in dangerous condition and replaced them all.

I spent twenty-four miserable hours thinking that I probably would have to return the tree. I went back to Hofius, planning to talk to John about my tragedy, but stopped by the Christmas decorations display first. To my amazement, there was a huge supply of cool bulbs. They were the same size as my regular ones, but instead of opaque colors, they were clear colored glass. I bought fifteen boxes of them (four bulbs per package). I already had decided to put up my old tree downstairs, so had to buy two (more) new strings of lights. They came with a total of fifty bulbs of the kind I no longer could use.

In due course, I erected my new tree. It took a substantial period of time to change all the bulbs before winding the strings around the tree. I plugged them in and wanted to weep. A cool bulb shows only a little Z-shaped glow of color from the element itself. The impression is much like that of the miniature bulbs. It was not what I grew up with, not what I wanted, but reluctantly, what I was stuck with. Furthermore, my two strings of 25 bulbs each were not sufficient for the larger tree.

Back to Hofius next morning to buy another string of lights and six more boxes of bulbs. Painstakingly I restrung the lights, adding the new line. Instructions on the box warned not to hook more than two strings together. Plugged the two ends, one from the first two strings and the other from the new string, into my carefully positioned extension cord and one of the plugs began smoking. Instant unplugging.

Plugged in alone, the lower (new) line worked. Plugged in alone, the upper two lines did not. But they had worked perfectly the day I put the tree up.

Bucher always said, “When in doubt, read the instructions.” I checked and discovered that the plugs contained fuses. Checked the fuses on both of the bad lines and could see nothing wrong with them.

Back to Hofius next morning. No 7-AMP fuses; sold out. The helpful young man explained that they had trouble with all of their similar plugs, but that they simply inserted a small bit of metal rod in place of fuses. It sounded like instant arson to me.

Found fuses at the fifth store I tried. Inserted new fuses. Lights still did not work. Appealed to Alex. He fussed with them and snorted, “Get rid of these stupid plugs.”

Back to Hofius for plain old black rubber plugs. Replaced the end plug of the upper two strings, and the lights came on. Apparently the plug connecting the two strings is okay. Can report, however, that I bought sufficient plugs to replace all, should it become necessary.

Finished trimming tree. It really is very pretty, though I still resent not having my traditional lights. These look almost like the miniatures.

And if you are wondering why in the world my tree is up so early, you can just blame my close friend Liz Maestre. She always made a point of having her tree up before her wedding anniversary on December 9th. It finally occurred to me that I loved the tree best before Christmas and that there was no law saying I couldn't have it.



This Christmas morning I awoke to find a rainbow world outside my windows.

The sky was the closest nature can get to Christmas red, a glowing, brilliant near-scarlet, reflected in the mirror-calm sea in almost the same rich shade. Low clouds, dark along the horizon, looked like a bank of mangrove forming an elongated bay of the open sea in front of them. A single sailboat showed a light at the top of the mast, and a small, sleeping cruise ship docked at the nearby pier was studded with lighted windows, promising life in the static scene.

Gradually, the scarlet shaded to true gold, rich, living gilt in sky and reflection. Moments later it was silver, not anonymous gray, but a rich, glowing silver with faint hints of green on the water and mauve in the shadowed water behind the sparkling slash of illumination. The faintest tinge of green stained the skyline in the silver above the low clouds.

Imperceptibly, the silver took on bluish tones, still glowing with light from an unseen sun. The broad swath of sea beyond the veranda was an ice blue, seemingly lit from beneath the surface, and the skyline was a living, bluish silver lightly streaked with the faintest of rosy blushes just above the fringe of clouds. Although it was near-daylight, the illumination of sky and its reflection in the sea were glows beyond the normal, a living display of the nature of light itself.



The holidays were the happiest time I have had in years. It was wonderful having my whole family here. Carli and Tom arrived on December 23rd. We had our big Christmas dinner mid-afternoon on the 24th to avoid complications the next day. Christmas Day we had a gorgeous time opening a mountain of presents slowly. María and Alex went to see her parents later in the morning, and I had a Christmas brunch about noon to allow María and Alex plenty of time to get ready for their traditional late-Christmas-afternoon party. I made an appearance at the party, but left the younger generation to enjoy themselves while I retired to the quiet of my own house and the company of only the TV and dogs.

The whole holiday season was utterly delightful. Carli and Tom had arrived recovering from colds and exhausted from heavy business and social pressures, so they were happy to sit around together while I went to the office, or to indulge in unaccustomed naps. They seemed to spend a major part of their time arguing enthusiastically over language and usage. The new Webster's Unabridged that María and Alex gave me for Christmas, and all my other language reference books, never left the coffee table. It was fun.



Kate opens her present from Alex and María, Christmas 1991

I had a big cocktail party (my first in years) on the Saturday between Christmas and New Year's. One day we drove up to the Belize Zoo, which just has been moved to handsome new quarters not far from the original zoo. And aside from that, we were fairly quiet. The weather was cold and rainy most of the time so they did not get any boating, as Alex had hoped they might. C&T took us all out for dinner for my birthday, and they left on January 6th.

Amusingly, it was a special decade for three of us. Tom was 50 in December, I was 70 in January, Carli will be 40 in February. Very few signs of tears or trauma anywhere.

Never a Dull Moment

Mid-January – October, 1992

A day and a half after Carli and Tom left, Walter Robison, an old friend and former neighbor, arrived from Canada for a five-day visit—his first since he and his late wife Terri left Belize years ago. After visiting with me, Walter went to stay with other friends upcountry, leaving his camera and taking my house keys. A somewhat scattered, dear person.

An hour before Walter left, another friend, the former Dean of our Cathedral, called to say that he was coming for ten days—not, thank goodness, to stay with me.

The Dean's Visit

Dean Gareth Lewis was on holiday from his cathedral in Wales, briefly, to substitute for the minister in Palm Beach. Gareth decided to see friends in Belize while he was “in the neighborhood.” I promised to meet him at the airport.

I drove out to the airport to meet him through the worst downpour I ever have experienced. A cold front had moved into Belize during the night, and the morning was misty with light rains. By early afternoon, the rain had begun to take its mission seriously. The poorly patched city streets and the first few miles of the airport road were alternately muddy washboards and a network of unavoidable potholes.

By the time I was on the highway, sheets of water lashed across the road, driven by heavy winds, making visibility a sometime thing. It was a colorless world, with even the foliage turned to a deeper shade of gray. Fortunately, I was on the wide, recently surfaced part of the airport road through the worst of the storm. Even more fortunately, the other hapless souls out in vehicles instead of safely in their homes had their lights on for safety and were driving far more cautiously than is the Belize norm.

I finally reached the airport and parked in the nearly deserted parking lot. I fought my way through horizontal winds and rains to the terminal. TACA reported that the pilot of the Miami plane had been told that it was inadvisable to land, but that he said he wanted to make one attempt. I went up to the gallery to watch.

The runway lights were on. Through the churning deep gray clouds, a phantom shape appeared, reminiscent of a World War II movie. The plane descended to perhaps fifty feet with ample power, then made a quick climbing turn, straightened briefly, and disappeared into the overcast. The Dean was on his way to overnight in El Salvador.

The heavy downpour on my drive home was so much less terrifying than the sheets of rain on my earlier drive that it was almost restful. As I turned from Gabourel Lane onto Hutson Street, I reminded myself that the street probably would be flooded. It was. I eased ahead slowly, parked carefully in the fence-to-fence sea so that my car didn't drop into the unseen drainage ditch, and got out to open my garage doors. I walked through calf-deep water, swirling with oil and smelling of the sewerage spewing from washed-out manholes in the next block. It was a blissful relief finally to have the car parked under the house and to be heading toward hot water, soap, and ultimately a revivifying Scotch.



I dreaded driving the airport road again next day to meet my returning Dean. However, it was so charming to be able to see the road, enjoy the greens of grass and trees, and not fear slippery pavements, that I overlooked the dismal bumping of the first few miles. The plane arrived on time, and Gareth emerged quickly from Customs with his single hand-carried bag.

He reported with amusement that the hotel in Salvador, with its unexpected deluge of guests, had run out of rooms and had put him into the Presidential Suite. Soon after he had gotten himself settled, bombs appeared to go off. He was not charmed at apparently landing in the middle of a revolution. Being as worldly as are most men of the cloth, he

did the logical thing and went out onto his balcony to watch the bombing. Fortunately for his sacred skin, it turned out to be Salvadoranans celebrating the signing of a peace treaty with the guerrillas. The streets were crowded with exuberant people and interspersed with watchful police and army troops. The noise of guns and firecrackers continued long into the night.

I saw the Dean regularly during his visit, and enjoyed it thoroughly. We all hope that when he retires from his current position as Dean of Monmouth Cathedral in Newport, Wales, he will return to Belize in some advisory or missionary capacity.


Trevor

Years ago, through the Dean, I began corresponding with a young man in prison here. He had been incarcerated for at least twelve years at the time and had educated himself through high-school level. He wrote fascinating, long, surprisingly literate letters. Eventually I got up courage to visit him.

Let me tell you, Her Majesty's Prison on Gaol Lane is not like anything you are familiar with. I parked across from the high, thick wall, walked across the narrow street, and yanked on the heavy rope hanging down next to the small arched door set into the huge green main door. The resulting brassy clang of a large bell brought a slouching guard in ordinary clothes who looked utterly taken aback at seeing me. He invited me in with old-fashioned courtesy and motioned me to a shabby bench in the small, unpaved anteroom. Eventually the prisoner was brought to one of the cubicles in an adjacent room and sat on a smaller, equally worn bench, and I met my correspondent through the wire mesh.


He was a small, husky man of about thirty, probably of both Creole and Spanish heritage, with bushy, wiry black hair, heavy glasses, and an indiscriminate amount of facial hair here and there, which he well could have done without. His name was Rudolph Trevor Smythe and he had

asked me to call him *Trevor*. I learned later that his mother was the only other person who ever called him that; he was *Rudy* to everyone else.



I continued writing and visiting Trevor, supplying him books but nothing else, probably to his disappointment, until he was released. Several people had interested themselves in him, and he had some help in trying to get settled. Unfortunately, he emerged with the usual world-owes-me-everything attitude, and he took advantage of most of his friends, including me, financially and in other ways.

Gradually he got himself sorted out, found a job, married, and had a daughter. He lives near the post office and other offices I visit regularly, so I continue to see him on the street.



Trevor now is working for a man whose launch we usually use to carry boarding parties out to enter ships in the harbor. Trevor comes to our office with the bills.

One day in late March, he came in; I waved, but was on the telephone, so didn't pay much attention. When I looked up, I noticed that he was wearing a thick harness of some sort, almost like a brace for his neck and arm. Looking from my desk toward the counter, it is hard to distinguish people against the glare outside the wide front door. They tend to be silhouettes. Trevor grinned, and it suddenly registered that he was wearing the biggest *wowla* (boa constrictor) I ever have seen draped around a neck.

Naturally, I went over to play with the snake though, big and heavy as it was, I did not try to take it from him. Trevor said it was about eight feet long and added that he had a nine-foot snake at home. The pattern on its skin was beautiful, though the boa's shape was a bit lumpy from yesterday's dinner. The colors were muted except near the end of the tail, where the design was sharp and the reds and blacks, bright.

I don't suppose Trevor has any problem with would-be muggers when he takes his pet out with him. That's an idea I might consider, either for myself or Rent-a-Reptile for the evening.



There was a time in the Sixties when I talked to Bucher seriously about our getting a boa constrictor as a deterrent to thieves. Carli was ecstatic at the idea. She and I had some lovely sessions making plans for the pet Bucher wasn't about to let us have. In the end, I was the one who decided it would not be practical. The main consideration probably was that the cook and housekeeper would have walked out instantly. Feeding is not a pretty business. And finally, snakes don't stay where you put them. They tend to slither off to impossibly small spaces and to reemerge in sudden and startling fashion.

Bucher always was clever about my off-beat ideas. Instead of arguing, he appeared to consider my notions, then sat back and waited for me to talk myself out of them.

Crew Change

Our company has been saved from disaster by my astute son.

In April we received a fax message from a company in France, asking if we would be agents for a crew change on a vessel that was loading sugar in Belize. Since the inquiry came from France, I assumed that they had been given our name by our major clients, Compagnie General Maritime (CGM), and that they were legitimate.

Alex was skeptical from the beginning. We have handled crew changes many times, but we always have been agents for the vessel. Although the company that operates the ship frequently is different from the one that provides the crew, they normally use the same agent.

The agency for ships loading sugar in Belize rotates among three shipping companies, and this one was not ours. Nevertheless, Alex checked with

the Director of Immigration for information requested by the French company and replied to the inquiring company.

Belize is a tiny neighborhood. Gradually information began filtering back to us. The same company had contacted two other Belize shipping agencies. One agent told the French company that the arriving crew would not have to pay the fee that we had been told was obligatory. Another company, the one that was acting as agents for the ship, was told that the incoming crew were not all East Indians (as we had been told) and that some of the departing crew did not have passports or U.S. In-transit Visas, which would permit them to be repatriated via the United States. By that time, both Alex and I had soured on the whole thing, and sent a fax that did not close the door, but that certainly was cool.



We heard nothing more. Within a few days the twenty-odd East Indians, et al., arrived. We monitor the marine radio channel at the office and could hear the flap about getting (or not getting) the men to the ship, problems with Immigration, calls for the agent, and a lot of mess that had Alex and me grinning with congratulations to each other about having avoided being trapped.

As the story has developed the poor sailors, who traveled for two or three days to get to Belize, were not allowed on the ship. Last we heard, they were gathered in the bar and lobby of one of our hotels, half of them flaked out asleep on the floor, to the dismay of tourists. The ship's agent told Alex that he received a telephone call from an unknown individual in Hong Kong at four o'clock on the Friday afternoon demanding that he prevent the crew change. He replied forcefully that he was agent only for the vessel, not for the crew, and had nothing to do with it.

We understand that the unfortunate agent who was successful in winning the crew change finally went out to the vessel in the company of his lawyer. Apparently the crew had not been paid in three months and refused to leave the ship. That has left the poor agent paying for a lawyer and paying hotel accommodations for the twenty or so sailors.

The U.S. Consul, who is something of a friend of mine, called to get information about the situation. He wanted to be sure that the crew change was legitimate, and that this was not just a ruse to get a bunch of Asians into Belize on their way to slipping into the U.S. The Visa Section of the U.S. Embassy (his responsibility) also would be involved with issuing—or refusing to issue—In-transit Visas so that the departing crew could catch their planes back to wherever they were going.

The whole thing now is in the courts. The ship continues to load sugar. And what will happen, we do not care—except that we hope to learn every fascinating detail of the story.

(And people tell me I should retire and miss out on all these fascinating stories!)

New Fax Machine

I'll write separately about my late-April trip to Austin, Texas, for a delightful week-long "Cousins' Reunion."^{*} After the reunion I flew from Austin to Atlanta, where I saw seven doctors and had three major test procedures plus three out-patient minor surgeries. I was diagnosed with one of the hundred or more rheumatic diseases and established on the correct medication. Now I feel marvelous and have no pain or stiffness.

Late in the afternoon the day before I left Atlanta, Alex telephoned to tell me that our office fax machine had died and to ask me to bring a new one back. It was 5:30, the height of the rush hour. It was pouring torrents. Docile Old Kate took off uphill and down on Roswell Road to the Office Depot near K-Mart. The water was flowing downhill so lustily that the right hand lane was unusable (unless one liked driving without brakes and possibly with a drowned distributor). Visibility was close to nil, with bumper-to-bumper traffic both directions, headlights agleam. I prayed all the way to the store.

* "Cousins' Reunion in Austin" on page 179 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

I showed an embarrassing lack of restraint in demanding a salesman who knew something about faxes, listened to him carefully, and bought the best value with the features we needed. I worried about the weight, since I had to hand-carry it from Atlanta to Belize. My young friend assured me that the box had a carrying handle (true), that it would weigh only a couple of pounds (a damnable lie), and that it didn't matter anyway because I had saved so much money over the standard price (possibly true).

I *hate* hand-carrying anything, especially something electronic and fragile. Fortunately, the world is full of nice men who take pleasure in helping little old ladies by stowing their packages in overhead racks and retrieving them, all smiles and comforting little pats on the back.

Would you like to guess my reaction when the Belize Customs Officer told me that I could not bring the fax machine into the country without a permit from the telephone company?

Fortunately, Alex was able to get the permit after lunch the day I returned and retrieved the fax from the airport, where Customs had impounded it. Furthermore, the duty he had to pay was *much* less than either of us expected.

Cutting Back

I returned home from my trip to Austin and Atlanta ready to tell Alex that two major illnesses in twelve months gave me the idea that Someone was trying to tell me something. I wanted to cut down my office time whenever we were not particularly busy. However, I walked into the wildest ten days I ever remember. Two Danish ships for the British Army, an Esso tanker, the little Williamson-Dickey ship from Texas, and a major project with two huge tugs and barges returning to pick up U.S. Army Engineers' equipment after a bridge-building exercise. The last involved the arrival of two old friends from the Miami company that owned the tugs and barges, one with his delightful wife.

Somehow we coped and survived. And Alex told me he wanted me to cut back on my office hours before I had a chance to suggest it to him.

Actually, this was not a good time to think about relaxing. Our fiscal year ended May 31st, and I had to wrap the accounts up for the auditors. Alex and I both had to be in Miami the third week in June for a French Line agents' meeting. From there, he would go to Atlanta for his annual holiday. I had to come back to hold the fort.

Since Alex is the man with command of the office computer, that meant that somehow I had to:

1. Complete our books before we leave.

– or –

2. Learn how to get into the computer, make corrections, and print everything out correctly for the auditors myself.

Alex said that our young man, Dwight Dougal, could do everything but the final stuff. I worried about sitting Alex down and making him show me move-by-move how I get into his bloody computer files. He thinks a reasonable demonstration is hitting fifteen keys in quick succession and saying, "See!"



When Alex returned from holiday, I announced to him that I had figured out how I want to begin retiring. I've tried cutting down my office hours, but always end up back at the office full time. Instead, I will work full time (unless it is my bridge afternoon), but will take off on a trip whenever the possibility presents itself. Of course, I already am doing that; but from now on, I will not feel guilty.

Alex's Return

In June, Alex and I went to Miami for a CGM (French Line) conference of shipping agents from Central America, the Caribbean, and the north coast of South America. The conference was held in a charming resort hotel on Key Biscayne. We understand that, later, it was almost completely destroyed by Hurricane Andrew. The conference was more stimulating than many. The great fun, however, was seeing our principals from the Paris and Puerto Rico offices, and our “neighbors” from area shipping agencies we work with regularly.

After the meeting, Alex flew on to Georgia for his holiday and I returned to hold the fort at the office. He returned after a couple of weeks, happy and enthusiastic about his holiday. I wish you could have seen our exit from the airport, however. I had taken his new (used) Ford Ranger truck up to meet him because my car needed work badly and its air conditioner was not working.

Alex arrived at the curb with a briefcase, large suitcase, and an enormous duffel. After our hugs, he said, “You brought my car keys, didn’t you?”

“No, I have the spare set and my own set.”

“You realize, don’t you, that those keys won’t open the camper?”

No, of course I did not realize it. It never occurred to me that car keys wouldn’t open a car. That a camper is an extra, not related to the vehicle itself, never crossed my mind. So there we stood with a two-man front seat, two adults, and three pieces of luggage.

Alex got into the truck, opened the glass between the vehicle and the camper and put the briefcase through onto the bed of the truck. He then cautiously inserted his guayabera-ed person through the square opening and wiggled down inside the camper. He opened the side window and with my (limited) help was able to lift and ease the large suitcase through it into the truck. Flushed with success and exertion, he writhed back through the window, onto the front seat, and out to the pavement.

That left us with the duffel. He hoisted that into the middle of the seat and propped it on end, where it effectively separated us for the ride home and prevented his use of fourth gear.

He remained in remarkably good spirits through the entire project and we had a wonderful catching-up visit from our isolated cubicles at either end of the front seat during our drive home.

Yukon Pilot

One day in August, I walked into the office to find a telephone call waiting for me.

KATE: Hello.

MAN'S VOICE: Is this the Mrs. Scott who holds the first private pilot's license issued in Belize?

KATE (*greatly taken aback*): Yes. May I ask who this is?

MAN: Do you remember talking to a crazy pilot who was planning to fly from St. Lucia to the Yukon?

KATE (*dawn breaking slightly, very slightly*): Yes, I do.

MAN: This is Peter Bernard. We were on a plane together a year ago and you insisted that I should not make the flight alone, that I had to take someone with me.

KATE: I remember perfectly. (*something of an exaggeration*)

MAN: Well, that talk I had with you made everything about the trip gel. I decided to take your advice.

We talked for a little while about the trip, which had been a huge success. As he talked, I began remembering our conversation on the plane, because I was horrified that he intended to fly from St. Lucia to the Yukon and back alone. He had flown for years and obviously was level-headed, but still, he appeared to be in his Fifties. He had some special reason for wanting to fly to the Yukon, but I could not remember what it was and did

not want to ask him. I don't normally start preaching to perfect strangers, but remembered clearly that I found myself making an exception in his case.

After thinking things over, he had decided to take his seventeen-year-old daughter on the trip. He said that she was an enormous help in keeping him fed and in spotting strange airports with her sharp young eyes.

Peter (as I finally remembered) comes to Belize about once a year to calibrate some Port scales. He said that he had written a long account of the flight and wanted me to have a copy. He said that telling me about it rounded out the entire project for him because our brief conversation had been a sort of catalyst.

He came by a little later to drop off his account. I am sure I would not have recognized him, though he looked vaguely familiar.

I was deeply touched at his taking the trouble to track me down so that he could tell me that he had followed my recommendation and give me the full story. It was fascinating, though nothing about it made me wish I had been the one making the flight.

Extending Marine Parade

On a Saturday afternoon in early August, I sat ensconced on my bed, legs elevated, typing in what should have been silent glory, surrounded by the gawdawful din from massive dump trucks.

The Government is extending Marine Parade beyond Hutson Street, northward along the seafront for the equivalent of three or four blocks to Gaol Lane. That is, from our blissful, quiet dead end, past Belize Guest House across Hutson Street from us, beyond the seawall of St. Catherine's where Cubbo used to bathe,* past the prison, down to Public Works Department (PWD). It will stop there, we understand, and not continue in front of the hospital. In due course, the old PWD yard will be razed and a

* "Cubbo" on page 169 in Book 1: *Life & Times, 1922 – 1979*

fine new building put up for the Central Bank of Belize (formerly the Monetary Authority).

I am relieved that this may eventually mean a seawall at the foot of Hutson Street. The lack of one has worried me, in case of a hurricane. However, so far, the base of the new part of the street in front of the Guest House goes up a couple of feet from the level of Marine Parade and Hutson Street. If they intend to leave it raised, that means that water from heavy rain storms or hurricanes will flood downward to us.

Meanwhile, we had a steady parade of dump trucks doing their thing over and over, accompanied by a tremendous groaning and gnashing of gears. The light layer of sand blown in through the windows has my housekeeper, Jean, in despair.

Almost immediately, Alex noticed that the trucks were using our driveway to turn around so they could back up to the new track. On the apron of our driveway, two slabs in the newly-installed “bridge” over the drain were cracked. By the next day one had broken in completely. No problem with the contractors; they said fix it and send the bill. The trucks stopped invading, but cars cutting too close as they rounded the corner kept enlarging it. Our contractor had a death in the family and couldn’t start repairs immediately. Fortunately, Alex and I could still get into and out of the garage.

I rather regret losing the relative quiet of our dead-end corner, once the street is finished and paved. Furthermore, if they are going to be building at the end of the new section, we may have to look forward to months of heavy construction traffic. At the end of that time, the entire street, new and old, should be a network of potholes, and the paving will have to start all over. So much for progress.

Bridge

After an hiatus of several years, my Duplicate Bridge group has been reestablished. Until recently, we literally could not find enough good

bridge players to have it; now, suddenly, we have a great crowd of good players available again. We play every other Saturday at the Ramada.

I dropped out of the bridge scene after my recurrence of thrombophlebitis a year ago and until fairly recently, played only occasionally. Jimmy Murphy asked me to play with him—to my delight. He’s a good, low-key player, steady and easy going, as well as an old friend, so the evenings are pleasant. There’s no pressure or tension with us.

Jimmy and I did not distinguish ourselves the first couple of sessions. Although we have played together off and on for years, we were not sure enough of our bidding patterns at first. The third night we came in fourth of fourteen couples, which we considered commendable.

Our last September session was a special tournament, Independence Trophy Night. We both thought we did rather badly. Poor Jimmy got into one of those morasses where you make one mistake and can’t do anything right thereafter. When we left, he was gloom itself about our performance.

To our utter amazement, we came in second, losing by only two points. To my even greater amazement, when I called Jimmy to congratulate him, instead of being pleased, he stormed about his mistake, saying that we would have come in first without it. True. Our opponents at that table were the winners. But as far as I am concerned, the fun is in the bridge playing itself; winning is frosting.

Jimmy was on holiday the next session, so I collected both of our trophies—a golden hand holding a fan of cards, on a wooden mount. Not really my style, but fun to have.

New Refrigerator

In early October, Alex showed me an ad on the back of the local weekend paper—slightly dented refrigerators at huge discounts. I did not say anything to Alex, but was at the door before the store opened after lunch.

The box I wanted was a side-by-side refrigerator / freezer to replace the second-hand one that has given me reliable service for more than ten

years. Now its doors are tumored with rust and the vegetable bin is virtually useless, lashed in place with twine because the plastic guides have broken. I already had made up my mind to buy a new refrigerator / freezer soon. This sale was too good to let pass.

To my delight, the store had the model I wanted in the pale almond, which matches my new stove. I was delighted to find that it had water and ice dispensers on the outside of the door. No dents were visible. I wrote a check and arranged for the box to be delivered mid-morning the next day (a Saturday). The store owner, an enthusiastic young entrepreneur, blithely promised (and gave orders) that the delivery men 1) would disconnect / reconnect the water line, and 2) would carry my old refrigerator / freezer downstairs and put it under the house.

Back in the office after my successful negotiations, I proudly flourished my “paid” invoice at my surprised son. His only suggestion was that I move the present refrigerator / freezer back into the utility room to use as a “drinks” box, and scrap the sad little refrigerator that has been stoutly serving in that capacity for almost twenty-five years.



Austin, my aging “yard man,” agreed to come in on Saturday to help me clean out the three refrigerators. By ten the job was done—and the skies were reverberating with thunder. Before I had speculated overlong on what I would do if the new refrigerator could not be delivered, the truck arrived with it.

1. The old utility-room refrigerator was quickly moved downstairs by six strong young men.
2. The prospect of disconnecting the water line from the kitchen refrigerator / freezer daunted the crew. They did not have tools. I produced them. They did not know what to do. I showed them. The only one with any intelligence finally made the disconnection easily.
3. The gang moved the box from its place in the kitchen, through the back hall, and to the door to the utility room. Thirty minutes and

countless tries later, it was decided conclusively that the box would not fit through the door. Both side doorway frames and the door will have to be removed to allow passage.

By this time, the gang had received five calls from the office about further deliveries, and were not about to wait for major carpentry. They moved the old box back into my kitchen and put it neatly against the wall in the breakfast room.

4. Finally, the men brought the new refrigerator / freezer up from the truck, where it had been sitting in light rain, and into my kitchen.
 - a. The three-prong plug would not fit into my two-prong wall socket.
 - b. They announced that I must call a technician from the store to connect the water line.
 - c. They vanished like a herd of migrating wildebeest before I could protest.

Fortunately, Alex returned just then. He dashed out and bought an adapter plug. He hooked up the water line, which immediately began leaking. Alex discovered that the old fittings did not fit the new box, ran out again to get the proper ones, and returned to hook up the water correctly. He also plugged in the old refrigerator / freezer in the breakfast-room end of the kitchen (minus its water line) for extra space. It can sit there quite nicely, doing its thing, until my missing carpenter (who promised to start painting, etc., before I left in early September) arrives to do the work necessary to get it into its proper place in the utility room.

Meanwhile, I have more refrigeration than anyone needs. María is gloating over the extra freezer space for her Christmas meats and party goodies. And I am reorganizing my new box, moving shelves up and down, and rearranging to find the most usable positions for shelves and food.

[Editor's Note 3 on page 364]

'Tis the Season

October 1992 – February 1993

From file written October 12, 1992

Our close friends Muriel and Don Stauffer, who lived here in the Sixties, will spend Christmas with me, then the three of us will go to Mexico for our third driving tour in that country. We are looking forward to toasting the New Year in San Cristóbal de las Casas, high in the mountains of Chiapas.

With houseguests for Christmas, it is more important than ever to do things ahead of time. I am considering starting to wrap Christmas presents later today.

For my 15 years in this house, I wrapped presents on a table in the room adjoining my bedroom. There never was enough space to do the job conveniently or to store wrapped presents later. Last year, belatedly, I realized that I had a large, unused guest room with all the space in the world. I can wrap on the bureau, which is high enough to prevent my annual Christmas-wrapping backaches. One twin bed holds presents to be wrapped; the other holds wrapping materials. I put the wrapped presents, minus bows for easier storage, in an empty bureau drawer. It is simple to add bows just before putting boxes under the tree.



From file written November 8, 1992

I am gearing up for my Christmas guests and our Mexican trip in early January. My Christmas presents are wrapped. Christmas-card list is checked. I am in the process of drafting two or three versions of a Christmas letter that I can then customize and enclose with cards to friends. I spent my time at the hairdresser's on Thursday mentally working out a menu for the short time that Muriel and Don will be here over Christmas.

What worries me, is me. I drift into trips over a pleasant period of time when I methodically cope with my packing. This time I will have to do all that before the Stauffers arrive. Final packing will be devastatingly difficult while I am trying to be a relaxed hostess, cater meals, and show them the town they have not seen in thirty years. I assume I will arrive in Mexico missing belts to dresses, vital medications, and heaven knows what else. I discovered in France* that I had forgotten my hair brush. A last-minute boggle. Fortunately, I was able to buy a charming mid-sized gold-backed one in a nearby shop, and still am traveling with it. It will not be as easy to pick up missing bits-and-pieces in the mountains of Chiapas.



From file written December 12, 1992

I spent Saturday putting up the artificial Christmas tree I bought last year. The tree is taller than I am. It is easy enough to assemble and decorate. Still, it involves more moving and bending than I, my damaged legs, and back, are used to. By the time the tree was finished and the Nativity set in place, I was exhausted. I ached from stem to stern, felt ready to drop, and decided what I needed was some Tender, Loving Conversation. I called a dear friend; what kind of sympathy did I get from him?

“It’s good for you!”

I was more than a little irritated this morning to find that he was absolutely right. I tentatively tried to do my exercises, sure that my back would protest, and found that I was perfectly able to do the whole series in comfort.

It is a little ridiculous for someone living alone, but I have two trees. Years ago I bought a smaller one from friends who were leaving the country. It fits perfectly in the library between the television and the door into the hall. It isn’t as pretty as the living-room tree, but I love having it lighted when I watch TV with the dogs. Hope Muriel and Don enjoy

* “France on Business” on page 143 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

having what amounts to their own, private tree. The library and guest room are like a suite on that side of the house.

A friend says that the dream of his life is a Christmas tree on wheels that emerges fully decorated from an unseen panel in the wall in early December and can be tucked away, still festooned, when the holidays end.




From file written February 13, 1993

Muriel and Don arrived on the 23rd of December. We had our Christmas dinner on the 24th, as is the Scott custom. Muriel and Don walked out to film the neighborhood with his video camera while I fluttered about on dinner preparations.

There was a slight last-minute boggle, which I thought was funny but which upset María terribly. For months, I had thought María planned to bake a ham and make her wonderful sauce for it. When she and Alex arrived, she did not bring anything. I asked about her sauce. She looked mortified and said she had not made it, but could do so quickly. She slipped into the kitchen and seeing no ham baking, returned more confused than ever.

We had several moments of mutual verbal misunderstanding. It developed that María understood I had decided that we would have only the turkey (which I would cook) and not the ham. True, but I had forgotten it. She then decided that I had baked a ham in addition to the turkey, had asked her to make the sauce, and that she had forgotten. When she could not find a ham in the kitchen, she realized that the problem went deeper. We sorted it all out, though María continued to be mortified over something that was completely my fault, not hers.

I managed to run late. I overcooked the turkey badly and, in my resulting distress, forgot to change into my red Christmas dress. No one cared. Eventually, all was served. Everyone had a relaxed, happy time and Christmas dinner was a huge success.



Christmas morning I had consumed my usual half-pot of coffee in solitary leisure before the rest of the family surfaced. Dressed in my traditional red caftan, the intricately embroidered one that Carli brought me from Greece, I established myself in my recliner to preside over The Opening of Presents.

The Stauffers brought lovely gifts for everyone. Our pile of brightly wrapped gifts was too large to fit completely under the Christmas tree, even before Alex arrived with several miscellaneous boxes plus one enormous one. Alex, in the red jumpsuit that Transworld Drilling gave him as a safety award back in the Seventies, took on his usual task of distributing gifts, one at a time.

The Stauffers brought back from Austria for me a lovely little crystal dish with work as delicate as a cobweb. Muriel was pleased with a small silver peacock pin I had found for her on my trip to Colorado last year. * It reminded both of us of a special incident on one of our earlier Mexican trips. Don was amused at my joke gift of a minute magnet shaped like a bottle of Mexican Corona beer. The season's most imaginative gift was Alex's present to María of driving lessons.

Muriel had hand-carried down to Belize a large, flat package, which I knew was a painting for me (she is an increasingly successful artist). To my absolute delight, it was one she had done when we were in Guanajuato two years earlier. ** At that time, to my utter horror, Don drove her back up the mountain overlooking the city and left her at a wide place alongside the highway where she had spotted a group of rather charming houses on the hillside. When Don and I returned to get her a couple of hours later, she had a "gallery" of three wide-eyed, silent little boys following her every stroke with utter intensity. It was their homes

* "Family Visits in Colorado" on page 193 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

** "El Bajío with Muriel & Don" on page 173 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*



Kate with Muriel's painting, Christmas 1992; photo in lower right corner of frame shows boys watching Muriel paint

she was sketching. One of them explained to me that he was learning to sketch in school, so was especially delighted to see a real artist at work. Muriel had tried to talk to them in her fractured Spanish, but they made it plain that they wanted her working, not conversing. Anyway, I was thrilled to have her give me that particular painting. It turned out handsomely. She said that it was rated highly when critiqued.

I planned a 12:00 noon brunch Christmas Day. María and Alex always have a lovely, informal party for their friends from about 5:00 PM on, and need time for last-minute preparations. We ran so late with presents that they begged off brunch. They still had to get to María's parents with their presents. Muriel, Don, and I divided my casserole in two, froze half, and heated the rest of the meal for ourselves.

The Stauffers and I dressed festively and made an appearance at María and Alex's party around 6:00, when people were beginning to arrive. Then Don suggested that the three of us go on to the nearby Fort George Hotel for a drink. We did—and with the second one, Muriel suggested our ordering a sandwich. So that was our Christmas night.

On Boxing Day, we decided to ignore the intermittent rain and drive up to the Belize Zoo. At about Mile 12, Don leaned over, glanced at the fuel

gauge, and asked if I had enough gas. *No*, I didn't. I had intended to fuel up before turning onto the Western Highway, but we all were so deep in conversation that I forgot. No option but to turn back.

By the time we reached the zoo turn-off, the rain was so hard that we decided to go to JB's for lunch first. The rains increased until I was inching along, wrapped in gray sheets of solid water, unable to see anything but a few feet of road directly ahead of us. There were no comfortable shoulders to pull off onto; I did not dare stop. Long after I was sure we must have passed JB's, the rain abated enough for me to turn around. When we finally found our rustic restaurant, the rain still was heavy enough to keep us pinned in the car for another ten minutes.

We had a pleasant lunch of the chicken we had watched being grilled in a small open shed. The cook held an umbrella over her head with one hand and turned the chicken with a fork held in the other.

The rain storm moved past and we continued on to the zoo. We were interrupted once by a brief squall, but Muriel and I huddled together under my umbrella, and Don found a convenient tree to protect himself.

We were back home by around 2:00 PM. Emilie Bowen came for tea, her only chance for a visit with the Stauffers. Conversation bubbled for a couple of hours.

That evening Don and Muriel took Alex, María, and me to dinner at the Chateau Caribbean.



The Stauffers and I left for Mexico on the 27th, and I returned to Belize on January 10th. I will be writing separately about the trip, so will not get into it here except to say that we had a glorious time.* The Stauffers and I seem to want to do the same things at the same time, so there are few strains. We were still finding new things to discuss when we said goodbye

* "Mexico with Muriel & Don" on page 201 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

back in Chetumal, and we were making tentative plans for a fourth Mexican excursion in another couple of years.



When I returned from Mexico, Alex was in Big Creek in connection with the discharge of barges bringing U.S. Army engineering equipment for various projects. As usual when either of us is holding the fort alone, it was chaos in the office. I spent the week juggling five ships—and adoring it! It was exhausting but stimulating.

My first weekend home was spent dismantling two Christmas trees, the Nativity scene, and miscellaneous Christmas decorations. They had looked charming when we left Belize, but were a bit anti-climactic by late mid-January.



Just days after my return to the office routine, my adored sister-in-law Becky from North Georgia arrived for a visit. We went to Chan Chich, a beautiful resort built in the ball court of a small Mayan ruin near Gallon Jug in the western jungle.

One dawn I found myself sitting in the chilly dark facing west, awaiting the sunrise and wondering why I couldn't have listened to bird calls quite as easily from my cozy nest under piles of comforters while I watched the reddening of the eastern sky through open blinds. I found out why I had made the effort when, with the light, came a deafening flight of twenty-some wild turkeys from the tall trees behind the Mayan mound facing the veranda of our cabana. The large birds with their burnished plumage alighted on the lawn near me. They paraded past in dignified single file, pecking tidily as they breakfasted.



Becky Bryan at Chan Chich, 1993

Surprise House Guest

February 1993

From file written February 28, 1993

Let me tell you my major faux pas.

About a month ago, I was delighted to receive a telephone call from Louis Bondurant III, son of dear friends. When Bucher and I moved to Atlanta in the late Forties, I got to know Louis III's parents, who were dating at the time—Louis Bondurant Jr. and Fran Ward. Coincidentally, Fran's sister, Margie Ward, had married one of Bucher's favorite cousins, Dan MacIntyre III. During our six years in Atlanta, Fran & Louis and Margie & Dan were among our closest friends.

When we left Atlanta, we remained in frequent close contact with Fran and Louis. They married after a years-long courtship; Louis III, their oldest, is a couple years younger than Carli. We saw him and his parents regularly in the late Fifties when we lived on the Siesta Key and they vacationed in nearby Clearwater, Florida. Fran and Louis's younger son, Ward, was born just months before we moved back to Belize and their daughter, Rhea, a few years later.

Louis III (whom I'll refer to simply as *Louis* because his father doesn't figure in this anecdote) had called to say that he, his wife Melody, and Ward were coming down to go scuba diving at one of the cayes and wondered if they could come on into town afterwards to see me. Louis had visited us when he was sixteen and wanted to show Melody and Ward the places he had enjoyed. They had a complicated schedule of activities, so I expected to be primarily a supper-bed-and-breakfast stop. I looked forward to having them here.



The young Bondurants arrived yesterday. When I met them at the airport, I was a little perplexed because Ward did not look at all as I remembered

him. He was tall and rangy instead of short and plump. I mentally congratulated current emphasis on fat-free diets and reminded myself that I had not seen Ward since he was in his teens. We had a big reunion as they piled enough luggage for a trip around the world into the car.

Later, when I had a moment alone with Louis and Melody, I asked them about Ward's wife Mary. Louis had not explained why she had not come, and I wanted to avoid any verbal booby traps that might be waiting for me. They said Mary was expecting a baby in April. I thought it a little strange that her husband was gallivanting around Central America so close to the time, but it certainly wasn't my business.

Moments later, Ward came into the room. I congratulated him enthusiastically on his soon-to-be fatherhood. There was a collective gasp of disbelief. Ward laughed and said that as far as he knew, fatherhood was not in his future, since he was not married. And the whole thing sorted out.

This was Louis's *cousin*, Ward MacIntyre, son of Margie and Dan, not his *brother*, Ward Bondurant. I was mortified at not having recognized a relative, though I think the last time I saw this Ward, he was about five. Louis apologized, saying that *he* knew which Ward he meant when he phoned me and didn't realize that I might be confused.

It all passed off with a laugh, though I still am embarrassed.

These three young people could not be more delightful or easier to have as guests. I am enjoying them thoroughly. (You note that I continually refer to them as *young*. When we were children, pushing forty was nudging the door to middle age.)

Crime Investigation

February – March 1993

From file written March 8, 1993

I've been in the middle of a detective story—another in the long series of improbable situations that keeps my job more of an entertainment medium than routine work.

Mid-February, the MV *Repulse Bay** arrived to load sugar. We were agents. Upon arrival, the Captain sent deck hand Abdur Rahim (pronounced *Rah-HEEM*) ashore to see a doctor. After several visits and fairly exhaustive tests, Dr. Lizama brought his final medical report to the office for us to send out to the Master of the ship. He showed it to us and said that while Rahim had various problems, some treatable, he could find no underlying cause for most of the complaints. Dr. Lizama diagnosed



Kate working at her desk, 1997

* *MV* before the ship's name means *Motor Vessel*.

emotional / mental problems and suggested that Rahim be repatriated to Bangladesh.

The morning the *Repulse Bay* sailed, the Captain sent Rahim ashore, with instructions to Alex to send him home to Chittagong, Bangladesh. Alex installed the man in El Centro, a modest, decent hotel, and I got busy trying to get reservations for him.

It was a discouraging job. Naturally, I tried to book him on Air France. There were scheduling problems, and no space was available. I kissed goodbye to anticipated commissions and tried to book him through other travel agencies. Same report; no space. Ultimately, I was able to confirm reservations on Air France. Poor Mr. Rahim came ashore on a Thursday, and the next week Friday was the earliest we could get him out.



Early on the Tuesday morning, the manager of Rahim's hotel called to say that Rahim reported his room had been entered during the night, and that he had been robbed. She swore she did not believe him. I called the C.I.B. (Criminal Investigation Branch of the police) and arranged to meet an officer at the hotel.

El Centro is only three blocks from our office. Rahim was outside, waiting for me. He told me his story. The following is quoted from my written statement to the police:

Mr. Rahim was waiting outside the hotel and told me the basic outline of the alleged robbery. He said that he had watched TV until 11 o'clock Monday night, 1 March, then had gone to sleep. When he awakened at about 0600 on 2 March, he went into the bathroom to wash his face, then went to the closet to get his clothes to dress for breakfast. His trousers and shirt were missing from the rod where he had tossed them the night before, and a hand bag was missing from the closet, he reported. His bedroom door was ajar. He looked out into the hall and saw his hand bag and some of his belongings, which had been inside it, lying in an untidy pile at the end of the corridor. He looked at them, he said, but did not touch them. He said that some

pants, shirts, toiletries, and US\$1,000 cash were missing. He went downstairs to the reception desk to report a robbery, he said.

Mr. Rahim and I went into the hotel and were invited into Ms. Castillo's office. The matter was discussed; some questions were asked. None of Mr. Rahim's replies differed from what he had told me.

The three of us went up to Mr. Rahim's room. The officers from the C.I.B. arrived almost immediately and began their investigation.

Not one detective, but five—tall, solemn young men—arrived from the C.I.B. By the time the five of them, Rahim, and I wedged ourselves into his pleasant but small room, with Ms. Castillo, the manager, slumping in worried dejection by the door, there was barely breathing space. Each of the detectives poked around here and there; all asked questions.

Poor Mr. Rahim either did not understand them or could not make himself understood. I finally asked the detective whom I took to be the superior officer if he would like me to help interpret. I have had a lot of experience talking to seamen with limited English and have developed a technique of editing what I say down to First-Grade level. I re-word until I can see comprehension, speaking very slowly and clearly. Understanding replies is more of a problem, but again, I have had more experience with weird accents than most Belize detectives.

Rahim told the detectives that the \$1,000 which had been stolen included \$500 and \$300 given to him by friends to take home to their families. He showed his recent monthly pay vouchers to prove that while most of his wages were automatically transferred to his family, he drew some cash. On being questioned, he said that he could not be sure he had locked his hotel-room door.

The police brought the hand bag and its scattered contents back to the room and dumped them on Rahim's unmade bed. The open, empty small money pouch, Rahim said, had contained both the U.S. dollars and various other foreign money. He seemed quite disturbed at losing six bars of Lux soap, saved from his monthly allotment on the ship. We all were willing to believe that he did not utilize all the soap given him, though he

was not nearly as offensive as the doctor had reported his being on some visits.

Rahim complained bitterly that now all the clothes he had were the T-shirt and pants he was wearing, which he had retrieved from the pile in the hall. I asked him about clothes in the large, blue duffel bag that remained in the closet. He said there were none. Peculiar, I thought.

After a fairly brisk investigation and questioning, Rahim was invited to go down to the station to make a statement. Police statements here are taken down long-hand by a detective. Knowing how slow and laborious the statement-taking process is, I dreaded going through it with someone whose English was rudimentary.



We were lucky in drawing Detective Sergeant Rene Rhaburn for the ordeal. He is an attractive, astute young man. I again offered to help and was co-opted enthusiastically. Rahim understood some of D.S. Rhaburn's questions and could answer directly. More often it was a matter of my phrasing and rephrasing questions until he could understand, and then "translating" the garbled answer. From time to time I asked questions of my own, without any complaint from the detective.

Naturally, most questions began with the word *what*. After receiving some very strange replies, I realized that I could not use the word. Rahim understood *what* as *white*.

You try avoiding the word what in asking a series of questions about what was found, what was missing, what one did next, etc.

The interrogation went on for almost 2-1/2 hours. We spent ages trying to get descriptions of the missing clothes. Rahim was able to tell exactly how much foreign currency he had lost, to the U.S. dollar equivalent. He grew emotional about the loss of some shirts and a pair of pants, compared to his relative calm at losing US\$1,000. The detective and I exchanged long, dead-pan glances regularly.

As the questioning proceeded, Rahim put his head down on the table, pleading a throbbing headache. I believed him; I was beginning to get one. He got up several times to walk out onto the veranda for some of the air that was blowing briskly through the open office.

I wanted to talk to D.S. Rhaburn alone, but realized that it would be highly inappropriate. He was the professional; let him do his job without any bright ideas from an eager septuagenarian.

At the end of the interrogation, D.S. Rhaburn took Rahim back to the hotel to begin the real on-site investigation. By this time it was 11:30 and I had been away the entire morning.



Back at the office, I answered a pile of telephone messages, then called the hotel manager about a further advance on Rahim's extended lodging. She waffled a bit, saying it might not be necessary. The police had found US\$970 in Rahim's jacket pocket and had carted him off to jail. I was inordinately relieved 1) that perhaps Rahim had not been robbed, and 2) that poor, dear Ms. Castillo would not get into trouble with her boss over the matter.

D.S. Rhaburn telephoned me early in the afternoon, asking me to turn in a statement. He said that half-way through the interrogation, long experience convinced him that Rahim was lying. He said he almost stopped right then, but reminded himself that our Bangladeshi might be telling the truth. I mentioned to the detective that I had wanted to talk to him privately.

Rhaburn replied, "I knew it," adding, "We were doing pretty well at getting information back and forth without talking."

He also thanked me for some of the questions I had inserted on my own initiative. He said they opened up a lot of doors that Rahim had kept closed.



In the afternoon, I took my written statement down to the C.I.B. Had another pleasant visit with my friendly detective. D.S. Rhaburn sent across to “the lockup” to get the key to Rahim’s hotel room so that I could pack up his belongings and take them to the office for safekeeping.

I quizzed the detective sternly about the lockup. Last time I saw it, it was a 12' x 16' cage with old-fashioned iron bars reaching the high ceiling. It did not have even a bench. Eight or ten of the biggest, meanest men I ever have seen were prowling back and forth in it. I worried about my gentle Bangladeshi. Rhaburn assured me that prisoners were given food, water, and “facilities” (i.e., a bucket).

In reply to my question about taking things to Rahim, Rhaburn said he could not have shaving things, but that I should take his tooth brush and paste, soap, towel, and a sheet for him to wrap himself in at night. When Allan Clare (from my office) and I packed up Rahim’s things later, I put aside his medicine, comb, toiletries, and some food he had left in the room. At home I added an old towel and sheet (a bit grudgingly after the problems the man had caused me), and delivered it all to the police station. Alex told me later that everything but the towel and sheet were stolen by cell mates as soon as they were delivered to Rahim.




Next morning Rahim telephoned me from the police station. “Why am I here?” he asked. “I am no trouble.”

Speaking slowly, in words of one syllable, I replied that he was a whole lot of trouble to the police and to me. He said he was not comfortable in the lockup. I asked coldly why he put himself there instead of staying in his air-conditioned room at El Centro watching TV. (Kindliness to Rahim was not at the top of my list that morning.) He claimed that the money the detectives found was his own money, separate from the \$1,000 that was stolen.

Rahim started jabbering things I could not understand. He wanted me to get him out. I explained that I could not. He said that I (the ship’s agent)


was no help. I said that either Mr. Scott (Alex) or I would meet him when he was taken before the magistrate. I am not at all sure that, at the end, I did not sort of hang up on him.



Our problems were not over. I was writing up Rahim's Air France ticket when Alex returned to the office from a visit to police headquarters.

"Don't bother with the ticket," Alex warned. Seems the C.I.B. never transcribed D.S. Rhaburn's report—so it had never been sent to the regular police—so they had never put Rahim on the magistrate's calendar. Furthermore, the desk sergeant told Alex it was not at all definite that the magistrate would let Rahim go with just a fine instead of a jail term.

Here we sat with our hard-won plane reservations to Chittagong, Bangladesh, and an incarcerated passenger.



Alex took the Rahim matter out of my hands. He said I was too tender-hearted. I don't know all the foolishness Alex went through with the police Wednesday afternoon, but just as our office was closing, we got a cryptic message from him telling us to take \$100 to him at the magistrates' court immediately. Neither Petty Cash nor I had it.

I walked briskly down to one of the few stores open on a Wednesday afternoon and arranged with the (highly amused) manager to cash a check. Then I hotfooted it down to the court. Finally found Alex. Gave him money. Asked if he wanted me to stay. Looked at his expression and left hurriedly.

When Rahim finally was brought in front of the magistrate, he started arguing. Alex furiously told him to shut up, plead guilty, and leave for home the next day, or go on with his foolishness and spend the next two weeks in the "----house." Alex said the police all laughed loudly at his berating of their prisoner. Rahim obeyed, reluctantly.

After he pleaded guilty to malicious mischief, Rahim was fined \$50 and his US\$970 was returned. Alex booked him into a nearby Chinese hotel, not nearly as comfortable as the air-conditioned El Centro.

Next morning Alex took Rahim out to the airport, checked him in for his flight to Miami, saw him through the security gate, and returned to the office with a sigh of relief. Alex returned half-convinced Rahim might have been telling the truth about the robbery.

I, too, had mixed thoughts. However, being there for the full performance, I judged from the man's actions, as well as from his statements.

As for motive, it could have been no more complicated than his despair at the delay in getting a flight home—plus his obvious emotional instability.

Sadly, we will never know what was true.

Still Not Retired

March – November 1993

From file written March 21, 1993

Backtracking to the disastrous weather of a week ago, the storm that bred the blizzard of the century began life off the coast of South America.


We first learned about it when increasing winds made the captain of the cruise ship *Caribbean Prince* question the safety of sailing to the Bay Islands of Honduras on their final cruise of the season. On Friday (March 12th), Alex and the Captain called a company in the East that custom-designs weather reports for clients. They predicted winds up to 50 miles-per-hour and 10- to 14-foot seas in the passage the cruise ship would have to make. That would be deadly for a boat with six-foot draft and a load of geriatric passengers. The cruise ship's captain used an alternative plan that kept the ship safely behind the reef in Belizean waters.

Heavy winds hit Belize City the morning of the 13th. The temperature dropped about twenty degrees to our coldest of the year.

The Esso tanker arrived at dawn on Sunday, March 14th, severely buffeted by strong winds and heavy seas between Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, and Belize. The Captain was in our office Monday morning (15th) and said that whereas his tanker can roll up to 20 degrees in bad weather, she went over 35 degrees on this trip. He was not sure she would come back upright. The vessel was well battened down for the trip, but even so, bookcases tore loose under the rolling; heavy, "immovable" things sailed across cabins; and he lost all of his documents that were needed to enter Belize under the welter of debris in his cabin. He said wryly that at 4:00 AM he was sitting in the middle of the mess making up a new set of documents.


While he was here, the Captain telephoned his office in Panama. Apparently the storm caused chaos there. Ships were tossed into each

other; the canal was jammed so that nothing could move; and it was a near disaster.



It was an hellacious week. The good thing was that we had much more export cargo than usual for the European container ship that loaded today. The bad thing was that shippers didn't tell us what their plans were until the last moment so that there was a madhouse of booking changes to be telephoned to the controlling office in Miami, refrigerated containers to be checked and sent thither and yon, and last-minute issuing of (or changes in) bills of lading and manifests (18 copies of each per set).


Things still were a madhouse when we closed for the weekend. Alex was out at the port, and I fielded telephone calls from the house. It all worked out. I finally settled down to my standard TGIF beer.



The weekend has seemed shorter than usual. I got a few things done, but seem to have a pile of stuff I never got to. Think I'll take tomorrow afternoon off if things are going smoothly in the office, and tackle all the things I should have done yesterday and today.

I dedicated Saturday to finishing up tax returns. I had held off because I heard a rumor that medical expenses now are deductible. No publicity about it. Verified the matter, and photocopied reams of stuff from last year's sessions in Atlanta. We can deduct the 20% not covered by insurance, to a limit of BZ\$1,000 (US\$500). It's not much, but everything helps. Our deadline is March 31st, so I really needed to wrap everything up. I rather enjoy doing them. Our Belize returns are a straightforward one-page deal. Nothing like the wilderness you have to wade through in the U.S.

For some reason I don't really understand, I do Alex's tax return as well as my own. It's probably fear of his ending up in jail because he would forget to file.



In May, Alex and María will meet Carli and Tom on the *Caribbean Prince* for the cruise from Fort Lauderdale up the inland waterway to Rhode Island. I'll have my annual stint of managing the office alone.

My break comes in August, when Carli has invited me to visit them. I'll go out late in the month and be back before the September national holidays, when Alex and María might want to take a long weekend. I have forgotten the dates, but I'm going to get to Palo Alto on a Friday and leave on a Monday, giving us a week with two weekends. I would happily stay two weeks, but think this is long enough for two people who both work full time. Besides, I want to be invited back some day.



From file written March 28, 1993

I'm off mid-week for a three-day Air France conference in Salvador. Fortunately, it occurred to me (late and casually) that I should think about whether I needed a visa. I have a book giving all the requirements for every country, so I glanced in it for reassurance. I did not get any. Salvador has a list of a couple of dozen countries whose nationals do not require visas; the U.S. is not among them.


I finally tracked down the Consulate of Salvador in our capital, Belmopan, by telephone, and asked them about a visa. I was assured that 1) I needed one, and 2) the only place I could get it was Belmopan.

"Do you mean that I have to drive over a hundred miles and miss a half day at the office to get a visa?" I exploded. I was aware of raising my voice, which probably was received on the other end as a screech.

Friday morning I was at the entrance to the Western Highway at 7:30. I was back at 10:00. The drive was pleasant enough. At about the halfway mark I ran into fog, which lasted all the way to Belmopan, but it was hazy rather than dense. Traffic was light. The young Salvadoranean woman in the Consulate could not have been more charming or helpful. I apologized

for my spontaneous reaction of the day before. She insisted on giving me a three-year multiple-entry visa, which will carry through the life of my passport.

I have no plans to return to Salvador, but who knows? I had two delightful visits to Salvador years ago.* Now, although the war is over, there are rumblings about the Human Rights Commission report on atrocities. I do not intend to set foot out of the unexciting but probably pleasant Camino Real, where the conference is being held. I have been reminding myself that if I hear gun fire or bombs, I am not to rush to the window to see what's happening, but should dive under the bed instantly, dignity be damned.



From file written April 19, 1993

For weeks everyone asks everyone else where they are going for Easter. I constantly get commiseration when I say that I am staying home. People simply cannot believe what a delight it is to me to have this free time to catch up on all the things I don't have time to do during my working weeks. I enjoy the company of my dogs, being able to do things when and if I feel like it, the sense of accomplishment, the leisure to stop and read for a while, if I choose. My life has been so full of wonderful family and friends that whether they are with me now or not, I feel surrounded by them.



From file written July 3, 1993

One of the nice things to happen recently is our being appointed agents for Laser Lines, a Swedish company. They have joined the consortium called CAROL, which has revised their European / Caribbean service and added two new Partners. We have been CGM (French Line) agents since

* The first of these visits is described in "El Salvador with Mama" on page 1 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*.

CAROL began serving Belize. Amusingly, it was CGM's regional sales director who urged me to approach Laser and ask for consideration as their agents here. Both Alex and I have some reservations about representing two companies in the same service. However, Belize Estate (BEC) already represents three of the CAROL Partners. This will even things up slightly. We know we can be fair in our handling of the two clients. This situation of multiple agencies and representing competitors is quite usual through this area.

We know literally nothing about Laser. The people we have been dealing with by telephone and fax have impressed us. When we had questions about a couple of points in the Agency Agreement, they compromised graciously. We understand they are aggressive at soliciting freight in Europe. That will be a help.

This new service has been designed to cut transit time between Europe and the Caribbean and to offer fixed-day weekly service. Both will be a big asset here. Instead of the "capital ships" of the CAROL fleet calling at all twenty-odd ports, they will do a shorter circuit. A feeder service will tie some of the northern Caribbean Islands and Central American into the schedule.

Two feeder ships alternating weeks will be attended by the agent of the company that owns the ship. As things stand, BEC will be handling both ships for the first six months. Then when the ships are rotated, one will be CGM's and one Laser's, so we will attend and stevedore a ship every week for the next six months. That means a six-month lean period with no stevedoring income and six months of relentless work but good return. We'll survive, but I never have considered feast-or-famine the ideal way to live.

Laser has promised to send me some information about the company so that I can do some promotion. Can't wait to find out something about them.



From letter dated November 7, 1993

The sales manager from the CGM regional office in Puerto Rico was here the end of the week. Tim is a delightful young Englishman of 31, about 6' 5" tall, well built, exceptionally handsome, quiet but relaxed, and with a charming sense of humor. I adore him despite the fact that I feel like a cross between Mutt and Jeff and his grandmother. On the way into town from the airport, something he said made me realize that he considers a trip to Belize in the same category as a trip to Darkest Africa.

Tim came specifically to call on the The Citrus Company of Belize (CCB). This was our second trip down to Stann Creek to see them. CCB is our biggest client. They anticipate an enormous increase in exports to Europe with the introduction of a new product early in 1994. We all have worked our hearts out to get their traffic. CGM offered them an excellent deal. Our only problem is getting a regular and sufficient supply of refrigerated containers. CGM has solved that one and Tim wanted to discuss it with them.

Anyway, Thursday we had torrential rains. I dressed in my newest and smartest tailored outfit, then waded through ankle-deep water in my new shoes to get to my hairdresser. I had no idea whether Tim's plane could get in, whether the noon Maya Airways flight could take us south, whether the afternoon flight could return us to Belize. I stuffed my briefcase with two umbrellas and bare minimum necessities in case we were stuck at the Pelican Beach Hotel overnight. Fortunately, the rains stopped, and the schedule worked.

When we got to the sodden dirt strip at Stann Creek, I announced that we would walk to the hotel. The plan was for us to have lunch there and for the CCB people to pick us up afterwards. I forgot that on our January trip (where there was a mixup in plans), a car picked us up at the airstrip, drove around a bit, then deposited us back at the hotel temporarily.

Tim was appalled when I blithely announced that we would walk to the hotel from the airstrip.

"It's miles!" he protested.

“Oh no,” I replied as I started down a rutted and flooded track through high grass, “It’s just over there.”

We criss-crossed the trail, seeking dry spots, as we walked the quarter mile. At one point, I stepped aside onto the grass to avoid a mudhole and found myself ankle deep in hidden water for the second time that morning.

Tim suddenly remarked, “My parents won’t believe this. Here I am slogging up a muddy trail with nothing but high grass and palm trees in sight, in my shirt and tie, carrying my briefcase.”

Fortunately, the hotel appeared around the next bend. We went into the pleasant little bar for a needed Belikin.* I excused myself to go blot my shoe and stockings. When I returned, Tim announced with amazed surprise that the pleasant Englishman behind the bar came from a village not ten miles from where he grew up.

After a quick lunch, we were collected and driven down past Silk Grass to the estate of the CEO. His house is huge but simple, in the Belize style. It is on a high hill overlooking miles of orange groves and pineapple plantings. Through a large gap in the surrounding hills one can see the coast and sea. He says that on a clear day, the cayes twenty miles away show plainly.

* *Belikin* is a brand of beer brewed in Belize.

Odds and Ends

April – December 1993

From file written April 6, 1993

I arrived home from the Air France Agent's meeting in Salvador* around noon on Saturday. I fixed lunch, then collapsed for a nap. The adrenalin that had kept me on top of the world through the conference, ran out.

When I awoke late in the afternoon, I felt terrible. A bath helped. I was looking forward to a restful evening with my dogs and my TV when an innocent, stray thought wisped into my consciousness. "Saturday" (pleasant, low-key TV shows), "Duplicate" (bridge every other Saturday)—still no reaction. Suddenly it registered. Duplicate tonight.

It was then almost 6:45 PM, the time Jimmy Murphy picks me up. And I was in my gown and robe. You never saw anyone dress as quickly in your life. Thank goodness, Jimmy ran slightly late. At 7:00 PM I was able to lock the doors behind me and climb into his car with an appearance of nonchalance. Of course, I ruined the impression instantly by telling him about my near faux pas. By this time, I had come back to life and was feeling marvelous. We had a good evening of bridge and think we did fairly well in the competition.

I was a little nervous when Jimmy and I first started playing together regularly, but this has turned into a delightful every-other-Saturday activity. It isn't a "date"—it is just two comfortable friends playing the best bridge they can and enjoying it.




* "Agents' Meeting in Salvador" on page 219 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

From file written June 2, 1993

Jimmy Murphy and I are doing better and better at Duplicate Bridge. It has taken a while for us to become comfortable with each other. We don't have fixed rules for all occasions, like our friend and my former partner Ian.

Jimmy and I have had to learn each other's bidding and play. I think we are doing it by instinct, rather than rule. We came in second two weeks ago. This past Saturday we scored regularly. The nice thing is that neither of us criticizes the other, we just commiserate with a laugh about errors. We are not anything close to U.S. bridge tournament caliber, but we enjoy being counted among Belize's steady players.




From file written June 6, 1993

I think I told you that Betty and Al Bevis were coming for a visit finally. They arrived on May 20th. Both look surprisingly unchanged, considering that they left Belize twelve years ago. Betty's whole body has collapsed due to the hideously painful spinal compressions of osteoporosis. Still, she is just as bright and happy as ever.

The first thing Al said when they walked into the guest room was, "Is my hat still here?" I threw wide the wardrobe door to show him that his hat was perched on the two baskets they had left behind.

"Is the open bottle of gin still there?" he then inquired.

"Certainly not," I replied. "You left me most of your liquor closet, and I considered the gin part of it. Besides, I didn't want it to spoil."



Things worked out nicely. Betty needed a little time to rest before going up to Mountain Equestrian Trails, the lodge in the Mountain Pine Ridge run by their son Jimmy and his wife Marguerite. I had to work full time because of Alex's being away. I offered Al my car, but he declined firmly.

They spent the days quietly, Betty reading to Al much of the time. His sight always has been poor, so they have done this for years. I was home with them midday and after 4:00 each afternoon. It made an easy visit for all of us.

...Except that I had a party for them. I thought it was the best way for them to see the people they knew when they lived here. It was a small group—attrition of The Old Guard by retirement, to other parts, and death. I did most of the cooking well ahead of their arrival. My housekeeper, Jean, and my new (superb) cook, Joyce, handled the rest. Everything considered, it may have been the easiest party I ever have had (translation: I coped with the least frenzy).

Life was not simple. First the ice maker in the new refrigerator stopped working. Then the refrigerator in the old double box froze the eggs I carefully had hard boiled ahead of time for my caviar pie. I knew it was too cold; drinks sometimes were ice. But this was too much. At the same time, the refrigerator side of the new box began losing its cold. There I sat with two large refrigerators virtually useless, with one too cold and one too hot. This was a potential disaster because the new one was crammed with party food.

I called my friend at Your Tech, the refrigeration people. I told him that it was a crisis and asked him not to send some young kid who would tear everything apart. He promised to come himself. The ice maker (6 months old) had to be replaced—burned out by our bad power. The refrigerators were a matter of adjustment.

As for the party itself, it was one of the best—low key, close friends, few enough so that Betty could sit down much of the time.

Jimmy, Marguerite, and two of their children came to get the Bevises Friday afternoon. As plans stand, they will bring them back on Wednesday. When the Bevises were making trip plans, I suggested that they return so that Betty could get a little rest before flying back to Texas.



From letter dated September 19, 1993

September celebrations continue, when permitted by the weather. This is a dismaying time for our Golden Labs, Simba and Amber. When they aren't terrified by nighttime fireworks, they are tormented by the drum-and-bugle corps marching past the house. The fear of drums is a new phenomenon. I learned about it Thursday late afternoon when I was trying to rest for twenty minutes in preparation for Duplicate Bridge that night. A little band started marching back and forth between our corner and the park. Somehow, each time they got here, they were on breaks where the drums continue cadence alone. One massive pounce, and suddenly Amber was curled up next to me shivering as she tried to bury herself in pillows.



From file written September 25, 1993

You may remember my telling you that I was going to Palo Alto to see Carli and Tom the end of August. My visit was absolutely perfect. It was twelve days in all, and I think that is ideal. I arrived on a Thursday. Carli takes Fridays off now, so we had that day together. I had two full weekends with them, then Monday to pack and do last-minute things before leaving before dawn on the Tuesday.

Carli and Tom had family barbecues both Saturday nights so I could see both of their married children, daughter Kris and husband Derek and younger son Greg and wife Rosa. We met Tim, Tom's oldest son, in Mountain View for dinner mid-week. He was off at college last time I was in Palo Alto, so I was especially glad to see him. They all are lovely young people, and I think that they finally are completely at ease with me.

I rented a car for a few days so I could shop by myself while Carli was working. A friend had recommended an outlet mall in Gilroy, about an hour away. I was highly successful for the most part. I never found the simple, tailored cottons I like for the office, but I found shoes and other things I need. Got a new bedspread for my room. María gently suggested

it was time. I've had the same one since 1976, so she could be right. New bathroom rugs were the other bulky things.

Carli and Tom took Wednesday and Thursday off. On Wednesday we drove up to San Francisco to see a fabulous exhibit of artifacts from the ruins of Teotihuacán outside Mexico City. When we left that, we strolled for an hour or more through the utterly charming Japanese garden nearby. Then we met sisters Cathy and Chris Pfeil for dinner. Carli shared a house with Cathy at one time, and the three of them came down to Belize many years ago at the end of a trip through Mexico. I have stayed in touch with the girls through the years, and I was thrilled to have a chance to see them both again. We had an exceptionally good dinner in a Spanish / Peruvian / Mexican restaurant within walking distance of their apartment.

On Thursday, Carli and Tom took me down to Monterey to see the Aquarium. It is a superb display. I even was enchanted by the extensive displays of jelly fish, which were Tom's favorites. We polished off the afternoon by indulging in ice cream from a small nearby shop that connoisseurs Carli and Tom said had the finest ice cream in the area. I *adore* ice cream, but rarely have it. Anything of reasonable quality tastes superb to me.


Friday Tom invited Carli and me to a noontime annual picnic of the computer science departments of Stanford. It was a fairly small group in a grassy courtyard shaded by an enormous live oak. People who retired years ago come back every year for the event. As we arrived, Tom introduced me to an older man, portly and white-bearded, whose name I caught only as "Josh." Tom explained that Josh was responsible for his going to Stanford, rather than pursuing his major in astrophysics.

When we got settled with our plates, Josh asked about Belize. Relaxed and friendly as he was, his questions were incisive, and it was obvious he wanted facts. I realized I was dealing with a super intellect from the way he talked, and it rather rattled me, though I don't think it showed. Fortunately, Belize is one subject I know and can discuss any way it's

required. Josh and I visited back and forth several times during the picnic. It was only after we left that Carli asked me if I realized that Josh was Joshua Lederberg, the Nobel Laureate.

That afternoon Carli, Tom, and I went to a movie. It was the first I have seen since my last visit with them about seven years ago. I was sure the giants were going to leap off the screen into my lap. I'm used to the less intrusive picture on my TV. Anyway, the picture was delightful. It won't win any prizes but it was good entertainment, funny and touching, with some excellent acting.

I think I have hit the high spots. The visit was delightful. Carli and Tom are so happy and compatible that it is a joy to be with them.



From file written September 21, 1993

Belize was affected by Tropical Depression Gert, which snaked its way up the coast of Central America. Thursday was dark and rainy. Friday was *dark* and *rainy*, ten to fifteen inches.

As usual in that old house where we have our office, the computer room was half flooded, with water flowing in around the windows and seeping under the door to pool under Alex's desk. Rain that was blowing through cracks in the aged siding "rained" through the ceiling in the back and the bathroom. A trip to the latter was like walking into a shower. By 11:30, I said, "Enough!" Rubber boots and an umbrella indoors are untenable.

Alex made a sign on his computer: "Flooded Out—We will reopen Monday morning," with a picture of a bottle floating in the sea (the most appropriate illustration he could find in his program).



From file written October 11, 1993

Recently the evening news on a local TV station reported a robbery at a notorious "club" out near the airport and British Army camp. Raúl's Rose

Garden has blossomed in recent years from a small shack to a substantial bistro.

Apparently three gunmen, their faces disguised by stockings, entered the club in the early hours of the morning. They took something like \$30,000 from the cash register, then proceeded to strip guests of jewelry and wallets.

The solemn-faced young woman who was reading the news continued with the story:

“Raúl’s Rose Garden is a brothel, which is illegal in Belize. However, the Government and British Army arranged to let it operate. The Army said their soldiers needed a controlled place to enjoy the company of ladies.

“The gunmen herded British soldiers and their companions out onto the back lawn in various stages of undress. There they robbed them of money and jewelry. It was one time the British Army was caught literally with its pants down.”



From file written November 20, 1993

I think that when I told you about my December / January trip to Mexico* with my close friends Muriel and Don Stauffer, I mentioned that we were planning a return in January of '95. Instead, we now are planning a trip to Provence in the south of France** in September next year. I am absolutely ecstatic. That is the one place I have wanted to go, but after my solo tour on my last trip to France,*** I realized that I do not enjoy traveling by myself. When they suggested Provence, I was both amazed and thrilled. We are busy faxing back and forth about itineraries and reservations regularly. My experience with Air France has taught me that these have to be made early.

* “Mexico with Muriel & Don” on page 201 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

** “Five In France” on page 249 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

*** “France on Business” on page 143 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

Another couple will be going with us. I will fly to France (on my agent's discount of 75%!) a day before they do so that I can have a day with CGM. We will spend three days in Paris first. Then Don has reserved what they call a "mini bus" (to accommodate five people plus luggage). We will drive to the Loire valley to do the castle routine, then on to Provence, where we will spend most of our time. I think the whole trip will be around three weeks long.

I have three French-language cassette programs and am working daily. I hope that I will be able to muddle through by the time we get to France. My accent will always be pure mid-West, but basic sentences are becoming pleasantly familiar. I studied French for two years in high school more than half a century ago. Then, before my first trip to France, the office paid for tutoring in French because it was a business trip (and because I'm one of the bosses and the other one, Alex, agreed). I have a pleasant residue of background to build on.

To me, one of the nicest things about the trip is having a whole year to dream and plan. Even if something happens to prevent the trip, I will have lived through it over and over.



From file written December 19, 1993

You may remember my writing that I bought myself a new artificial Christmas tree a couple years ago. When I got it home, I was quite disappointed to see that while it was a beautiful, full, long-needle tree, it was sort of frosted and not the deep green I expected. Further, according to the directions, it needed special lights that I don't like.

Last year, as you know, Muriel and Don came for Christmas. Up went the tree early in December. I found I was mellowing slightly about the frosting and the puny lights. Then one day I charged into the hardware store again on one of my pre-Christmas forays and found myself face-to-face with the tree of my dreams. It was the short-needle pine with lots of little spurs of branches like the Spruce trees we had throughout my

childhood. I almost bought it on the spot, but the expense to replace such a new tree would have been ridiculous. I sighed, went home, and laughed about it at lunch with Alex and María.

When we finished opening presents that Christmas morning, María and Alex disappeared briefly, then returned with a massive box. They proudly presented it to me. Good guess; my dream tree. It was wildly extravagant of them.

So this year, I couldn't wait for the first weekend in December so I could put up my new tree. I want you to know that it took me two-and-a-half hours to bend all the little branches out properly. After that, the tree could be assembled quickly, of course.

I had to laugh at one aspect of my new tree. It is too big for me. I have to use my sturdy kitchen step stool to string the lights around the top and put on the top ornament. You'd better believe that I am caution itself during the operation. I am not the least bit eager to fall and break all sorts of valuable bones. I found myself thinking wistfully of my sparse but easy-to-handle first tree.

Fully decorated, my new tree was gorgeous. I still didn't like the lights. A few days later I went downstairs to María and Alex's apartment. There stood my previous tree with "proper" lights. Alex explained that they are special ones that burn 25% cooler than the ones we used to use. At that point, I remembered that I used my old bulbs on my first artificial tree because no one told me I couldn't. The next day I strained my charge account at one of the stores by buying eighty of the new bulbs. Yesterday my Saturday morning began with a careful replacing of all bulbs on the tree. It now graces my living room as it should, artificial though it is.



From letter dated December 25, 1993

This morning, Alex surprised me with something I really wanted. Utterly sybaritic. One of those massagers like the Pro Shiatsu advertised on CNN.

I have just spent at least thirty minutes letting it knead every inch of my spine as I relaxed in a semi-coma. It is twice as effective as I expected.

When we finished opening presents, I had a simple breakfast of fruit and sweet rolls for María and Alex before they took off to see her parents. I called Emilie Bowen just to say Merry Christmas, and she insisted that I join her for Christmas dinner.

When I came home, I settled down on my bed with my laptop. As usual, the dog sheet was on the bed, and as usual, Amber was on the sheet. All was fine until the fire crackers started in the street under my window. Suddenly, Simba was pressed next to me, crumpling the letter from Mary that I was trying to answer. As for Amber, when she found my only available side taken by Simba, she started to climb into what ought to have been my lap, but in actuality, was the keyboard of my computer. I fended off her lunging body with one hand while I quickly saved, exited, unplugged, and moved the computer and little lap table to safety. Amber proceeded to walk around my pained, exposed lap several times trying to find the safest way to curl up. I spent twenty minutes semi-buried in shuddering Labs before the outdoor celebration ceased.

New Toy

August 1993 – November 1996

From file written September 25, 1993

Early in my visit to Carli and Tom in August, Tom made a loaf of bread in their bread maker. I am sure you have seen one or have heard friends talk about them. You toss the ingredients in, the machine mixes, kneads, lets the bread rise, and bakes it. All you have to do is set the timer (within 13 hours) for the moment you want the finished loaf to emerge.

I decided that, expensive or not, I had to have one. We looked at the discount stores we were in the next day, but Tom and Carli gently dissuaded me. As Tom said, "You can buy a lot of loaves of bread for what a bread maker costs." By the next morning I reluctantly had convinced myself that I didn't want one.

Three days later, with the greatest of ceremony, Carli and Tom presented me with an enormous Christmas-wrapped box. Three guesses. I was absolutely astounded. They said that their main problem had been in talking me out of buying one without making me suspicious. I really did not have a clue.



Packing was an interesting project. The three of us decided it might be easiest for me to send the bread maker by UPS since I would have to pay duty anyway. That was before I found out that it would cost about \$450! I let the packers repack the box, however, for safety, and now am the proud possessor of a heavy 20" cube box and three trash bags of "peanuts."

As for the bedspread I bought on my shopping expedition, Carli donated an under-seat-size duffel she no longer uses. I could see no way the spread would fit in. "It's all air," Carli insisted, hauling and pushing and forcing the entire bedspread into a compartment one-third its apparent size. Furthermore, later, when several items seemed not to fit anywhere, she

took the bedspread out, put two boxes with quart bottles of my stocking-wash liquid in the bottom, and was able to zip the bedspread back in, to my amazement.

I had a spare duffel-type expandable suitcase with me. I managed to get the rest of a year's shopping, including the bath mats, into it. I had arrived with my two regular brown bags, both squashed by their straps because there was so little in them. I left with five pieces. The garment bag was so bloated that only the straps held it together.



As you know, the Major Trauma of trips comes with facing the Customs Officer in the Belize airport. Somehow my luggage looked more numerous, larger, and heavier than it had when I wrestled with it in Carli and Tom's guest room. Nowadays Customs is happy if you tell them you spent about \$100, all on personal things, not things for resale.

This time the Officer cast a very skeptical eye over my bulging bags when I tried to pull that line. I immediately pointed to the box, told him it was a Christmas present, and declared my absolute joy at paying duty on the bread maker inside.

As the Customs Officer was writing up the ticket, I commented with dismay, "You aren't going to charge me duty on the California sales tax, are you?"

The officer looked at me as sternly as his youth would permit and said, "I'm charging you duty on everything on the invoice. But," he added, tossing his head toward the tower of luggage, "I'm not looking at *all that*."



From file written November 19, 1993

Now, about Carli and Tom's glorious addition to my life, the bread machine. I am working my way through the recipe book that came with it.

I have to make certain adjustments because of our hot climate. The results have been extremely good, with some interesting exceptions.

Naturally, I watch the initial mixing and kneading because it is a fascinating process. One of my early loaves was practically soupy. I tossed in handful after handful of flour until it looked about right. Alex was able to identify my problem. I had thought the safest way to measure the required $3/4$ cup of water was to fill my little plastic quarter-cup measure level three times. He showed me that three quarter-cup measures put into my Pyrex glass measure were well above the three-quarters line. I was outraged. It never had occurred to me that measurers that I bought in good faith might be telling me lies.

Then there was the time I wanted to bake a loaf of bread to send to María's mother as a birthday present. I had baked a loaf of my "standard" recipe for María and Alex on the Saturday. It was picture-book gorgeous. I repeated the recipe for María's mother on Sunday, and it rose to half the size. I cooled down the bread maker and started a second loaf. It barely rose to the top of the container. Obviously, I had a bad package of yeast. I had used the last of my first package on María and Alex's loaf. I refused to send either loaf as a present, though they were perfectly edible.

The next week I made a gorgeous loaf with new yeast, wrapped it in Glad Wrap, tied it with shiny ribbon, and sent it along.



My bridge friends gave me a hard time about the way I talked about the bread machine, saying that they hadn't seen any bread from it. When it was my turn for our Thursday group, I set up the machine to have a loaf of herb bread ready for four o'clock tea. To my horror, we had a power failure. I realized that the power had gone off just as the bread should have started baking, so hoped that it would not be too badly damaged.

When the power came back on, I read my instruction book and figured out how to program the machine to bake immediately. I had to guess at the time. Forty-five minutes later, the bread maker produced my herb

bread, *lots* of herb bread. The bread had risen too long, of course, and even stuck to the top of the machine. However, after I finally was able to get it out, it was a gorgeous loaf. The extra rising didn't hurt either taste or texture. My bridge group was properly appreciative, despite the fact that they had to wait overly long for their tea.



Alex came home from a recent trip to Miami and tossed a book into my lap...*The Break Maker Gourmet*. He said that he bought it for me for Christmas, but figured I needed it right away.

The first thing I did was read it. It takes an astounding number of recipes to fill a book. Some were fascinating, and I will try them. A few were strictly off-the-wall, as if the author got absolutely frantic looking for fillers.

I was thrilled to see a recipe for sourdough starter. I spent the week developing some and then baked my first sourdough loaf. It was absolutely delicious.

Since then I have baked two highly successful loaves of Pumpernickel Bread. One I took to Ann Crump last Saturday night when I went for an informal one-table bridge-and-supper.

I already am making plans to give loaves of bread as Christmas presents to people I don't usually give presents, like Callie Young. It really is a self-indulgence. I have a marvelous time baking and can't justify turning out loaf after loaf, even when I usually give half to María and Alex. My freezer is full of zip-lock bags with one or two or three slices of bread. I haven't a clue what recipe I used until I thaw the bread, and sometimes not even then.



From letter dated December 27, 1993

I decided to bake Callie and Ford Young a loaf of white bread for Christmas. We don't exchange presents, but Callie always brings me some of her gorgeous cookies.

It is hard for me to bake pure white bread because I don't approve of it. I think that if you go to the trouble of baking bread, at least a small percentage of the flour should be whole wheat or some equally healthy grain.

Anyway, I set the bread up to be baked after I got home from work Thursday afternoon. When I opened the machine, I was horrified. Here, finally, was that odd loaf in which the dough ended upside down with the seam side up and a resulting uneven top.

Uneven, hell; it had a top knot on one end.

I was sick. I knew I had to start over and bake another loaf. I left the misshapen loaf cooling on a rack. Every time I walked past it, I burst out laughing. It was the silliest, most self-important loaf of bread I ever had seen. Suddenly, I realized that Callie has a wonderful sense of humor and probably would adore the loaf.


I tied red and green ribbons around the top knot, then wrapped the loaf in Saran and finished it with a wide ribbon and a bow. I wrote a note of explanation. I took the loaf to Callie late Friday morning and explained the mishap. She thought it was marvelous. She said that the loaf looked like an animal, with the far end rounding down slightly lower and the top knot as a head.

When she came for coffee on Boxing Day, she told me that Ford made his entire lunch Thursday out of my bread and butter.




From letter dated December 5, 1994

I think I told you that I was devising a new recipe for María's father. Once I had it standardized, I named it *Pan Panta*,* to his delight. (You do remember that his name is *Pantaleon*, nicknamed *Panta*.) I tried it for the first time last week and think it is quite nice. I'm happy with my (now) three standards: Pumpernickel, Anadama (using recipe from son-in-law Tom), and Pan Panta.


From letter dated December 11, 1994

Bridge last night for Jimmy Murphy, Ann Crump, and my old bridge buddy Ian McIntosh. I set up Pumpernickel to finish about 9:15. I gave it half an hour to rest and become sliceable, then served fresh warm bread with a plate of ham and cheese slices surrounded by small bowls of mayonnaise, mustard, butter, paté, and salmon spread. No one complained about make-your-own. It was a great success.


From letter dated May 28, 1995

Life has been much simpler since I developed a semi-production-line. Normally, I bake only on weekends. Even then, the time available is far less than the things I want to do in it. Inspiration came one day when I had retrieved all the plastic-bagged containers of flour, powdered milk, corn meal, etc., from the freezer and was painstakingly scooping correct amounts from each.

Now, I measure out the dry ingredients for two or three different loaves into two or three separate bowls at the same time. All the white flour measured into each bowl. Gluten flour into each, and so on. I am meticulous about sequence, knowing that disaster lurks if my mind strays. The combined ingredients for one or more spare loaves go into labeled

* *Pan* is Spanish for *bread*.

freezer bags and stay in the freezer for a week or more until I am ready to bake them.

I glory in my new system. I keep a loaf of Pumpernickel and a loaf of Anadama in my freezer at all times. About every other week I bake Pan Panta for María's father. And there are odd loaves for other people from time to time.



From fax sent February 25, 1996

This is a bread weekend. I mixed up ingredients a week or so ago, but had too much bread on hand to bake last weekend. This is my adaptation of my cookbook's Oatmeal Applesauce recipe. I substitute 1/4 cup of whole wheat flour for white, honey for the sugar and increase the cinnamon. It is *good*. I baked a loaf for myself yesterday and have one in progress now for María's brother Elmer. I don't send bread to him as often as I did to their late father, but intend to keep him on my gift list.



From fax sent November 4, 1996

Sunday I mixed up a loaf for Pan Panta and started it in the bread maker. Three hours later I realized, to my horror, that we had a blackout. Fortunately, the bread was in the last rising stage. I was just about to call down to María to ask if I could use her oven to bake it when the power came on. My oven has an electric starter and cannot be lit with a match unless I want to burn the house down. I preheated the oven, left the dough in its own bread-maker container to bake, and prayed. In due course I extracted a perfect loaf.



Alex and María ready for the big event, February 28, 1994



Outside registry. Left to Right: Carli, María's father, mother, brother Elmer, sister Neima, María & Alex, Kate

At Long Last

December 1993 – March 1994

From letter dated January 30, 1994

My best news is that after eight years, my stalwart son asked María to marry him on Christmas morning 1993. I could not be happier. María is a darling, absolutely the kindest person I have ever known. I love her dearly and have silently hoped that she would become a daughter. I think I was as happy about the event as they were.

Alex's "proposal" was completely in character. He always doles out Christmas presents. The last gift under the tree was a lumpy package that he handed to María. She opened it, and to her dismay and mine, it contained a couple of PVC pipe elbows stapled to a card. I decided that Alex had gone senile ahead of me, then María gasped and retrieved from among the wrappings a familiar tiny ivory leather box. It was my mother's engagement and wedding rings.

They will have a registry wedding. María is divorced and cannot remarry in the Catholic Church. I couldn't care less. All I want is to be able to refer to "my son and his wife" instead of to "my son and uh-uh-mmmuh."




From report dated March 13, 1994

I order all my stationery from Bucher's sister Bibba. Shortly after Christmas, I sent Bibba details for the wedding announcements without the date.

The happy couple decided to marry in late February when Carli and Tom would be in Belize following a Guatemalan tour. María and Alex asked Carli and Tom to be their witnesses at the service. Carli, Tom, and I were deeply touched at their wanting them as attendants.


It was so long before I called Bibba to tell her when A&M would be married that she wondered whether the wedding had been called off.



Alex was absolutely paranoid about complete secrecy for the wedding. It made things *very* difficult for me. However, when a 45-year-old son *finally* is marrying a lovely young woman you have loved for years, you don't rock the boat.

All was Top Secret. No security organization in the world ever has maintained the level of secrecy I was sworn to and upheld. Alex even gave me strict instructions that the wedding announcements were *not* to reach Belize until after the wedding. Apparently he thought that if the boxes were opened for postal inspection, the date would leap off the page and, like fireworks, be blazoned across the Belizean sky.

I could understand Alex's reluctance to proclaim their plans. It is slightly forbidding to be a first-time bridegroom at his age. Alex wanted everything done as quietly and simply as possible. The perpetual refrain in the house in the weeks before the wedding was, "It's getting out of hand!" María and I learned to continue our conferences in private and do exactly as we had planned to do all along.



Carli and Tom arrived from Guatemala mid-morning Sunday, February 27th. María's mother sent over an enormous pot of relleno as her contribution to our private pre-wedding reunion.

The wedding was at 5:00 PM on Monday, February 28th at the Registry, downstairs in our historic Supreme Court building. María's parents, Sr. and Sra. Villanueva, along with her brother Elmer and sister Neima, joined us in the front of the office as we waited for the staff to leave so that the service could begin.

María looked lovely and slim in a gorgeous pale beige lace blouse with high Victorian neck and a straight skirt of soft material in exactly the same shade. Her "something borrowed" was my mother's diamond-and-



Alex, María, and Kate after the wedding

pink-pearl pin, perfectly placed at a vee formed by the lace of her blouse. She had a small wrist bouquet of cream and peach flowers.

The wedding was simple and brief. It was surprisingly sweet despite the office decor, thanks in part to the gracious young Deputy Registrar who officiated. He was serious through the service and friendly after it. He let us use our cameras as we wished.

After the wedding, we returned to my home for a celebration of champagne and bocas.* María and Alex wanted the quiet family gathering after the wedding instead of a reception (Alex: “Too much commotion”).

Out of courtesy to the Villanuevas, who do not speak English, our conversation was in Spanish. Sr. Villanueva gave the short speech he had been preparing for weeks. I think I said a few words. After the tension building up to the wedding, it was wonderful to relax and enjoy ourselves. I was amazed at surviving two hours in Spanish at a time when my emotions already were in an uproar and my nerves frayed from Making Lists. It was a happy, convivial evening.

* In Belize, the word *bocas* (literally, *mouths* in Spanish) is used to mean *appetizers*.

Alex had agreed (reluctantly) to have a small reception three days after the wedding.

Before I knew about the wedding, I had been thinking of having a party during Carli and Tom’s visit to celebrate our having lived in Belize for Forty years—We arrived on Valentine’s Day, 1954. It was easy to shift mental gears and make the party a wedding reception.

Or it would have been easy had it not been for the secrecy. Alex decreed that even after the wedding, we would not tell people about it. If they found out, as inevitable some would, that was all right. But no telephoning of friends-and-relations to report the happy news.

My problem was reception invitations:

- They had to be sent early to avoid conflict with other “do’s.”
- Under no circumstances could I indicate to anyone that this was a wedding reception.

Solution:

- Invitations to my friends or people on both our lists said that it was a celebration of “40 Happy Years in Belize.”
- Invitations to María’s family and special friends indicated that the party was for María and Alex, but were hand-delivered after the wedding had taken place.

Remaining Problem: My wedding-reception list did not include many of the people who normally would have come to a 40th celebration. I would have worried more about hurt feelings if I had not been so swept up in the wedding, Carli and Tom’s visit, and preparations.

I went in to the office every morning, leaving Carli and Tom to fend for themselves. We all worked on party preparations each afternoon. I had been cooking and freezing for weeks. However, many of the things I had chosen to serve could not be done until the last day or two. C&T were wonderful help and delightful company throughout.



María's niece Badra arrived with the wedding cake early in the afternoon of the reception. It was beautiful, a three-tier heart of soft peach frosting with deeper peach touches on the roses. Badra is talented and artistic. She has been making cakes professionally for about five years. María asked Badra to make it a spice cake and got the recipe for Alex's traditional Christmas / Birthday cake from me as a surprise for him.

The reception was Thursday, March 3rd, beginning at 7:00 PM. By that time, the rumor of María and Alex's marriage had filtered through. I enjoyed some wonderful double-takes, however, as I motioned toward María and remarked casually to arriving guests, "You know *Mrs. Scott*, of course."

María was disappointed that her sister Dulce could not come from New Orleans. They are very close. When the Villanuevas arrived, seven strong, Elmer went back out the door "to get a big package." He returned immediately, grinning broadly, behind a beaming Dulce, who swept María into her arms.

María's brother-in-law Fernando is a professional photographer. He kept himself busy throughout with the three cameras slung about his neck.



Left to Right: Sr. & Sra. Villanueva, María's sisters Neima and Miriam, María, María's brother Elmer and sister Dulce

María had told him that Tom would be taking pictures, so Fernando was delegated to operate small family cameras instead of his own larger one.

Tom was our Resident Photographer. We had five rolls of film of the wedding printed before the reception (Tom's, María's, and mine). Carli went through them and made up a small album that we left out on the coffee table for guests to enjoy. Tom shot another roll at the reception. It was printed before he and Carli left Belize. My own photographic efforts were abandoned as guests arrived. The film remains in the camera.

The reception was basically one of my usual cocktail parties. We served champagne at about 9:00 PM. Alex wanted things kept simple, so instead of the usual long wedding toasts, I gave only a few words. A couple of his friends followed me with brief tributes and wishes. Ceremony broke up in laughter when a particular friend raised his champagne glass in a toast, said, "I have known them for a long time," drained his glass, and smiled broadly with no intention of saying anything else.

María and Alex cut the cake, and the party proceeded.



Nothing has been said about a honeymoon. Carli and Tom gave Alex and María a gift certificate to Chaa Creek resort, so perhaps that will qualify when they have time to take a few days off.

Memorable Visit

March 1994

From file written April 23, 1994

After Alex and María's wedding reception, I had two days to relax and enjoy the rest of Carli and Tom's visit. A few days after they left, my sister, Mary, and her husband, Ellis, arrived for their first visits in 12 and 21 years, respectively. They both were absolutely ecstatic about the trip, about the house, about being in Belize, and about all our planned activities. They could not understand why it had taken them so long to come back.

One reason was the dogs. Ellis is seriously allergic to animal hair. I had commercial cleaners in the morning of the day they arrived. Rugs, floors, walls, furniture, curtains were cleaned with heavy-duty vacuums. I had to pray that the strong wind coming through the house would keep the air uncontaminated for Ellis. Fortunately, he was perfectly comfortable.

The dogs, of course, were banished. To our amazement they seemed to understand that they could not come in. None of the loud vocal protests I had feared. Thank heavens we didn't have a thunderstorm. Simba would have eaten the siding off the back porch trying to get in.



Mary and Ellis arrived late afternoon on Monday, March 14th, after visiting friends in Florida since early March.

Tuesday I went in to the office for an hour then returned to pick Mary and Ellis up to go to the Guatemalan Embassy. Visas now are required, even just to cross the border to shop in Melchor de Menchos. The little shops there have a full line of Guatemalan fabrics, table linens, jackets, belts, bags, etc. They are a tourist's dream.

We had a choice of getting free visas in Belize City or paying US\$10 each for tourist cards at the border. I needed to get a visa for my upcoming trip

to Guatemala after the Air France conference anyway, and thought Mary and Ellis would enjoy having visas in their new passports. The Consul was a handsome, meticulously gracious young man, who made us all feel like cherished guests as he filled out forms, stamped, and signed, and stamped, and signed, and stamped, and...



At 7:30 Wednesday morning, we were off on our way to the West. We drove straight on through to Melchor. Slight delays but no problems at either Belize or Guatemalan borders. Mary had a glorious time shopping. Before we had been there twenty minutes, Ellis showed signs of being about to explode, so I gave him some Quetzales* I had bought at the border and sent him to the cantina next door for a *cerveza*.**

There is only one shop now, on the hill on the right as you cross the little bridge; the large shop half a block farther on the left-hand side is now shuttered.

The young girls who ran the near shop were absolutely darling: patient, helpful, pretty. There is a new shop on up the hill, perhaps 100 yards farther along, which I understood the *muchachas**** to say was the new location of the closed shop. It was obvious that the two open stores were operated by the same family.

I quickly realized that prices had risen dramatically. However, I saw no reason to tell Mary about it. Things still were good value. She picked out several items and asked the girls to hold them for her while she shopped. By this time “Mama” had arrived from the shop farther up the hill. Mama had no intention of letting Mary out of her sight. It was obvious that Mary was about to be trapped in a different selection at the same price. She knew it, but because there were no other shops in sight, she acceded.

* *Quetzal* is the unit of Guatemalan currency.

** *Cerveza* is Spanish for *beer*.

*** *Muchachas* is Spanish for *girls*.

I ran next door to rout out my lonely brother-in-law. He had enjoyed his Gallo* in solitary splendor in the bar, listening to a series of plaintive Spanish songs and wishing he could understand the words.

My Spanish was a big help. It becomes fairly fluent in shopping situations. Further, it “happies” shopkeepers inordinately when one tries to converse in their language. The darling girls at the first shop were like ecstatic puppies frolicking around me when they realized I could speak Spanish (to whatever degree). Mama was equally elated.

Mary ended up with a nice assortment of table cloths, place mats, a gorgeous embroidered throw for Nancy’s blanket box, and equally handsome embroidered vest for Peggy.



We went through the nuisance of sequential border crossings again, then headed for the San Ignacio Hotel for lunch. It continues to be expanded. We ate on a charming open veranda overlooking the pool. The white iron furniture is airy and effective. I noticed a plywood walkway extending



Ellis and Mary Robinson lunching at San Ignacio Hotel, 1994

* *Gallo* is a brand of Guatemalan beer.

from where we were seated out to the edge of the veranda and back into the main dining room. It obviously was the base for red carpet laid for Her Majesty's recent visit.

We did not reach the hotel until after 1:00 PM. There still was quite a crowd. Service was agonizingly slow. It was nearly 3:00 before we left for Chaa Creek, which calls itself a jungle resort.

Alex had assured me that I could drive to the resort easily over an all-weather road. For no reason, I assumed I would face perhaps 100 yards of dirt road. Wrong. It was about three long, rough, rocky, rutted, bumpy miles. Furthermore, there were unmarked turnoffs, so I was not sure we were on the right road. By the time we reached Chaa Creek, I was physically and psychically shredded.



Chaa Creek is a beautiful collection of thatched-roofed cottages on the bank of a river, far larger than I expected. No electricity. Kerosene lamps light the dining room as well as the snug cabins. Jungle looms beyond the lush lawns and flowering shrubs of the resort. It is a bit more “manicured” than Chan Chich, but has its own charm.

My cottage gave me the feeling of being inside a tent. The thatched roof came down windowless almost to the floor on both long sides. The front was closed by unscreened varnished lattice-work. The Dutch door was charming, especially when I realized that although the bottom half had a simple bolt on the inside, the top half of the door could be fastened only from the outside. So much for Paranoid Kate. The cottage was dark and a bit stuffy during the heat of the afternoon, but charmingly cozy at night with its kerosene lamps.

Mary and Ellis's larger cottage, next door, had windows and a more finished type of framing and thatching. I rather preferred mine.

The dining room was open under a large thatched roof, warm with planters of greenery, and pleasant in the lamplight. After a good dinner, Ellis suggested a liqueur. The bar tender pointed sadly to the empty space

on the shelf where the Baileys should have been. We made out quite nicely with other sustenance.



My abode was on the side of a hill, so I had to go up two steps to the bathroom. The shower had no curtain, just a large square recessed area in the floor beyond the toilet. I was terrified that I would trip and fall into it in the semi-dark. Earlier, as I was freshening after a brief rest, I walked out of the bathroom buttoning my blouse to find a man in my bedroom. My immediate shock was alleviated when I realized it was a diffident Salvadoranean lighting lamps.

The bathroom was lit by a small oil lamp, which the brochure said could be left on all night. (Fearful of flammable thatch, I didn't.) I bathed in the dim light before going to bed. Water from the shower sprayed every direction except straight down, soaking the end of the colorful Guatemalan rug that ran in front of the basin / counter. Rinsing soap suds from my resanitized torso involved a contorting dance under errant wisps of spray.



As usual, I awoke as dawn broke. I lighted lamps (successfully, to my own amazement) and dressed quickly. By the time it was light, I was on my way to the dining room for coffee. The kitchen maids seemed amazed to see me, but cheerfully supplied a tepid cup of what obviously was coffee left from the night before. I drank it without complaint, but was able diplomatically to get freshly brewed coffee to take back to the cottages for the three of us.

We had a pleasant breakfast and decided to forego the Panti Medicinal Herb Trail, next door, and just follow the walk along the Macal River, which runs past the resort. Our cottages faced a broad, mown terrace and bank of lawn that reached down to the trees and bushes lining the river. A path ran from one of the swimming holes diagonally up across the grassy slope.

Mary started down the path. Suddenly her foot slipped, and in slow motion, she went down, her right foot doubling back under her. Ellis and I reached her almost simultaneously. Mary was moaning with pain and pointed out that her foot was not straight.

I ran up to the office and told the young man on duty that my sister needed help. He absolutely flew out, barking orders to a Latin helper as he went. I followed back down the steps behind the second young man. The poor thing was rushing so that he tripped between steps and driveway and somersaulted on the gravel. I rushed to help him as he picked himself up, muttering in Spanish, rubbing a scraped arm, and looking embarrassed.

By the time we arrived, Ellis and the office manager had Mary back sitting on the steps of their cottage. The owner of the resort appeared by magic. I suggested ice to reduce the swelling. We had a chilled pack in place by the time the resident medic arrived. He did not think the ankle was broken. Since that was exactly what we all hoped, we were happy to accept the verdict.

Ellis and I packed quickly. Within moments, Mary was settled in the back seat of the car among pillows, her ankle cushioned and chilled. I drove so that Ellis could be free to help Mary shift position as necessary.

Soon after leaving Santa Elena, we ran into a police blockade checking drivers' licenses. When the young officer came up to me he said something routine like, "I hope you're having a nice day." I replied that we most certainly weren't because my sister had fallen and broken her ankle. He looked startled, both at my bothering to reply to his rote greeting and at my reply. To our delight, he answered, "Ahhh, I'm very sorry. Now drive carefully." We thought it highly appropriate and rather sweet of him.



The trip was trouble free. Back in Belize City, I drove directly to the X-ray facilities. The assistant took a wheelchair out for Mary. I know the X-ray technician, Mr. O'Brien, well, both from personal experience and

from sending our cruise-ship crew members to him annually for routine health certificate X-rays. I asked him if, after seeing the plates, he could give us an idea whether or not there were a fracture so we would know how to proceed. He said that he wasn't supposed to do it, but under the circumstances, might be able to bend the rules. A few minutes later he was back with an unhappy expression and a report that Mary had breaks in both the tibia and fibula. Her patella was dislocated and, I think he said, shattered.

Mr. O'Brien called orthopedic surgeon John Waight. John also is the head of the hospital and reported that he is not doing that type work right now. He said that this obviously would have to be an open retraction, and that there was a Cuban surgeon who could do it. When Mr. O'Brien reported the conversation, I didn't even consult with Ellis, but said that there was no way Mary was going to have surgery here. At my query, Mr. O'Brien told us that the easiest thing to avoid moving Mary again would be to call Dr. Lopez, owner of the clinic, to immobilize the ankle so Mary could travel. He sent me across the street to the drug store to pick up plaster tape because they didn't have it on hand.

Dr. Lopez arrived quickly, a pleasant young man, probably around forty. When he asked Mary if she would object to his cutting off the leg of her attractive aqua pants suit, she looked more horrified than she had been about her fall. I suggested her removing the slacks and my going back to the house to get a pair of shorts for her. By the time I returned, the plaster splint was well in process. Mary said that Dr. Lopez worked with a feather touch in molding the plaster to the shape of her damaged, painful limb. To our great relief, he even had one of those great braces with Velcro straps. He said he is the only doctor in Belize who keeps them.



We drove up to the house literally moments after Alex drove off the other direction on his way to the airport for a Laser Line conference. Mr. Myles, the yard man, and Ellis somehow got Mary from the car, up the stairs, and onto her bed.

The rest of the day was dizzying for Ellis and me. He was on the telephone to their doctor in Colorado and to various medical institutions. I had a complicated afternoon of trying to make plane reservations. Endless problems. I finally was able to book them to Houston and back to New Orleans for surgery at Ochsner Clinic. It was dark before I finished getting a signed release from Dr. Lopez so that the airline would accept Mary as a passenger. Mary was absolutely superb through it all. Despite her pain, she kept her sense of humor.

I helped Ellis with a whirlwind job of packing. It wasn't organized, but everything fitted into their suitcases. One reason may have been that the downstairs clothesline was full of their clothes. It didn't cross my mind.



I had asked Mr. Myles to come in early to help Mary back to the car Friday morning. Early in the evening he sent a message via María's mother that he couldn't come because he had to pick up his Social Security check and take it to the bank. That was nonsense. He could have come here then been back at Social Security before the office even opened. Actually, it worked out much better. I called my neighbor across the street and explained the situation. Sean didn't wait for me to finish, but declared, "I'll be right there." I had to yell at him to slow him down enough to explain that I needed him the next morning.

Medication kept Mary reasonably comfortable, and she slept fairly well. As she was eating breakfast, she complained that Ellis had been told by the hospital that she must not eat anything after breakfast in case they wanted to operate immediately after her arrival. She said that she was dreading the airplane ride, and the one bright thought had been that she could kill some of the time enjoying lunch aloft.

At my call, Sean appeared with another equally tall, strong, young man to help him. They loaded the luggage into the car then carried Mary from the bedroom, carefully negotiating doorways, down the stairs, and out into the car. I will be forever grateful, not only for their help, but for the eager way they offered it. (P.S. I baked a loaf of Anadama bread the next day,

tied it with a red ribbon, and took it over to Sean while it was still hot from the bread machine. He was touchingly pleased.)



We arrived at the airport before the crush of passengers. There was a boggle when the wheelchairs did not have elevated leg rests. Ellis solved the problem by balancing his carry-on case on the foot rest so that Mary could prop her leg up on it. He was at the counter for over an hour. The seats so carefully booked the day before had been erased from the computer, probably by the Salvador office. He tried to buy a third seat. Full plane. I ricocheted between visiting with Mary, safely off to one side, and answering Ellis's summons when necessary for purposes of negotiation. When he finally joined us, he said that he had their two seats, that they would be boarded first, and that once they were aboard, it was up to the airline to cope with the situation.

TACA did. Ellis told me later that once they understood the situation, they made sure that Mary was seated in the "denied" seats with a spare seat between them. Ellis had the feeling from the whispered staff conferences that they may have had to bump someone to do it.

Mary and Ellis got through the Houston airport easily and received equally attentive care from Continental.



Mary said that she broke down completely when they finally reached the Ochsner Emergency in New Orleans. Completely understandable. She had been incredibly cheerful and uncomplaining throughout the painful, traumatic time.

At Ochsner, although they wanted to operate as quickly as possible, they waited until they could get Mary's medical records. She has had a minor circulation problem involving shortness of breath, which worried them. She finally was admitted to the hospital around eight that night. Meanwhile, María and her sister Dulce kept Belize family informed.

Dulce (who lives in New Orleans) kept checking with the hospital and reporting the status, gave us telephone numbers, and sent flowers for us.

I finally was able to talk to Mary. That is, we were connected by Mr. Bell, and I was able to listen to her babble with drug-induced vivacity. I understood about one word in ten. It was a wonderful relief just to hear her voice and realize that she was under care.

Mary was scheduled for surgery at 8:00 AM Saturday morning. I finally got through by telephone around 7:30 that night, with no idea that she just had returned to her room. A major accident had tied up the surgical staff all morning. Her surgery didn't start until around 3:30. The nurse insisted that Mary could talk to me. The doctors had decided against general anesthetic and had given her a spinal, Ellis told me later. Mary was far more coherent than she had been the night before.



It was Sunday morning before I finally reached Ellis and learned full details. Her ankle is full of plates and pins and screws, but the doctors were highly pleased at her prospects for full recovery.

Mary was released from Ochsner Tuesday (the 22nd) and they flew home to Durango. Mary has to wear her cast till June. Ellis is learning to cook and loving it.



You didn't need to read all this, but I needed to write it. As you probably can tell, it has been in process since last unhappy weekend. With each phone call, I have upgraded it. This whole thing threw me far more than I expected. It was one of those stupid missteps where no fault is involved for anyone. I just grieve for Mary's pain and the interruption of a holiday that was making her so happy.

Catching My Breath

March – September 1994

From file written June 29, 1994

At the moment, I am luxuriating in the longest uncomplicated stretch of time I have had in 1994. Most of my activities have been happy ones, but the quick sequence was something of a strain.

A few days after Mary and Ellis left, I flew to Costa Rica for an Air France conference.* The meeting itself was excellent and gave me a chance to see old friends. Everything else—planes, hotel, shopping—was a fiasco.



Kate, 1994

* “Agents’ Meeting in Costa Rica” on page 241 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

Four days after I returned from Costa Rica, the Alex Bryans arrived, four strong, for a ten-day visit.



Our nephew Alex Bryan and his wife Marcia lived in Belize for a year and a half in the Seventies, managing a farm Bucher bought. Since then, they have felt like a second son and daughter. This was their first visit back. Their children, Katy, 16, and Will, 13, are as delightful and poised as any teenagers I could imagine. It was a joy having them.

This time, Alex (Scott) and María took over the bulk of the entertaining. The Bryans arrived on Good Friday (April 1st). The next day was rainy in what should be the dry season, so I had them all here for the full day. It gave us a wonderful visit. Then the younger generation went out to the cayes for two days.

Alex Bryan rented a car, and his family took off daily on sightseeing expeditions. It left me free to go to the office. I ordered in food most nights, a variety of ethnic offerings. The children were delightful about trying everything. They either adored it or politely did not let it show that they were filling up on tortillas.



Alex Scott and Alex Bryan, 1994



María with Marcia Bryan, 1994


The day they were leaving, Alex Bryan came to me, blanched with discomfort, to confess that he and son Will had sat down hard on the edge of my guest bed and had broken it. I thought it was hilarious and tried to soothe him. My immediate thought was, “Thank heavens it happened the last day.” I could not make myself even go into the guest room to check it for weeks after they left. Finally I did and, guess what, Alex was right. The springs had collapsed completely.



Before I had time to catch my breath after the Bryans’ departure, I was off to Guatemala for a short Air France workshop. At the Air France conference in Costa Rica, we had been invited to attend this workshop. The “invitation” was as close to arm-twisting as it is possible to get without physical attack.

A group of representatives of the French tourism industry, government and private, had been invited to a four-day session. They would have three days of the most wonderful touring to Guatemala’s finest sites, then the workshop with Air France Central American agents on the final day.

Alex didn't see any point in my going. However, without me, Air France is minus an entire country, which looks bad for them. I did not look forward to another long session in Spanish or, even worse, in French. I enjoyed the workshop, though I was in no mood for airplanes or hotels, much as I normally love them.




I came home from Guatemala to get ready for my annual trip to Georgia to see family and doctors. It was a terrible time for me to leave. We finally are moderately successful in promoting Air France in Belize. (Their planes don't come here; we send passengers by TACA to Miami, where they catch Air France for Paris and beyond.) With the holiday season looming, we had a steady stream of requests for reservations. I have handled most of the Air France work myself, so had to give Alex a crash course before I left. In view of the situation, I cut my trip down to two weeks.

Once I was strapped aboard my plane, the office and my obligations were a thousand miles away. The trip was a huge success as far as I was concerned. I started with a useful visit to our new client, Laser Lines, in Miami. Then, with a certain amount of wear-and-tear on my nerves due to close connections, I enplaned for Atlanta.

Had a wonderful time seeing family and friends. I stayed with Fran and Louis Bondurant in Atlanta. Our visit was perfectly lovely. They made me feel completely at home. All three of us came and went on our own schedules. This was the first time we had been together for more than an evening since the Fifties. It was wonderful.

I visited Becky in Jefferson twice. Despite her current medical problems, she makes a marvelous show of being her old bright, energetic self.

Received the expected good reports from doctors. Did a year's worth of shopping. By the end of my time, I was raging to return.



Now I am settled back into my comfortable routine. It was days before I got down to the mahogany of my desk top under the pile of faxes awaiting me. I had to pull the April accounts together, then start on May and closing the books at the end of our fiscal year. The auditors are breathing down my neck.

Ten days ago, Alex and María left for Georgia on their own holidays. I manage quite nicely with my staff of three congenial, competent young people. The house runs smoothly. My two dogs are company at night. My major social activity is biweekly Duplicate Bridge. Gradually, friends disappear for their summer vacations this time of year. For once, I don't think I will mind. I am too busy luxuriating in the commonplace.

Carli and Tom will be here late in July for her 25th high school reunion. María was in the same class, so both couples will be busy. I admire Tom for letting himself in for this. Culture shock.



From file written August 15, 1994

Things are leveling off now. I can sit on my veranda with my two Golden Labs and watch the sailboats waft past on the ever-changing blues of the Caribbean. All I have to worry about is becoming fluent in French before my September trip to Provence. Not all the cassette courses in the world could achieve that. However, I am helping the process along by counting in French when I take my daily exercises.

Please don't think that my life is always a succession on Major Events. This year so far has been a whirlwind. Except for Mary's broken ankle and a less than restful trip to Costa Rica, it has been marvelous. The only thing is that septuagenarians don't bounce back like 30-year olds.



From letter dated September 4, 1994

The government has just passed a law calling for companies to pay a 1% tax on their gross receipts. Everyone in business is frantic about the new

tax and how to handle it. To my delight, early last week we received a letter from our accounting firm saying that they had set up a seminar with the Commissioner of Income Tax to interpret operation of the new Gross Revenue Tax. The letter said that space was limited and urged us to reserve space and pay a \$40 fee immediately. I telephoned instantly and sent a check over that afternoon.

Friday I arranged an easily prepared meal for my cook, left the office a little early so I could change clothes, ate quickly, and was off up the highway to the Belize Biltmore Hotel for the 1:00 PM seminar. My dear, I looked *very* smart and professional. I wore my new olive-green slacks because I would have to use my footstool. Pants are simpler than spending all afternoon tugging a skirt down for modesty. My handsome new blouse complemented the slacks, and my beige jacket tied the outfit together in a businesslike way. Of course, the jacket was punishingly hot on the drive to the hotel, but I knew it would be comfortable in the air-conditioned seminar.

The hotel parking lot was suspiciously empty; the lobby, even more so. Not even an employee in sight. Finally a slim young bellboy in a jacket designed for a 200-pound man arrived to help me. No one knew anything about the seminar. I was certain it was at the Biltmore.

A telephone call to the house fortunately caught Alex. He followed my somewhat scattered directions for locating the letter about the seminar. He reported that whereas I had read and responded to a date of Friday, September 2nd, the date of the seminar actually was the 23rd. You remember that old one, “All dressed up and no where to go”?

I will miss the seminar. It is the day before I leave for France. Because of my thrombitic leg, I would not dare sit immobilized for five hours on Friday and start a 24-hour trip the next day. I’d end up in a Paris hospital.

I am slightly frazzled about my approaching deadline. Lists are made, but it is too soon to pack. I will never be fluent in French and to hell with it. Let the fun begin.

Year's End

November – December 1994

From file written November 26, 1994

I am looking ahead to increasing pressures at work. The cruise ship that spends about three months in Belize annually arrives in about a week. Attending her is fun but time-consuming. I am busy already with the Belize girls who work each year as stewardesses, as a sort of honorary mama. One of them will act as cruise director on the first two cruises. She needs special reassurance and guidance. Being an agent is full of variety.

As for Air France, traffic is growing. It took a long time, but people are beginning to know us. Gabriela Anaya, the delightful young woman in the regional office in Mexico City, has been a whirlwind of help, getting special low fares for Belize. I thought bookings would dry up completely after the summertime rush, but it hasn't happened.

Meanwhile, my knowledge of geography is improving. I worked hard with a Nigerian last year who wanted to bring his wife and children to Belize. Since then, the Africans have found me. Many of them are missionaries with the Islamic mission. Their accents are becoming familiar.

I have time to take a personal interest in prospective passengers. It gives me lovely glimpses into their lives.

- A young girl trying frantically to get last-minute reservations for her British friend to come for Christmas so they can announce their engagement
- A German man traveling back to Hamburg with his infant son for a family wedding
- A young Irishman returning to Dublin for surgery

- A reformed dope addict working with Le Patriarche, a French drug rehabilitation organization, secretly arranging to leave with a Belize girl whose family did not want her to marry him

I listen, make reservations, and know I can't comment.

The years go by, but there are new adventures.



From letter dated December 5, 1994

Thanks to my recent trip to France,* it has been easy to do Christmas letters this year. I have one version that encapsulates the entire year and a shorter one with just the trip. This business of doing letters on a computer is a godsend. I think back to the days I spent typing individual letters to go in my Christmas cards. As you know, most of my friends-and-relations live at a distance. This is the only time I touch base with them during the year.

Just when I'll get around to addressing envelopes, I don't know, but it will be soon.



From letter dated December 11, 1994

Somehow, I have lived through the worst of the pre-Christmas trauma. Translation: Christmas letters are written and mailed; packages are (presumably) close to their destinations; Christmas cards are ready for mailing. As for wrapping our own presents, there's plenty of time.

The key event of this past week was a visit from the regional director of Air France in Mexico City and his deputy. M. Francis Richard and M. Marc Emy are delightful young men, bright, capable, gracious. I have seen them several times and feel completely comfortable with them. Furthermore, as their Belize General Sales Agent, we have a current standing of 108% improvement. They like us.

* "Five In France" on page 249 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

The point of their trip was to look at Chaa Creek as a possible locale for the 1995 agent's meeting. Alex and I both were in a decline about the idea of hosting a meeting. It is an inordinate amount a work, even for a large agency. However, all the other Central American agencies have been gigging Air France and me about having a meeting here. I sent them reams of information about both Chaa Creek and the Ramada several months ago and waited in horror.

I met them at the airport, greeted them in French, and we were on our way West. In my wisdom, I decided to go up to Burrell Boom and cut over to the Western Highway at Hattieville, much the shortest route. What I did not know was that the pavement ended three inches beyond Boom, and a passable gravel road soon turned into miles of red mud. It had rained recently. Both ditches were awash. In one place, the water had cut through the road itself. I drove my rental vehicle (a Dodge Ram Charger), mumbling prayers that I would not skid off the road and baptize my guests in mud.

We made it through, everyone laughing about my foray through the boondocks. It took 45 minutes from the airport to Hattieville. If I had gone back to the city, over the Belcan Bridge, and out to the Western Highway, it probably would have taken 20.

So we arrived at Belmopan, where we were to call on Elisa Bejow, a travel agent who is doing a wonderful job pushing Air France. We went all the way around the ring road before a friendly Belize taxi driver I have known for years showed us the way to her agency.

Pleasant visit, then on the Chaa Creek. The Panti Trail has posted signs that threw us off completely in trying to find the resort. Wanting to avoid the Panti Trail, we kept taking the unmarked road at forks. We ended up in someone's back yard first, then ultimately made it up another wrong track to a blocked road behind the Chaa Creek kitchen. There we stayed.

A young man was posted waiting for us. We were ushered into the bar, where I ordered a Belikin with enormous relief and my Air France friends got huge Margaritas. The owner of the resort joined us. They had laid on a

superb luncheon. Mick Flemming, the owner, showed us around afterwards. It was obvious that he did not want, and could not cope with, a conference. Francis Richard, who loved the place, admitted that he did not consider it appropriate for a meeting. Thank goodness that was the end of Belize as a conference site. He says they'll probably schedule in Guatemala.

Marc Emy drove back to Belize, sparing me the drive I had been dreading. They both were exhausted after having gotten up at 3:00 AM Belize time to catch the plane in Panama. They were relieved at my suggestion to cancel my plans for cocktails at the house and dinner out together. I left them at the Fort George and was home in time for the last half of my soap opera.



From file written January 22, 1995

Christmas Day was special in an unexpected and utterly Belizean way. María invited her father, brother Elmer, and me for a traditional relleno dinner, using the generous amount of her late mother's last relleno that was stored in my freezer. It was a pleasant informal gathering. Then the Boom & Chime band from Fenders' Bar arrived to serenade Alex on his birthday.

Fenders is more like a neighborhood club than a public bar. When the original building burned down a few years ago, patrons got up a fund to help owner, Lester Young, rebuild. Alex and María are regulars. Lester was one of the friends Alex asked me to invite to their wedding reception. For almost a year, Fenders has had an informal Boom & Chime session every Sunday afternoon. The first I knew about it was a long story in *The Reporter** a few months ago.

Incredibly, nine men with their instruments—and amplifier—crowded into Alex's modest living room in their apartment under my house. Lester

* *The Reporter* is weekly Belize City newspaper.

led the group with his accordion. We had a tall, cylindrical drum, keyboard (electrified, of course), guitar, banjo (the musician fussed with a broken string half the afternoon), maracas, mouth organ (also electrified), bongo drums, and a percussionist with a crippled hand who beat on cow bells or a hollow wooden box-thing. He remembered me from when we used to fly into Big Creek in the 60's. Unfortunately the jawbone man^{*} couldn't get away to play with them on Christmas day. The ninth man didn't play anything, but appeared to enjoy himself standing in the doorway. To reassure you, the amplifier, while unnecessary from my point of view, was tuned low enough not to blast us out of the room.

I sat on the couch at the end of the living room next to a smiling black woman of extremely generous proportions. She introduced herself as Lester's girl friend. I did not catch her name, but she was a vision! Long, loose red silk skirt topped by a creation with black spaghetti straps and tiers of gold fringe and lace that disclosed glimpses of patterned black-and-red satin underneath as they swished in time to the music.

The band played a long set in typical Belize rhythm. Listening hard, one could identify gentle, familiar Christmas carols not quite buried by the exuberant beat. They ended with a rollicking *Happy Birthday To You*.

Alex served drinks and María brought out bocas. I moved around the room, trying to speak to each of the musicians for a few moments. They were a mixed group, in age and color. What they had in common was sheer delight in their music and beautiful manners.

They played a second set. Another round of drinks and bocas. The afternoon was going on. To my amazement, they played a third set. Finally they packed up their instruments to leave. Even then the guitarist, bongo man, and other percussion man lingered briefly with a plaintive non-Christmas tune of their own.

* Traditionally, a "boom & chime" band includes a percussionist who "plays" a donkey's jawbone by scratching a stick back and forth over the teeth—the *jawbone man*.

I kept thinking this was the sort of thing that kept Bucher and me in Belize those forty years ago. It was after five o'clock when I finally went upstairs to my own home in a glow of Christmas happiness.

Emergency at Sea

March 1995

From letter dated March 12, 1995

I reached home after my trip to Florida late Saturday afternoon last week, slept late Sunday morning, and unpacked at a leisurely pace. Early in the afternoon, I interrupted my labors to sit down for a pre-lunch beer. Almost immediately, the Punta Gorda agent for the *Caribbean Prince* called to say that a passenger with a coronary was being air-evacuated to Belize City. He gave us only the bare facts, but we had no way of knowing when the plane would arrive.

We learned later from Lew Holland, the ship's emergency medical technician, that the doctor from Punta Gorda, who was to accompany the patient in the air ambulance, was late in arriving. The doctor-passenger from the *Caribbean Prince* who had been attending Mrs. Gerstle considered her condition so serious that she "ordered" Lew into the plane and insisted that they take off without further delay.

Lew called me from the Casualty Ward in the hospital as soon as they arrived. I rushed over to the hospital and was there when Mrs. G. was admitted. I think Lew said that a doctor had seen her briefly when she first arrived. However, she was disconnected from the oxygen Lew had been supplying, and the Belize Hospital never gave her oxygen again. They installed a glucose drip. Mrs. G. was told that a doctor would not see her until the next day. Her only attention was occasional checks of pulse, temperature, and blood pressure. The nurses ignored her completely, even when she complained of increasing pain.

During Lew's and my absence getting necessities from luggage that was in my car, Mrs. G. got up to use the lavatory, unhooking and carrying her IV. She found she was expected to ask the nurse for a piece of toilet paper. The ward facilities were unisex. One cubicle had no door, and the other, no seat ("Not that I would have used one, anyway"). The nurse did not

accompany her, despite her frail condition, and watched, unmoving, from the nurses' table at the end of the room when Mrs. G. stumbled down an unexpected step and bruised herself returning to her bed.

"I have bad vibes about this place," she remarked when we returned. I had them before she was admitted! I promised to find her a private doctor.




It took Alex and me one hour on the telephone to get through to the small private hospital connected with Belize Medical Associates. In that time, we learned that every doctor in the city had gone to Corozal for a free clinic. By the greatest good fortune, I finally was able to get through to the little hospital. By even greater luck, Belize's only heart specialist was on call. I talked to Dr. Cawich, who promised to make immediate arrangements to transfer Mrs. G. by ambulance. When Lew and I got back to the Belize City Hospital, the ambulance was at the door.

Mrs. G. (now *Marj* to me) had a serious relapse from the stress of being moved. However, she was hooked up to oxygen immediately, given an IV with medication, and received another nitroglycerin tablet from Lew. In ten minutes, she was stabilized.


The private hospital is very nice. Rooms are large with large private baths, both ceiling fan and air conditioner, refrigerator, and remote-control TV. The man on duty when we took Marj in was Mr. Chinade, with whom I worked hard last year trying to get his family from Lagos to Belize. He was wonderfully attentive. The hospital seems to have more nurses and attendants than patients. I think they have just four rooms. The hospital is adjacent to a clinic of four to six doctors of varying specialties. It is expensive for Belize, but worth every penny.

One day and two EKG's after Marj's admission, Dr. Cawich told me that there was no sign of heart damage. He thought she was suffering from angina brought on by very low hemoglobin. In a comfortable private room and with attentive medical care, she improved steadily.



From the moment I first met her, I knew that Marj was someone I would love knowing. We became fast friends. For years, she has spent about half the year on large cruise ships, giving craft classes (Royal Caribbean, Crystal). She is my age, has a wonderful sense of the ridiculous, has the same standards of morality and behavior I grew up with, and is a fine conversationalist.

I was with Marj from 2 PM till 8 PM the day she arrived. After that, I saw her two or three times a day. It was hectic rushing from office to hospital, back to office. Alex protested that I was pushing myself too much. All I could think of was how I would feel if I had nearly died away from all family and friends in a distant, backward country. Marj needed me. Aside from the pressure, I loved every minute with her.



Marj has the best travel medical insurance anyone ever has seen. The company was in touch with her once or twice daily and with me at least once a day, coordinating plans for her return. It took a little talking to let them understand Belize and to convince them that I intended to cooperate.

The first request was for a non-stop flight Belize / Newark. I had changed her return tickets, but they said to cancel everything. Through their own travel agents, they rebooked with American, which offers First Class. They sent a doctor down to accompany her home. The insurance company doctor arrived Thursday, and the two of them set off on the return to New Jersey that midday.

It was hard saying goodbye, we had become such close friends. Unfortunately, it was a hectic day for me.

- Hair appointment at 8 o'clock

- Sav-U,* shopping for essentials only, en route back to office
- Office catching-up
- Back to hospital at 11 AM
- Goodbyes at 12:15
- Home for quick lunch

María and Alex had fixed marvelous pork pepper steaks from a new recipe.

- To Ann Crump's for our old bridge foursome (Ann, Emilie Bowen, Betty Lindo)

Betty's husband Dean Lindo is the Belize Ambassador to the U.S. They were here for a conference Dean skillfully had scheduled to bring him home for the Ninth of March boat races.

- Duplicate Bridge at night

Survived, despite the room's beginning to rock like a ship at sea toward the end of the session.

Even a three-day weekend (Baron Bliss Day), long nights of sleep, and afternoon naps haven't counteracted the stress. I hate being reminded that I'm a septuagenarian.

* *Sav-U* is a grocery store.

Missy Joins the Family

June 1995 – February 1997

From letters written in June and July, 1995

My life changed dramatically recently. I sit here babysitting the newest member of our family. She is Missy, a Rottweiler puppy a bit past three months old. The munching sound you hear is Old Kate eating her words. I swore I would not have one.

Our beloved older Golden Labrador, Simba, died recently of the complications of an early old age. Our younger Golden Lab, Amber, was inconsolable. She howled all night. Daytimes she went to the place under the big tree at the far side of the yard where Simba painfully betook himself at the end. There she laid down as if waiting for him to return.



Missy, 1995

I decided we had to have a puppy instantly. While I was on the phone to Gerry Sharp, a client in the citrus valley, Alex passed me a note saying, “Ask him about poppy.” My first reaction was that I was to ask our best customer if he were in the heroin business. Then I realized that Alex’s hasty print read *puppy*.

Gerry said there was a litter of Rottweilers ready to be released in Burrell Boom. In reply to my demurrals about the breed, he put his wife Marie (of the hot sauce)* on a conference call to help convince me that Rottweilers can be the most loving, family-oriented, sweet-natured dogs in the world. They have had four.

To shorten the story, we had Missy the next morning. We all worried about Amber’s reception of the intruder. Simba quite literally tried to kill Amber when we brought her home. This reception was a bit wary on both sides. Amber was friendlier than Missy, to my surprise. The puppy found a comforting cave under the back steps, ventured out to meet Amber, then retreated hastily. A day later, Amber and Missy were playing so energetically that it was hard to tell which initiated the action.



Amber and Missy, 1995

* Marie Sharp is renowned in Belize for her habanero hot sauce (and other sauces), now marketed by Marie Sharp’s Fine Foods Ltd.

I donated my bathroom to Missy. It is not safe to leave her alone outdoors, day or night, because there is a hot trade in stolen puppies. There are heartbreaking ads in the papers and on TV weekly.

I lived through the first few nights on love and self-discipline, rather than sleep. Quickly, Missy learned to sleep through and even more important, to leave the papers at the end of “her room” as pristine in the morning as they were the night before.

Alex and María puppynap Missy as often as they can. She adores it, and it makes my life easier. I was close to a physical collapse the first couple of weeks. However, she tries desperately to please us and is becoming more and more amenable. Her formal training is my job.




Missy has doubled in size and is working on trebling. She is easier and easier to manage (most of the time). I must say she is the most hardheaded, obstinate puppy I ever have known. While she wants what she wants when she wants it, she also is trying desperately to please us. This is, in terminology I loathe, a learning experience for both (all) of us. However, make no mistake: I intend to be the Alpha Dog in the household.


I promise you, this is my last puppy. I’m too old for this foolishness, regardless of how much I enjoy it. I adore Missy, but the constant close attention to her activities and the physical effort are beginning to get to me. I calculate that with my normal house-to-office-and-back activity and taking Missy down to her grassy facilities, I do an average of eleven round trips on the stairs daily. No complaint. It is ideal exercise. Furthermore, it is easier than it was, now that she usually runs up and down the steps by herself.

My weight, normally fluctuating between a preferred 122 and a dismal 127, is down to 118. The first time I have broken the 120 barrier in approximately six decades. This blissful situation will correct itself, I fear, as Missy needs less attention. In the meantime, I am thinking of investing

in some ice cream Monday. I haven't let myself have any since I zeroed in on the extra pounds acquired in France last year.


From letter dated August 6, 1995

There is one major disappointment with Missy. She isn't cuddly. From the very beginning, she resisted being help unnecessarily. All of our other dogs have delighted in closeness. This is difficult for me. This week, she barked for attention just before the end of my soap opera. I wanted to see the conclusion, so I got down on the floor next to her and pulled her close to my side. She wiggled an inch away. I slid over. She skidded a bit farther. She licked my hand, but did not want any closer contact. I suspect she has trained me.


From file written Sunday, August 13, 1995

I am suffering from a severe attack of "empty nest" syndrome.

We decided to let Missy stay outdoors with Amber last night. She is a fair size now, about 28 pounds, and is spending more and more time outside. What I didn't anticipate was my own reaction. I sent her out after her supper. Normally, the two dogs spend the evening going in and out of Alex and María's apartment. Then when they are ready for bed, Alex sends the puppy up to me. However, on Saturdays A&M have a long nap, then stay up till midnight.

Last night, of course, 7:00 PM was the last I saw of Missy. By 9:00, I was feeling distinctly deprived. Before I turned out the lights at 10:00, I was ready to go downstairs and retrieve her. I felt alone and discriminated against. After all, Missy is *my* puppy.

Morning made up for it. When I opened the back door to call the dogs, Missy bounded out from under the house and almost fell over herself in her rush up the stairs. We had a frenetic and lengthy reunion. It was pitiful to see how ecstatic Missy was to see me.

I realized that we managed the separation all wrong. Any night except Saturday, the dogs would have been back upstairs with me. I could have given them both an affectionate goodnight before putting them out. The way we did it, Missy must have thought either that her private bathroom and I had vanished from the face of the earth, or that I had turned against her. I'm obviously anthropomorphizing. We'll manage better tonight. Missy and I both will adapt.

My ridiculous emotional response aside, there are certain advantages to having Missy on normal Scott dog routine. It is convenient to be able to use my own bathroom in the middle of the night instead of stealthily creeping across to the guest bathroom, trying not to wake the puppy. This morning, for the first time in weeks, I was able to sleep until I woke up instead of being wakened by a sharp bark. I did not have to bypass my own bathroom to take Missy out on a leash to use hers.



Yesterday there was a big fiesta of some sort at Memorial Park. Alex and I decided it would be best not to leave Missy out in the yard. I opened the door to the veranda for the first time since she has been with us. Missy bounded out, explored it a little tentatively, then apparently decided, as Bucher used to say, "she had died and gone to heaven." There were cars and bikes and baby strollers and people going this way and that. She waltzed back and forth, securing the veranda as her private domain. She barked lustily at oblivious passers-by, whom she selected for such warning according to her own hidden agenda.

When, late in the afternoon, I retreated to my bedroom and closed the door, she barked in immediate reproof. I reopened it enough so she could move in and out, while I got my leg back in comfort on my pillows, watching *The Capital Gang*. She did not come back in until street activity subsided.



From file written August 21, 1995

Missy is one inch taller and two inches longer every day. She is a darling, eager, affectionate puppy. Last weekend, we let her start sleeping outdoors with Amber. We have two large dog platforms (shipping pallets) covered with rugs for them to sleep on. Missy sleeps on the cement alongside hers. María and I put rugs down in locations she prefers, and she rumples them up and pushes them aside. She also creaks every morning like an Elderly with arthritis.

After two weekends of being outdoors with Amber almost all day, we today started letting her stay outside full time. Until now, I have put her into her (my) bathroom / hall when I left for the office.



From file written August 23, 1995

Now about my adored Rottweiler—who isn't!

When we bought Missy, I knew her muzzle was too pointed for the breed. However, I was absolutely desperate for a puppy to solace Amber at the time. I did not know the breed and thought females might have less blunt muzzle than males.

The first time we took her to the vet, he pointed to two small, barely distinguishable slightly paler spots behind her ears and said, “She shouldn't have these if she is purebred.”

In another couple of weeks, she developed growing patches of longer, cream-colored hair in her “armpits,” with similar lighter hair extending into the black of her stomach from her hairless groins. A knowledgeable friend of Alex's and María's took one look at her and said, “She's part Shepherd.”

The breeders raise both Rottweilers and Shepherds. I called and said that it was obvious there had been a mistake in the breeding. Both the husband and wife insisted it was absolutely impossible. Not that it mattered—by

this time Missy was the light of our life even if she had been half armadillo.

When I got home from my Morocco trip,^{*} I found that Missy's muzzle was, if anything, even longer and more pointed. Her legs had taken on giraffe characteristics. She was almost as tall as Amber, though her body was still slim. She is not going to be heavy-set, I am sure. Alex says she will look more like a Rottweiler-Doberman cross (common here). She may end up very funny looking; so be it.

On the plus side, she remains the brightest dog I ever have had. She is a loving thing. Before I left, we started letting her stay outside with Amber more and more. She definitely prefers her independence, though both dogs are in and out of both houses at various times of day. Missy already is a fine watchdog with a surprisingly full, deep bark. Even as a puppy, she was not shrill.




I never have had a dog that talks. Missy absolutely amazes me. I noticed it from the beginning, but now she has an elaborate “vocabulary” of sounds. I do not always understand what she wants, of course, but am learning.


I think the quality in her sounds varies according to the importance of the communication rather than to the meaning, but I may be wrong about this. Last night, for example, she was on the bed with Amber and me. (I have a special “dog sheet” so that they can be up while I’m working on my computer or watching TV.) She is just learning that she has to lie down and be quiet when she is on the bed. I gave her a toy to keep her entertained. After a little while, she sat up and began complaining. I assumed that she wanted to get down. My bed is quite high since I bought new springs and mattress, and I am afraid of her jumping off on her slim little legs. I lifted her down. She still was not happy. I finally realized that

* “France – Morocco – Spain with Muriel & Don” on page 9 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

she had dropped her toy, and all she wanted was to have me pick it up for her while she stayed on the bed. She'll educate me gradually.



Missy never has been a good eater. It has been worrisome from the beginning. However, she has appeared healthy with a coat like the richest satin. Since I returned from my trip, I have been working with her, and she now is eating about what I think she should. I have broken her of some of her spoiled habits and will deal with the rest gradually.



My real concern is Missy's legs. I do not think they are as strong or muscular as they should be. I have started her on vitamin tablets. The improvement in her appetite seemed to coincide with that.

I talked to the vet about it earlier, but at that time, it was just a matter of her limping like an arthritic when she first got up after lying down. He did not seem to think it was important since, once she got moving, she was fine. However, since returning, I see that she does not negotiate stairs as easily as I think she should. This is something I have to discuss with the vet again. I am hoping that it is a developmental phase, possibly due to her poor eating. Once she is out in the yard and running around, there is no sign of any problem.



From file written November 13, 1995

This past weekend was dedicated to Missy. She had her Intimate Surgery Saturday morning. The worst part was withholding her supper, breakfast, and water for 16 hours ahead of time.

I have worried about her weak hind legs for a long time. Most of the time she literally creeps up the stairs like an arthritic elderly dog. She limps after she has been lying down for a while.

The vet, Dr. Tewes,* says it could be one of two things: hip dysplasia or something with a long name that is a matter of maturation. I'm betting on the latter. I probably will have to take her up to Central Farms, where they have animal X-ray facilities.

This is heartbreaking in a puppy, but we'll do everything necessary for her. Meanwhile, I am marginally optimistic because she appears to be moving slightly more freely (except for her convalescence).



From file written February 12, 1996

Now about Missy...

My puppy limps badly. The vet has diagnosed it as probably being some long name that applies to a condition where a dog's leg bones grow too rapidly, outstripping the development of the system of capillaries that supply blood to joints and cartilage. The cartilage literally dies, sometimes flaking off into little bits called "mice" that cause extreme pain with movement.

I have come to terms with the fact that Missy is a Rottweiler-Shepherd-Wolf cross. The breeders, of course, absolutely deny that their Timber Shepherd (35% wolf) possibly could have gotten at her Rottweiler mother. Alex calls her a *Notweiler*.

Her markings are Rottweiler, but the hair of her satiny black coat is longer than it should be. Her stomach has a layer of long blond hair, and recently she has developed short blond "feathers" at the backs of her thighs. Her head and muzzle are long and narrow like a Shepherd's, rather than broad and blunt like a Rottweiler's. She is about as tall as my Golden Lab Amber, but slim and rangy like a half-grown Shepherd.

Still, Missy is a pretty, loving little thing. Carli told me rather sternly, "Mom, it is time you got over the idea that you have to have a purebred dog."

* Tewes is pronounced *TAY-wes*.



Missy, 2001

From fax sent June 1996

Missy is now slightly over a year old. She has filled out, has a coat so shiny you almost can see your face reflected, and copes better with her lameness. She still hobbles upstairs in the morning. Later in the day when she has been racing about, she comes up fairly well, hind legs pressed together hopping up step by step. I feel that the more she moves about, the more the muscles in her hind quarters will strengthen. I think she always will be crippled, but I am relieved there is no indication that she needs surgery.

From fax sent January 19, 1997

Pat Snyder, the wife of the captain of the *Caribbean Prince*, has become a good friend during the three years that Mike has been coming to Belize for the ship's annual cruise season. She usually comes down with the ship

and stays for a trip or two. This year she has stayed longer. She is a delightful person. We have many things in common, a main one being animals. For years, Pat bred and showed dogs, German Shepherds and Australian Shepherds (her favorites). Through the years she has known or owned a dozen or more breeds.

I brought Pat over to the house for a visit late one afternoon last week. She insisted that I let the dogs in. She thought Amber was a beautiful example of a Lab. She was entranced by Missy.

Pat had heard Alex and me refer to Missy as a *Notweiler* and asked what the mix was. As soon as I told her Rottweiler, German Shepherd, and Wolf, she exclaimed, “I should have known it from her legs.”

Pat says that Missy’s long, slim legs are characteristic of a German Shepherd / Wolf cross. And her (to me, pitiful) out-turned front paws, Pat says, are pure wolf, “though the angle is a little exaggerated.”

Pat agreed that Missy’s head is typically Shepherd. As for the long, light hair on her underbody, Pat said that it is darkening as she matures, lies




Missy, 2001

flat, and is not objectionable, “but clip it if it worries you.” The idea never occurred to me. It hasn’t occurred to Missy, either, and I don’t think she would appreciate it.

Missy’s markings are excellent for a Rottweiler, and her body is typically heavy, especially compared to her legs. Pat thinks she is a lovely dog, exceptionally bright and independent. Pat has shamed me into going back to working with Missy. She says that with three months of work I could have a beautifully trained dog. “Missy is dying to please you,” Pat said.

She had been impressed walking down the stairs when Missy tried to push past her. “I just put my hand down in front of her nose. I didn’t touch her, but she knew instinctively what I wanted. She walked down quietly a step behind me the entire way.”

I am working with Missy again, in my inept way. I hope I keep it up. It isn’t easy when I’m working full time, studying German, and getting ready for my February trip to Europe.*



From fax sent February 4, 1997

We took Pat and Mike Snyder to dinner last week. Pat was to return to the States a couple of days later. She especially wanted Mike to see Missy.

Both Pat and Mike commented on how deep Missy’s body is compared to her exceptionally slim legs. The longer Pat watched Missy and Amber, the more she noted Missy’s wolf-like behavior. Apparently, the way she throws one long front leg over Amber when she is sitting or lying down is exactly the way wolves play with each other.

The other day when I was working with the dogs, I had Amber in a Sit-Stay. I walked around the corner. When I poked my head back, Amber was still sitting as she had been told to do. Missy was sitting next to her with a leg draped around Amber’s shoulders.

* “Winter in Europe with Muriel & Don” on page 137 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

Rug Merchants

October 1995 – January 1996

From fax sent October 23, 1995

A few months ago, we received a fax saying we had been recommended by Miguel Flores, the CGM agent in Nicaragua, to be agents for an auction of oriental rugs, as he had been. A delightful gentleman from the Netherlands arrived soon after to discuss possibilities and look over the situation in Belize so his office could decide whether or not to try an auction here. They decided affirmatively. They put the funds up front. We receive the rugs, arrange an auctioneer, location, and some personnel. We get a percentage.

Alex and I thought it was a kooky idea, but that's why we have the "&" before the word "Services" in our company name. At the time Bucher and Sid Turton were looking for a name, I suggested "Marine Services." By the time the company was incorporated, the ampersand had been added. I was horrified at the time. However, as we have branched out beyond shipping, I find it rather comforting.



From file written late December 1995

The British company behind the auction has done this all over the Caribbean and Central America. Miguel Flores was highly complimentary about the people and the way they operate.

In due course, we received "9 bundles of Oriental Rugs" by air freight, and Alex found a safe warehouse for them. I was in charge of a flurry of advertising. The auction was held in a large room at the Fort George Hotel in December. The company sent in their own auctioneer, and we had a local auctioneer as well.

Alex said that when they opened up the packages of rugs the day of the auction, the auctioneer was like a kid in a candy store. He said they had no

business sending those rugs to Belize; they should be offered in Paris or New York. He showed Alex how to estimate value by counting the number of knots per square inch.

We had a surprising turnout that night. Bidding was slow to begin with. That's when we should have jumped in, because lovely rugs went for practically nothing. Before long, people got excited. The final figure was over \$100,000 total. I bought two, a simple geometric that no one would realize was a modern oriental, plus a gorgeous long, slim silk rug that I will hang on the wall when I get around to it.



From fax sent January 10, 1996

Alex was on the verge of matricide one morning last week. I overheard him on an overseas call and realized it was the British company that had the rug auction. I could hear Alex protesting that we couldn't possibly have a repeat performance this month. The ominous words, "Whatever gave you that idea?" registered, and I shook my head ruefully at Alex as I pointed to myself. Alex finally convinced the man that a new auction was *not* a good idea. When he hung up, he demanded the "Rug Auction" file so he could see my last letter.

At the end of my letter, I had said I was sorry that more of the heavy spenders had not attended, but added that the next day, several people had mentioned wishing they had bid more and higher. I made the unfortunate mistake of quoting one of them as asking if there would be another auction... "say, in two weeks!"

Alex was furious with me. "Don't you know you can't be smart-ass in a business letter!"

Note: I write an informal letter and have gotten away with it—usually to applause—for years. I can't imagine changing my style at this late date, but I certainly will be a bit more circumspect.

Holidays Here and There

December 1995 – January 1996

From file written February 12, 1996

I changed my December visit to Carli and Tom in Palo Alto so I could be here for the rug auction I wrote you about. Then I took off for ten days with them. It was lovely. They are very happy together, and it is a joy to be with them.

We went to the Christmas-tree farm to cut trees for them and for Tom's daughter, Kris, and her husband, Derek. The latter tree was picture-book pretty. Carli and Tom's was a disaster, though it looked gorgeous in the field when we all agreed on it.

The trunk had a bend in it, which left the tree lurching toward the wall. By the time Tom had it balanced properly, looking as normal as possible under the circumstances, there was a great limbless hole in plain sight. We filled it with all the long ornaments we could find and declared that the finished tree "had character."



I returned home with a serious cold that went into so bad a sore throat that both the doctor and I thought it was strep again. By the time the culture report came along, antibiotics had things under control. My holidays were quiet and non-alcoholic, needless to say. No matter, it gave me time to work on my report of the trip to Morocco, Spain, and France.*



Christmas morning María and Alex came up, and we had our usual delightful opening-of-presents under the occasionally-interested eyes of the two dogs. María invited me for Christmas dinner, along with her

* "France – Morocco – Spain with Muriel & Don" on page 9 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*



Kate and Alex with Amber and Missy, Christmas 1995

brother. Elmer has been pretty low since the death of their father in November. Fortunately he was in good spirits, and we had a lovely time. María had a beautiful ham, and I fixed a casserole of mashed potatoes and one of mixed vegetables in cheese sauce. We had Alex's usual birthday / Christmas cake for dessert, though I'm not sure Alex appreciated María's sharing it with us all. That was my Christmas spree.

Boxing Day, Emilie Bowen invited me for midday dinner. She wanted to get up a bridge afternoon, but no one was available. We had a delightful visit, just the two of us, and enjoyed her replay of Christmas dinner.

As for New Year's, I invited Callie Young for coffee on the Sunday morning before New Year's. She is one of my oldest friends and practically a recluse for the last many years. We had a lovely visit.

Then on New Year's Day, Emilie Bowen and Betty Lindo came for a beer before we all went out for midday dinner. The hotels were not serving, so we ended up at our favorite Chinese restaurant. The food is very good, and it is a pleasant place. Betty's husband is the Belizean Ambassador in Washington, so she had lots of entertaining tales to tell.

All in a Year's Work

February – December 1996

February

Air France is really heating up. Already I am having trouble getting reservations on the dates passengers request. We have one group tour (Tel Aviv) that looks as if it really will materialize. The agent booked a "Visit France" package for the overnight in Paris. Another travel agent is working on a tour and wants a quotation on a similar Paris stay. I want to put together my own 10-day tour to France and advertise it, but so far I haven't had time to pull it all together. I have thought of hiring María as a consultant to do it for me. She is excellent with detail work.

March

We have had another ill passenger from the *Caribbean Prince*, the cruise ship that does a three-month season here every winter. They made a special call ashore for a passenger with pneumonia. It was dramatic: The ship, all public rooms darkened as it made the treacherous nighttime trip to the pier; the ambulance, lights flashing; a doctor to meet the patient, a delightful, brisk young woman of a size substantially to the far side of "plump"; medics, gurney, and doctors disappearing into the darkness of the long Fort George pier then, after thirty minutes, beginning the long, slow trip back with the patient.

We have an excellent, new (expensive) small private hospital. The chest man was waiting. By the time I arrived with the patient's wife and the ship's cruise director, Colonel Savoie was hooked up to the EKG machine. He had a triple bypass a couple of years ago, which concerned everyone.

He received first-rate care and improved steadily after a rough first 24-hours. Mrs. Savoie was a darling. It was a weekend, of course; that's the only time for emergencies. Alex met the ship when it brought the

Colonel in, but he and María were off early the next morning for a party in Corozal.

I did the hospital run a couple of times a day over the weekend. It was fun driving back. All the little boys are out with their colorful kites, practicing for the kite competitions that have become a fixture along with the regatta on Baron Bliss Day.

The Colonel was well enough for them to fly home to San Antonio on Thursday.

April

A man from Japan Air Lines (JAL) is coming the week before the Air France meeting, to discuss their appointing a General Sales Agent (GSA) in Belize. I am getting up all the information I can for him about traffic to the Pacific area. I am a little dubious about the outcome. JAL passengers to Taipei or Hong Kong have to go through Tokyo. Singapore and China Air fly them nonstop from Los Angeles to Hong Kong. I think the success of JAL here will depend on a competitive fare, especially in the beginning. I also worry about our being such a small company. However, they had a good report of our operations from Air France, which should help.

May

Manuel Hernández, a representative of the sales department of JAL's Mexico City regional office, was here this week. To my amazement, from the time he got into the car at the airport, he started talking details. No pussyfooting around with if-we-come-into-Belize or if-you-are-appointed-GSA. He said that the director, Mr. Shimizu, was highly impressed by the enthusiastic recommendation of us sent them by the Salvador Air France office, as well as the recommendation by the director of Air France Mexico.

Manuel was a bright, pleasant young man. I think I endeared myself to him almost instantly when he emerged after checking into the Fort

George. He was wearing standard informal business clothes—slacks, conservative jacket, shirt, and tie. I threw up my hands in horror and told him he couldn't survive that way in Belize. I sent him back to his room to leave his tie and jacket. We were friends by the time he returned.

We had an intensive program of long talks daytimes, then drinks at the house, and going out for dinner. Manuel said he was sure he could offer a competitive JAL package. Although their schedule is not as good as others that make a 2-hour connection in Los Angeles, by offering hotel rooms and breaking the long trip, we hope to win a share of the traffic.

There are lots of details to be worked out, but Manuel said over and over that he wants to get started as soon as possible. He knew about my upcoming Air France conference in Guatemala and suggested that Mr. Shimizu might ask me to fly on to Mexico at the end of it.

June

The upshot of my meetings with Japan Airlines in Mexico City last month* is that we will operate under a four-month temporary agreement while the GSA agreement is worked out with New York and Tokyo offices. All we need to get started is fares. Manuel should send those to us in the near future. Meanwhile, the one travel agent I have told about Japan Airlines is most enthusiastic and promises to do her best to switch as many as possible of her passengers for the Orient to us.



I should be able to get started on Japan Airlines this week. Still need final confirmation about fares. As for schedules, Manuel gave me a schedule book that is printed mainly in Japanese, with some small parts translated into English. I must find the strength to sort out the information we need from the off-putting mish-mash of characters.

* “Discussions with Japan Airlines” on page 135 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995*
– 2007

July

I just got a fax from JAL in Mexico City saying that permission had been granted by Tokyo to offer us a 3-month trial period, July, August, and September, to introduce and start selling JAL in Belize.

I am increasingly dubious about JAL. We learned recently that Japan does not recognize passports of the Republic of China. Taiwanese nationals constitute our main block of prospective customers. Furthermore, U.S. visas are needed by all passengers because they have to overnight in Los Angeles, between either TACA or Continental and Japan Airlines. JAL offers a free hotel room, but lots of would-be passengers do not have and can't get U.S. visas. Third on the discouraging list is the fact that only the JAL flight to Hong Kong goes through with an overnight in Japan. Again, JAL provides an hotel room, but that's a second night en route. And Taiwanese need a special Japanese document (not available here) to overnight there before proceeding to Taipei.

On the positive side, JAL has given us excellent fares. The travel agents are excited about prospects. Obviously we will be able to sell to a fairly small pool of people, but with help from the travel agents, we may be able to make a start.

August

This has been a *week*. It is the sort of thing that always happens when Alex is off on holiday. I was thrown back into the kind of unexpected "situations" that keep life here interesting. Focal point: MV *Ceti*, which is loading sugar in the harbor.

Last weekend one of the welders, Naranjo, caught his leg between the hatch cover and coaming when they were securing against the rain. I was not notified. The Captain arranged for a boat to take him ashore and to the hospital. X-rays showed damage to the knee and a hairline fracture of the femur. The doctor put him in a cast and sent him back to the ship. We only learned about it the middle of Monday morning when the stevedore who had assisted Naranjo came to the office.

It was a madhouse of planning, cancelling plans, and calls to the penny-pinching ship operators in Miami. I had a perfect schedule for Naranjo through Miami on a comfortable connection to Ecuador. No way. He had to go south from Belize (cheaper). The first ticket they ordered involved a 20-hour layover in San José. I pointed this out to the ship operators and suggested a slightly better schedule via Panama. They were grateful for the help, and I was grateful for the delay caused by the fact that the Panama schedule was not daily.

I sent Allan from our office out to the ship to get all the medical records. The ship owners had a fit about my hiring the boat. There was no alternative. Sugar tugs were not available for free transportation because monsoon rains from nearby Tropical Storm Dolly had closed down loading operations. Allan brought Naranjo's passport in and arranged with Immigration for his exit.

A greater problem was the medical release demanded by the airline before they would board the injured man for repatriation. Two hours of wandering through our lovely new Government hospital failed to unearth the attending physician, despite the many gracious people who tried to help me. After work, in desperation, I went to the private clinic of the Chief Medical Officer. He established that the attending physician was on leave in Orange Walk. After some demurring, he decided to work something out by telephone with her rather than make my poor, hurting young man come into town by launch through heavy rain in rough seas so he could examine him. Twenty-four hours later I had the medical release.

On Thursday, the injured crewman was off for his home in Ecuador.

Friday morning, Immigration called to announce that they had "sufficient evidence" to put the captain of the *Ceti* in jail for six months to two years and/or levy a fine of \$1,000 to \$10,000. This was not information I needed to brighten my day.

The problem—two crewmen on successive days had applied to Immigration for clearance to go to Honduras on visits and return to their

ship. The second man arrived with a letter of permission from the Captain. Unfortunately, Belize law requires a letter from the ship's agent.

I assured Miss Willoughby that it all was an innocent misunderstanding. She gave me until 2:00 PM to "escort" the Captain and miscreants to her office. She already was holding the crewmen's passports.

I said we would cooperate in every way, but explained that the sugar tug schedule was so irregular that it might be difficult to meet a deadline.

MISS WILLOUGHBY: Send a launch out for them.

KATE: The ship owners might not approve the extra expense.

MISS WILLOUGHBY: I think they would prefer it to a \$10,000 fine.

That sounded reasonable. I promised that we all would be in her office in the early afternoon.

I was reluctant to discuss the matter on an open radio channel with the Captain. Instead, I telephoned the ship owners, knowing that they had telex communications with the vessel. Jail-or-fine was not what they needed to hear. I assured them that I probably could resolve the matter, despite Miss Willoughby's repeated statement, "I want them all in jail." After hanging up, I tried to decide which lawyer to contact in case I couldn't.

With time to ponder the situation, I realized what apparently had happened. Later the Captain confirmed my guesses. Bad weather kept the ship in Belize far longer than expected. The two crewmen in trouble both lived in neighboring Honduras. Out of kindness, the Captain had given them leave to go home for a few days while the *Ceti* was in harbor. From Miss Willoughby's point of view, sending them out of the country was wrong to begin with. The Captain's giving one of them a note authorizing the trip to Honduras and back was "evidence" of law breaking that she could use to send him to jail.

I sent a carefully worded fax to Miss Willoughby repeating our intention of working with her to resolve the matter and suggesting that the Captain

had no intention of contravening Belize law. I hoped it would give her another slant on the situation and help her simmer down somewhat before we arrived.

After lunch, I picked up the Captain and seamen, who had come ashore as instructed. I tried to describe the situation and convince the nice young Captain that Miss Willoughby held his immediate future in her hands as I drove a circuitous route to Immigration, now located miles from anywhere on a street that was closed for construction.

Miss Willoughby made an excellent first impression that only got better as our interview proceeded. She was an attractive young black woman, probably in her late twenties, immaculate in her uniform. She was tough in the best sense of the word, implying a firm intention to do her job to the letter of the law. She also was open-minded.

Early in the interview, she said that the Chief Immigration Officer told her to take the Captain and two crewmen to court as quickly as possible. She asked for time to get in touch with me. "If it were X shipping company, yes, but this is Marine & Services!"

Miss Willoughby quizzed the Captain carefully, realized that, as I had suggested, he followed the same letter-to-Immigration procedure in other ports with no problem. He protested that he always insisted that his crewmen go to Immigration in the correct way.

Miss Willoughby remarked that earlier this year, Immigration had a similar situation with several crewmen from a ship represented by X shipping company. Because of their history of noncompliance, she said, the Captain was fined \$2,000 and the shipping agency, \$5,000. Our situation still was up in the air, so I found her story highly unsettling.

We had a rocky moment when it developed that Reyes, one of the crewmen, already had gone to Honduras and returned. It was when he asked to go again that he got into trouble. Unfortunately for him, he got Miss Willoughby for his second request. When she refused permission, he became loud and abusive. She confiscated his passport and tossed him out of the office.

Fairly quickly, it became apparent Miss Willoughby had decided that the Captain was both reliable and truthful. After a brief conference with her superior, she told the Captain that she would let him go with a warning. She approved the Honduras leave for the second crewman after I signed the Captain's letter giving authorization as agent. And she asked the Captain to lecture Spanish-speaking Reyes severely about his behavior and about showing proper respect.

It was an elated group I drove back to our office so the Captain could call the ship operators. I initiated the call with "Here's the Captain. He's not in jail."

September

Japan Airlines so far has been a bust. When we came in, Singapore Airlines and TACA lowered Far East fares and started a big promotion campaign, some of their newspaper ads written in Chinese. My best travel agents say they simply have not been able to talk passengers into trying JAL. Furthermore, this is a very slow time of year. They tell me that demands for tickets to the Pacific countries increase heavily in November and December.

I have faxed a full report to Japan Airlines in Mexico City. They already know that it took us three years of hard work to swing the Belize market around to accept Air France. I suggested that JAL extend their three-month trial period. If they do, fine. If they don't, to hell with it. I'm tired of beating my head against a wall. I'm going to Atlanta.

October

Department of What Else Is New...

Monday morning not long after I returned from my annual trip to Georgia, we found the office without power. We did what we could, working around the problem. When the power still was not back on a little before 10:00, Alex checked with the office next door. They had power. He returned, furious, to verify that our bill had been paid. It had. He strode

out of the office, waving the file, en route to the Belize Electricity Board (BEB) office nearby.

They verified that our account was up to date and that no disconnect order had been issued in error. Back Alex came. I returned from an emergency visit to Ro-Mac's* to find Dwight and Alex studying the empty glass case where our electric meter used to reside. We assumed it had been stolen.

By noon we had a new meter and were reconnected. The story finally emerged. Saturday night, a BEB employee had found our meter box open and the meter broken and loose. Whether someone tried to steal it for some weird reason or whether visitors to the bar downstairs had broken it during a brawl, no one knows. The BEB man removed the broken meter and reported it. A new one should have been installed before the office opened, but the order apparently dropped through the cracks.

November

We were agents for another auction of Oriental rugs. Like last year and despite promises, the company in England sent promotional material uncomfortably late. I had a last-minute scurry to place newspaper, radio, and TV ads. The former did not reach us when they were supposed to, and the latter were so long and wordy that I had to redo them completely.

Some of the rugs arrived in June. The nine boxes have been stacked among file cabinets in our back office. The main shipment of rugs was due November 9th and did not arrive. Ultimately, they were located in Miami. American Airlines had tucked them away in a corner because they did not have space to carry them on their now only 3-flights-weekly service to Belize. Protests worked. The rugs arrived on TACA just five days before the auction.

The auction brochures should have been sent two or three weeks in advance. They arrived the day before the auction, with barely time for Angelus Press to make 75 copies before the auction.

* *Ro-Mac's* is a grocery store.

We lost the ads, we lost the rugs, we lost the brochures. As icing on the cake, the day before the auction, we lost the Austrian auctioneer. Alex went out to the airport in the morning to meet his 9:30 plane. No Herr Gutensohn. We checked with the Fort George every hour all day. Just before 5:00 PM, the dear soul telephoned me to say he had a disastrous 10-hour trip, rerouted to Belize due to a strike by air traffic controllers in Panama.

After the trouble-plagued build-up, everything finally fell into place, and the auction itself was a moderate success.

I was jolted and dismayed to find that despite all my hard work on promotion, we had fewer people than last year. However, the proceeds were almost the same, thanks in large part to “contract bids.” A man from the Bahamas, who attended last year, put in prior bids for a number of items. He got some of them, but on others, I think prices were higher than they might otherwise have been because bidding started at a respectable level. I don’t think Belize can support another auction like this, much as we enjoy the slightly exotic activity for a change.

December

I will be in Miami December 10th through 12th. CGM, the French Government shipping line, has been privatized. Honchos from the new owners, CMA, plus brass from CGM are coming for a half-day meeting to see the agents from Central America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and northern South America. My friend Jean-Paul Gustin, Regional Director in Puerto Rico, gave me not an invitation, but instructions to attend.



1996 was a wretched year. Our European container line abruptly stopped calling in Belize the end of February with two weeks’ notice. They are our prime client, so it was hard even keeping the doors open until they started back mid-October. Air France was a godsend at keeping us afloat during the dry spell.

Things have been almost busier than we need since October. In December we had ten ships in one week—the container ship, a sugar ship, a tanker, three tugs, and four barges.

The last lot brought U.S. Military equipment for the largest humanitarian project they will have in Latin America in 1997. They will have troops here until June building roads, bridges, and schools. Old friends of ours from Miami were the lucky bidders on transport for enormous numbers of vehicles, heavy equipment, and seventy containers of building supplies. Being agents for the tugs and barges was a bonanza for us.

This was such a big project that we had hot-and-cold running Brass. A series of Army colonels with their aides arrived from Panama. The Navy sent two officers from Washington. The tug owners sent their man from Louisiana. And our friend came with one of his associates.

The rigs were held up loading and leaving by high water in the Mississippi. They slowed down through horrible weather in the Gulf. Surprisingly, discharge went remarkably smoothly and quickly. The rigs pulled out the morning of Christmas Eve, and the Brass headed for the airport and home.

The Army is setting up a base camp at Burrell Boom. They will have a cadre of regular Army engineers and will rotate National Guard units in for two-week stays during the project.

On the Home Front

February – December 1996

February

I came home from work one noon to find two large cartons overflowing with fruits and vegetables on the counter. I started to tell my housekeeper, Jean, that they had been mis-delivered when she handed me a note. She said she told the man that I would say that and made him put it in writing.

One of the major market vendors has a business called “Farm-to-You.” They have been supplying the *Caribbean Prince* for two or three seasons. This was their thank-you for the business.

It was an incredible array: four kinds of lettuce, escarole, pineapple, two little containers of gorgeous blueberries from Chile, strawberries, tiny carrots, snow peas, spinach, two beautiful heads of cauliflower and some magnificent broccoli, green beans, zucchini, cucumber, eggplant, sweet corn, tiny new potatoes and beautiful regular-size ones, red cabbage, green peppers, and huge red sweet peppers. I may have forgotten something. My refrigerator is overflowing. I even had a Southern-style vegetable dinner with cornbread and *no meat*. Bucher would have adored it.



The Sholer house across the street from us on Hutson was sold. The new owners have refurbished, enlarged the front veranda, opened a restaurant upstairs and “Little Las Vegas” downstairs. I presume they have a bar and slot machines. Those are the only legal betting aside from lottery and boledo.*

We nearly died the night of their opening, when they had karaoke. It was at awful volume, and the singing was excruciating. We all were horrified

* *Boledo* is a popular small-stakes gambling game that involves betting which 2-digit number will be drawn.

about future nights However, obviously that was a one-shot deal. The restaurant apparently serves one or two tables nightly.

Friends of my niece Nancy Robinson came for drinks a week ago—a nice young couple, excited about their first foreign trip. I took them across the street for dinner, believing what I had heard about its being a first-class restaurant. We were greeted by the cook’s rushing out of the kitchen and asking in horror, “Do you want to *eat?*” She announced that all they had was rice-and-beans and chicken. I explained to my guests that since that was the national dish, they might want to stay and try it. The food, when it came, was excellent. The service was strange, to say the least. I don’t think they will be in business too long.

March

Carli, Tom, and I had a delightful two weeks in Puerto Rico.* Before we went, friends asked us what in the world we intended to do all that time *there*. Certainly not much if we intended to hole up in a big U.S.-chain hotel, as so many people do. As it was, we had a glorious time exploring Old San Juan, then striking out on back roads to see as much of the island as we could in the time we had.

April

Last Sunday, Jimmy Murphy and I drove to San Ignacio to see Callie and Ford Young. They had moved into their new home there in March. It is an attractive house on a large lot on a hill looking out over a valley to far-off hills. It was eerie walking in, because it is so similar in floor plan and identical decoration to their old house in Belize City.

May

Emilie Bowen and Jill Bell asked me to join them in one of our regular lunches last Sunday. Our destination: a new resort, Jaguar Paw, off the

* “Puerto Rico with Carli & Tom” on page 83 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

Western Highway. We set off together in Emilie's car because it is a high, four-wheel drive, better for the rough road in to the resort.

Two miles out of town, I began to hear a suspicious noise. By the time the origin registered, a *loud* familiar one told me that a rear tire had thrown its tread. Shades of my long-ago drive with Becky to Corozal, en route to Mérida.* Jill, who was driving, turned the car around and inched her way back to a filling station.


By a miracle, the tire repair man was on duty and within moments, had the car up on a jack and was removing bolts from the wheel. The last bolt was a different size. Furthermore, it was a size that defied extraction by nineteen different sizes of socket wrench. Emilie was wild. No one but Ford Central Workshop (BEC, owned by her son Barry) touches her car. She considered both the destroyed tire and the off-size bolt as personal insults by Ford Central.

After twenty useless minutes, we had the young man replace the other bolts. Jill eased the car back into traffic and drove slowly back to Emilie's house. There, one hour after our departure, we piled into Jill's new Ford Taurus and took off again.



Jimmy Murphy, Callie & Ford Young, and Kate, 1996

* “Mérida with Becky” on page 93 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*




Emilie said that the turn-off to Jaguar Paw was at Mile 47. Somewhere en route, that metamorphosed into Mile 37. We all watched for the large green sign with the jaguar on it. Nothing at Mile 37, nothing at Mile 47, nothing in between. Jill pulled up at the turn-off to Belmopan and started back. By this time, we all were in hysterics. Emilie and Jill had tried once before to visit Jaguar Paw, turned off too soon, and ended up far south in Manatee.

At Mile 37, Jill spotted the green sign—flat on the ground in deep grass, well off the roadside. We turned around again and took a long, straight gravel road heading directly toward the karst hills south of the Western Highway.

When I say *gravel*, I speak of immature gravel, rocks that have not yet been ground fine, fist-sized rocks that make driving a low-slung car a challenge. Emilie said it was supposed to be six miles in to the lodge. It felt like fifty and probably was ten.

On we went, and on and on and on. Finally, we saw a man swinging a machete along the verge. He wore a T-shirt with the resort's logo. He told us that the lodge was just over the hill ahead. We got to the top, and Jill gasped, "I can't drive down *that*," in her charming mid-London accent. Jaguar Paw was ahead of us at the bottom of a short, almost vertical hill. She took an audible breath and completed our lengthy journey.



The lodge itself is a large, vaguely Mayan building with attractive cabanas along the edge of the jungle at one side. It is close to Cave's Branch. The river varies from a shallow run over low rocks to deep swimming holes. At one end, it disappears into a gaping cave. Bats and stalactites hang from its roof. A wide beach of water-smoothed stones makes an easy walkway into the cave. One of the attractions of the resort is its canoe trips down Cave's Branch and through a series of caves. Other caves are accessible by foot with a guide.

Two groups of Belizeans, some of whom we knew, had come for the day. A group of Indians was picnicking on the pebbled edge of the Branch, the smell of their cooking, an arresting aroma.

The handsomely decorated lodge had a pleasant dining room, where we enjoyed excellent lunches. Afterwards, the friendly waitress let us inspect some of the cabanas. Delightful.

Each of the four rooms we saw was decorated differently. All were elaborate with elegant materials, imaginative use of wall hangings, beautiful bric-a-brac. Some of the bathroom walls were finished with pleated fabric. It would take hours to notice each detail in any of the rooms. In the cowboy room, an almost life-size photograph cut-out of Clint Eastwood's head in cowboy hat with a real red kerchief fastened around his neck decorated the toilet cubicle. I am not sure how restful private moments would be under his steely gaze.

I am going to suggest to Mary and Ellis when they are here later this year that we drive up, enjoy the caves, or just the water's edge if Mary is leery of caves, and spend the night. According to the owner's wife, a delightful young woman (American), they pride themselves on their dinners. Furthermore, the grounds and even the cave are lighted at night. I think one night would be enough.

July

We all watched Hurricane Cesar closely. Had she turned even slightly northward from her westerly course, she probably would have landed in our laps. Hurricanes strain one's sense of honor. One hopes fervently that it doesn't come calling, but feels guilty about the implied hope that it hits someone else.

Alex got reams of information from the Internet. It originated at the University of Michigan, labeled "for official government information only." There was far more detail covering far greater an area than I chose to interpret. Still, it was reassuring to realize that we had far better

information than the Belize Meteorological Office. An additional plus was our cable station's adding The Weather Channel temporarily.

At noon Friday, when the threat increased, Alex, María, and I began making hurricane preparation plans. We will go to the office if / when a hurricane threatens. A&M will move their clothes, computers, etc., out of their apartment and bring them upstairs to my guest room and library. María and I agreed that we would take the dogs with us. Alex left Doña and Feo locked in the house during Greta, while Bucher and I were in Atlanta. He said that the green living room rug apparently looked like grass to them. Having two howling dogs in the house would be some protection against looters, but I couldn't bear leaving Amber and Missy terrified and alone.

Both Alex and I spent Friday afternoon making lists in our laptops. I listed so many things-to-do that I am tempted to say to hell with the whole effort. As for my food list, it is an invitation to grow two dress sizes overnight.

The only actual preparation was Alex's trip to Hofius* to stock up on batteries and nails. He came back to the office in shock at the amount he had spent on copper-tops—\$70+, and they didn't even have the D-size he wanted.

We really didn't have time for a hurricane. Saturday, Alex and Jimmy Currie were in charge of moving the marine exhibit from Government House to its new home in the remodeled old fire station at the bridge foot. I worried about them through a night of thunderstorms. However, it was reasonably bright and dry for their project. Alex worked in the new museum all day long setting up their exhibits.



Belize is kind to its kooks. We have had many of them strolling the streets during our years here. Recently, as I stopped the car to go open the garage doors, I noticed a slim young woman strolling down the street toward me.

* *Hofius* is a hardware store.

Her milk-chocolate color briefly disguised the fact that she was stark naked. As she passed me, she smiled brightly, nodded, and turned down alongside the sea.

When I mentioned the incident to friends later, one of them said she had seen the young woman, properly dressed, stop in front of our major store. She quietly removed every garment, draped them neatly over one arm, and walked into the store. No one hassled her, and in her own good time, she wandered back out and went on her way.



One of our bridge friends, a brother of the lawyer Horace Young, died last week after a long illness. I sent a letter of sympathy to his long-time bridge partner, Charlie Hyde (Evan's father and a good friend of mine through our Duplicate games). At bridge on Thursday, Charlie thanked me for the note and commented, with an amusing degree of amazement, on my ability to write. He encouraged me to start a column in Evan's paper, *Amandala*. I declined, but thanked him. Charlie himself writes a column for the paper under an assumed name. It usually is very good.

At any age, an offer like this is flattering. At my age, it is a wonderful reminder that not everyone thinks I deserve to be put out to pasture (as some of my dear friends do).

August

Last evening, I attended the opening of the new Belize Marine Museum and Terminal in what used to be the fire station at the foot of the Swing Bridge. You would be astounded at the transformation.

Money for the project came from USAID,* the Belize Tourist Board (Government), and the Belize Tourism Industry Association (private). USAID produced an architect of uncommon vision. Despite his initial horror at walking into the derelict building amid trash and unconscious winos and crack addicts, he created an inviting building with paned

* *USAID* is the United States Agency for International Development.

windows inset above planters filled with large shrubs. Walls are white with trim of varnished mahogany.

Inside, the end of the building nearest the river is a large open area that utilizes the original iron framing of the double-vault roof. This is for people waiting for water taxis to the cayes. A new, wide wharf behind the building allows easy access to boats. Colorful kiosks in the waiting room will house handcraft shops. A small bar will offer beverages and snacks. Clean rest rooms and comfortable benches will make the building a pleasant oasis for tourists exploring the city afoot.

To the left of the main entrance, handsome double glass-and-mahogany doors lead to a museum of marine life. Every facet of sea and shore and their life are shown. The displays are mounted professionally, with excellent descriptions. You would not believe Belize could provide so fine a show.

Upstairs is the boat museum. Alex and Jimmy Currie, members of the Belize Maritime Trust, have worked day and night for months building, acquiring, and mounting the collection. Large models of specific or typical boats of every kind dramatize the country's water-bound history. Photographs, drawings, and exhibits cover a wide range of Belizean



Kate and Alex at the Maritime Museum, 1997

shipwrights, boats, and various building processes. A cramped, life-size room shows a typical fisherman's hut of the kind erected on the cayes. A handsome old dory with its paddles rests on the floor under a row of pictures of use of the boat. The exhibit is fascinating and will continue to grow.

The opening was the usual sequence of speeches, gratifyingly short. Comments on both museums were unfailingly positive. I think most people were surprised and impressed at what had been done with the building and the displays. The Belize City shipwrights, most of them third or fourth generation, were invited and came. I saw one of them, a tiny, weathered little man, grinning ear to ear, surrounded by a crowd of well-wishers.

October

Mary and Ellis's visit was a delight to all of us. Mary and I have seen each other only sporadically and briefly since I left for New York at age 22. She was 17. For most of those years, I overpowered her (unintentionally) and she irritated me (unknowingly). Thank goodness we both have mellowed with age. All is serene now.

Just before they arrived, I had a momentary panic about how I would entertain them for two weeks. However, it all worked out beautifully. We had special excursions spaced out through their time. Some days they were happy staying at home reading or taking one of the neighborhood walks I had forbidden them (because of street muggings) while I spent a couple of hours in the office. When we were home, they liked to rest in the afternoon, so I had another little time to dash into the office and catch up.

We spent a couple of days at Chan Chich. It is my favorite jungle resort. Becky and I went there on her last visit. I arranged a day-long tour for M&E to the Mayan ruins at Lamanai. It involved a long boat trip plus some jungle. They adored it. I never have gone—too rough on my leg. Other days we visited nearby ruins.



Ellis & Mary Robinson and Kate, 1996

We went to the Baboon Sanctuary and watched families of the animals (actually Black Howler Monkeys) cavorting in the treetops. We went to the Belize Zoo and had a special tour by the zoo director, who is an old friend. We had some shopping expeditions. Mary picked up some Guatemalan table cloths, etc., which pleased her enormously.

We played some bridge, with Emilie Bowen as fourth. I had not realized that Ellis played. They are involved with regular bridge and Duplicate in Durango. We all had a good time playing.

November

The former Sholer house across Hutson Street now has a bar and pool hall downstairs. Apparently the new owner ripped out all the guest rooms on the ground floor, planning to have gambling. Very quickly he got the word that it was illegal. The sign in front changed from *Little Las Vegas* to *Caribbean Club*.

They advertised bingo in the big downstairs rooms. I heard the calling and a little noise a couple of times. Then that stopped. Next, the big room became a pool hall and the name changed to *El Paso*. The adjacent bar sometimes plays its juke box too loudly, but most of the time, the clinking of the balls is not a problem. A recent Friday night was an exception when a hearty group continued to play—and, obviously, drink—into the wee hours. Their shouts of alternate delight and despair woke me every few minutes for several hours.


The main problem has been the Sunday karaoke sessions up on the veranda from about 3:00 PM to 9:00 PM. The worst was when Mary and Ellis were here in October. We were playing bridge with Emilie Bowen. Every window was tightly shut on that side of the house, but the noise still was so overpowering that we literally could not talk to one another.

After two weeks with volume unseemly but not shattering, the karaoke started up with a blast that almost knocked me out of the chair where I was reading.

Alex has called, I have called. Alex once called the police, I once called the police. Each complaint resulted in a slight and temporary lowering of volume. Alex's final call a couple weeks ago solicited a growled, "Stop bothering us. We're trying to run a business here."

A week ago, Alex borrowed a sound meter. He recorded sound levels eight times over about a two-hour period. The most interesting one was taken after dark at the corner of Cork Street in front of the For George. The sound level there, three blocks from the source, was higher than the legal limit for a residential neighborhood at night.

Alex wrote a very nice letter quoting the various readings and attached a copy of the Noise Pollution Ordinance. Neighbors signed the letter along with us. Alex showed that copies were sent to the Ministry of the Environment and the chairman of the Liquor Licensing Board. The law provides for fines and/or short imprisonment for those producing, or permitting to be produced, excess noise. A worse threat would be loss of their liquor license.



We received no reply to the letter. However, there was no karaoke for two weeks. Noise from the bar and poolroom keeps me awake most Friday nights, but isn't as bad as the earlier music.

Suspicion just has proved correct. The main business of the house is prostitution. I was outraged. Alex said, "Don't knock it, Mom. At least they're quiet."

December

I spent Saturday, November 30th, finishing and printing my Christmas letters. By Sunday noon, I was able to get the Christmas tree out and start putting it up. The project nearly did me in; the tree is too large for me to manage easily. I forgot how to put the stand together and fought several variations for almost an hour before settling on the simple, correct one.

Then I got confused about the lights. I thought I remembered using two strings, but found I had five new ones plus enough extra light bulbs to supply the Rockefeller Center tree. That's what happens when I go shopping without a written list. I buy thing I think I need. Anyway, it was getting dark Sunday night; I was completely baffled by the lights and how to hook them up. I was near tears, and I *never* cry. I was ready to tell Alex that this was the last year I could manage a tree by myself. Instead, I decided it was time to turn my back on the problem and retire to my iced coffee and *Capital Gang* on TV.

Next day, María reminded me that last year, they gave me a lovely little box into which lights are plugged. As thrilled as I was with it, I can't imagine forgetting. The lights are turned on and off by a button activated my a toe-touch. The box is decorated with a ribbon and bow and looks like a gift left under the tree. Monday I got the little gen down from the shelf where it carefully had been stored and succeeded in arranging my tree lights easily.

Tuesday after work I added ornaments. Wednesday we had a meeting, and Thursday was Duplicate Bridge. The tinsel went on to finish the tree on the weekend. It was rather restful doing it in stages.



Christmas was pleasant but quiet—most of it. Late in the afternoon, Alex telephoned to tell me that the Boom & Chime band from Fender’s had arrived to celebrate his birthday. They were asking for me.

I already had bathed and prepared for a quiet evening alone after a happy day of opening presents, then Christmas dinner in María and Alex’s apartment. However, I got up, dressed in my elaborately embroidered red Greek caftan, put on makeup again, and went down to join the group. Seven large men with their instruments, plus the leader’s wife, A&M’s friend Charlie Vernon, and Alex and María themselves were in a tight oval in A&M’s modest living room. I found a place to sit on one of the couches next to the harmonica player.

We had a banjo, guitar, small accordion, harmonica, tall drum with taller drummer, and two small drums bracketed in parallel held between the knees of a highly intoxicated drummer. Later a missing member of the group arrived with his “Fish,” a foot-long length of large bamboo, highly decorated, with two holes and a midriff scored into ridges. He rubbed it in various ways with a tapered stick making a sandpaper-like accompaniment to the music.

The band entertains most Sundays at Fender’s, the pleasant little neighborhood bar not far away. The men all were middle aged and had been playing together since their early teens. They had been going the rounds with their impromptu playing for many hours, enjoying Christmas cheer everywhere they went.

The group played for an hour and a half, unfamiliar songs or well known Christmas tunes in calypso rhythm. Naturally, a rousing *Happy Birthday To You* was prominent among their offerings. The musicians probably went through two cases of Belikin beer and a couple of bottles of

Caribbean Rum during the serenade. They all were properly lubricated and slightly tongue-tied between sets. You never saw happier men, but they never missed a note when they played.

The tall drummer with the large drum wore a black T-shirt with a large white block displaying the letters *POLICE*. I assumed he was one of Our Finest. It was only later that I got a clear look at him and realized that the small print underneath read, *Just lie on your back and do everything the nice officer asks you to do.*

It was obvious from everyone's reactions to some of the songs that, on occasion, lyrics were risqué. However, I not only could not understand the Creole words, but the amplifier blurred sound so that I barely could distinguish that they *were* words. I tried to mirror María and Alex's reactions so that none of our guests would realize I was utterly adrift.

As they packed up their instruments to leave, several of the men made a point of telling me that Alex was a good friend of every member of the group. Despite their drinking, all were courtly in the charming old-fashioned way so typical of many Belizeans. It was a wonderfully old-fashioned ending to Christmas.



Did I tell you that I am going to Europe with Muriel and Don Stauffer in February? Some time last year I complained of feeling discriminated against because I was not getting to Paris in 1996. They suggested that I go on their annual business trip with them. It will be a fast schedule in the worst possible weather, but I jumped at it. It may be my only chance to see Germany, Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland, as well as revisit my beloved Paris.

Year's Highlights

1997

January

January 9th. The office has been chaotic today. When we moved into this building, the owner arranged for a live-in watchman, and we all contributed to the salary. Recently, he came to see us to say he wanted to install an alarm system in his premises downstairs and hoped we would want to put one in. It is a rental system, and the signal goes to Wackenhut's 24-hour security service. The price will be a bit less than that for the watchman, and we are delighted. Meanwhile I have had claustrophobia, surrounded by four very tall young men moving briskly between the desks with wires, tools, and ladders, drilling holes everywhere. I just have asked them to move the control box lower because I barely could reach it and couldn't see the numbers through my bifocals to punch in the code.



January 15th. I may be less than coherent this morning. I came to work early, opened the door, punched in the code on our new alarm system, and was practically knocked off my feet by the resulting wail. For thirty minutes, I hit every button and combination of buttons available while noise reverberated around me. I dashed to the telephone to call Wackenhut and report a false alarm and recalcitrant siren. I got the book of instructions, found directions for disarming the alarm, and followed them and followed them uselessly. Of course, this was the day Alex was late.

Alex and Mr. Fairweather, who had installed the system, arrived simultaneously. They went into action and within moments, blissful silence ensued.

1. No, the system was not at fault.

2. I did not have wits enough to punch in the master code because I considered it Alex's sole property.
3. I was using the wrong code.

Alex was not here the day the codes were installed. Someone had wandered into the office and heard the common number, so we all decided it should be changed. Next day Alex suggested a new combination of numbers. Apparently I was the only person who didn't realize that he was unsure about installing the replacement and never changed the code. You are familiar with the phrase egg-on-your-face?

February – Early April

I'm not used to taking my major trip at the beginning of the year. I usually travel in September or October. The trip to Europe in February* was rushed (as I knew it would be), cold (as I expected), and marvelous (as assumed). Although it was an if-it's-Tuesday-this-must-be-Belgium type trip, it was fun being with friends who had lived in both Holland and Belgium and had visited all of the counties many times.

For once, I returned from a trip rested. To my own amazement, by bedtime, both suitcases were unpacked and stored away. I had time to regroup before Carli and Tom arrived on Good Friday. We had a delightful week—plenty of time to visit, a few sightseeing expeditions, lots of good Belizean or Mexican foods I don't usually have.

On Holy Saturday, we christened the picnic table Alex and I gave María for her birthday. The wind was brisk and the sun, bright. Thanks to the dry season, there were no mosquitoes. The table—which took five strong men to move into place—is in the shade of the big tree in the back yard. María has worked for months building a good bed around the base of the tree and establishing low plants and multicolored flowers. It makes a pleasant setting. Alex's barbecue was superb. The whole thing was so pleasant that we did it again on Easter Sunday.

* “Winter in Europe with Muriel & Don” on page 137 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*



Clockwise from left: Carli, Kate, María, Alex, Missy's hind quarters, Amber, 1997

Monday we drove up to Cayo, stopped by for ten minutes to say hello to Callie and Ford Young, then continued west and took the ancient ferry across the river to Xunantunich. I had not been there for at least thirty years. Changes are impressive—much more excavation, a little museum, tidying of the area. It is a worthwhile tourist site.

Alex and María suggested our having lunch at DePlooy's, a resort not far past San Ignacio. It has a charming large deck overlooking a gorge. The bird feeder nearby attracted a succession of gorgeous birds I never had seen before. Alex quoted the owner as having said that some Audubon guests counted more than 100 different varieties off the deck before breakfast one morning.

Another day Carli, Tom, and I drove up to the zoo, then on a little farther to Jaguar Paw, a new resort back in the low mountains on Cave's Branch River. The nearby cave with its pebble beach is fascinating. Carli agreed with my assessment that, charming as it is, the place is far too Americanized for a jungle resort.

Friday morning the four of them took off in Alex's car for the Yucatán. I was so pleased at their all vacationing together that I couldn't be bothered feeling lonesome at their deserting me. I settled down to regular hours in the office for the first time in a week.

Alex and María returned Wednesday afternoon absolutely bubbling. The four spent the first night at a charming resort at Bacalar, just beyond Chetumal, then head up the coast. They visited the ruins at Tulum and the new theme park Xcaret. Alex delivered Carli and Tom to Hertz in Cancún before he and María returned to Belize. C&T were headed to Mérida and Chichén Itzá. They should be home this weekend. It was a lovely holiday for all of them.

Mid April – Early May

April 15th. Muriel and Don Stauffer have thrown me into a flap.

Yesterday they asked me to consider joining them on a 10-day trip to Tokyo in September 1998. It is the same convention Don attended in Madrid two years ago. My immediate reaction was "impossible." About thirty minutes later, I found myself playing with the idea.

April 28th. In their fax Friday, Don told me how please they were that I had not slammed the door on their suggestion that I join them on their trip to Japan next year. My stern Midwestern side tells me I should say, "How pleasant, but no thank you." However, I am beginning to feel like Mary Tyler Moore tossing her hat into the air in the introduction to her old TV series. More and more, this falls into the opportunity-not-to-be-missed category.

I think Bucher's sister Becky may have tipped the scales. I called her just for a visit this weekend. I told her the Stauffers wanted me to join them on a trip to Japan next year. She interrupted me in mid-sentence to say: "Go!" No qualifiers, no think-it-over, just a flat command. She added, "What are you saving it for, anyway?"

I have 18 months to save up for the trip.

May 8th. I am delighted that common sense didn't win out over my desire to accept a marvelous opportunity to see a special part of the world.

July

Alex and María have been on holiday for almost three weeks. The first week at the office was gloriously smooth. I finished up our accounts and turned them in to the auditors early.

The next week was pretty hectic. We had a container ship and lots of work with consignees, shippers, documentation, and faxes. At the same time, we were deluged with Air France business. A glorious way to suffer at the office. Of course, sometimes you work hours making and changing reservations, only to have the passenger decide not to take the trip. Still, it is worth it.

This past week was one for the books. The Air France requests and changes continued; people came in to talk about their trips or get their tickets at the most inconvenient moments. No matter. Good business. The main problem was a ship arriving to load sugar. Comet Shipping of Limassol, Cyprus, had contacted us weeks earlier about the vessel. At the last minute, it was held up in a previous port so they substituted the *Kapitan Kudlay*. She had been at anchor off Honduras waiting for a charter.

The ship arrived Wednesday morning and Allan Clare, the man who usually boards ships, took the boarding party out to meet her as she anchored at the Bogue, a couple of miles off the Fort point. He didn't get back until almost noon. Reason: three stowaways.

As the boarding party (Customs, Port, Immigration, Health, and Agent) boarded the ship, three men appeared in the water and swam to the launch that had taken the boarding party out. They were hauled aboard, weak and sick.

As the story finally emerged, they were stowaways from Honduras. No one knows when or how they got out to the ship, which was at anchor just outside the harbor there for several days. They hid in the well at the stern

of the ship, where the propeller shaft comes out. They had some food and water with them. However, that ran out before the ship left for Belize. The crossing must have been hellacious for them. We have had strong winds and heavy squalls. How they held on and kept from drowning, no one knows. According to the Chief Immigration Officer—and, believe me, I had plenty of contact with him for the next 24 hours!—they were shoulder deep in water the whole time.

Allan said the Master of the vessel was completely horrified when he heard about the stowaways and where they were for so long. He wrote the normal Letter of Protest, describing the incident and declaring that the ship had no responsibility for them because they were outside, not inside the vessel.

Sounded nice, but of course, Immigration held the ship responsible. The three stowaways were locked up at the police station as soon as the launch returned to shore. The Chief Immigration Officer (CIO) offered me two options: 1) The ship could take them back to Honduras instantly, which would have cost the ship owners many thousands of dollars, or 2) we could send them back to Honduras on the next plane. That was what I intended to do from the moment I heard about it. In view of our cooperation, Immigration didn't even take the men to Magistrate's Court in the normal way.

I asked the CIO if he expected me to be responsible for driving the stowaways around town to get passport pictures for their Emergency Travel Documents. He laughed and reassured me that he would take care of it. He also promised to take them to the airport and make sure they boarded the plane. I got the tickets and delivered them to the CIO when he brought the three unsmiling stowaways to the office after getting their photographs. He also had bought them new T-shirts (at the ship's expense) because theirs were in rags.

The current Chief Immigration Officer is a nice young man I have known for years. I used to chauffeur the boarding parties, and knew him as a novice Immigration officer. I'm delighted to see how he has risen in the

ranks. I think we both enjoyed working together on this. He told me that some shipping agents are very obstructive, and he ends up taking them to court.



As if the stowaways weren't enough of a problem for the office, we had a sick crewman who had to be taken to the doctor. The Master, a huge, pleasant Russian, who speaks quite good, heavily accented English, indicated that this man would need a specialist, but didn't know the word in English. I suggested that he show me what part of the body was involved. The Master looked somewhat flustered and gingerly pointed one finger downward.

I calmly suggested a urologist, then told him I didn't think Belize had one. I ended up taking the man to Medical Associates, where the surgeon saw him. He has to come back in a week for another test. The young seaman was polite, but managed to avoid ever looking at me directly.

This is an old story. Some years ago, a sugar ship arrived after spending the Easter holiday in Panama. By the time they reached Belize, more than half the crew needed medial attention. Dr. Lizama referred to them as "Kate's Bad Boys."



Thursday, the Master announced that he had enough operating water for only two days. Our standard reply to shipping companies when they fax to ask us to attend a ship warns them that water is not available in this port. There is a tiny line at the port for ships small enough to moor there, but it takes days to fill a tank. As for delivering water to a ship at anchor, it is a major hassle. I checked with Honduras. For the ship to go there to take on \$500 worth of water would cost \$24,000 in port charges. That left me with our inadequate Belize facilities.

I located the only water barge in the country, arranged with one of the local launch men to do the necessary towing, bought enough water from Water & Sewerage for four barge-loads over the weekend, arranged with

City Council to hire their only water truck, and promised overtime pay to the drivers. Do you need to know that none of the above fell into place easily? By the end of office hours yesterday afternoon, I was ready to collapse.

Saturday morning, I went out around 7 o'clock to make sure the barge was in place. It was. I went on to the bridge-foot and located the launch man, Cracker. He is an old friend, worked for Bucher. I suspect Cracker is something of a scamp, but as Bucher used to say, he's our scamp. We discussed all the arrangements, and he was most reassuring. Fortunately, the older I get, the more protective people like Cracker are about me.

As I drove home, I had the not-unfamiliar feeling that Bucher had been standing behind my left shoulder telling me what to do. When I got up this morning, the idea of going out early to check with Cracker had not crossed my mind. This has happened before. It is a wonderfully reassuring feeling that we aren't that far apart, even after 20 years.

November

I should have gone to an Air France agents' meeting in Mexico City last week. However, you can't get there from here now except by going through the States, too long and expensive for a one-day meeting. Air France sent me a Continental pass. It arrived a few minutes after my TACA flight left Belize without me. I managed to survive the disappointment of two long days of traveling and one long day of listening to speeches in Spanish.



Bucher's oldest sister Bibba, with the enthusiastic connivance of Carli and Tom, pulled me yelling and screaming into the electronic age. I agreed to get email, not knowing that Alex already had it in his own name. Of all the human beings who have pretended to teach through the centuries, Alex is the worst. His instructions in the intricacies of Windows and Eudora covered the barest basics, leaving me as secure as if I were in a leaky canoe without a paddle.

Grudgingly, I admit that email is a quick, efficient, inexpensive way to contact friends-and-relations. Carli and I are back and forth several times a week now. Lovely. Email devotees are like Holy Rollers, determined to spread the good word. I have the feeling that I am being clutched to the bosoms of more people than I am comfortable being intimate with. On the other hand, just having an email address has brought some wonderful friends from the past back into my life. I suspect I am in the process of adjusting to the (excoriated) mode of communication.

December

I developed a motto to cover my moments of embarrassing stupidity: If you don't tell anyone, no one will know. It is fairly useless when I usually find my mishaps so funny that I broadcast them happily.

Which brings me to yesterday. After work, I dropped by Emilie Bowen's, as I often do. Her brother, Ray, was due for the holidays, so this looked like our last chance to get together for a moment. Earlier in the afternoon Emilie drove out to meet brother, found he was not on the plane, and refused to do another run over a highway still under construction. The driver had taken her car to the airport to meet him.

I did not want to block her driveway so, for the first time, parked across the street. In view of the narrowness of King Street, and hoping not to be sideswiped by passing cars, I eased my car up over the low curb, carefully avoiding the great square open holes in the sidewalk.

After a short, pleasant visit I returned to my car, duly investigated the position of a hole directly behind my right rear wheel, verified that the hole in front of it left ample room for me to pull out, and set off...

...instantly falling into the hole I had not noticed hiding under my bumper directly ahead of my right *front* wheel.

There's one thing about Belize—there always are strong arms ready to rescue one. A group of men, including Kevin Bowen (Emilie's grandson), materialized from Bowen & Bowen. Kevin's girl, Caroline, emerged from the Chan Chich office and semi-directed the operation while soothing me.

My car quickly was lifted out of the hole, and I was sent on my way, feeling like a grateful fool.

Controversial Cruise

January – February 1998

From email sent January 17, 1998

We have been in the middle of Belize's biggest controversy...we are agents for a wildly controversial cruise ship.

In December, Norwegian Cruise Line faxed us about their ship *MS Leeward*.^{*} She was scheduled to go to Grand Cayman, but they wanted to send her to Belize instead. Fine with us.

One morning about ten days ago, Alex telephoned me at 7:30 AM to ask if I were watching CNN Headline News. I was not. He said that there was a big story about Cayman's refusing to allow the *Leeward* to call because it was on charter for a cruise group of 800 homosexuals. It added that the ship was going to Belize instead.

Alex telephoned the Minister of Tourism, Henry Young, at home; he said his phone had been ringing off the hook. You can imagine the man-on-the-street reaction. By late afternoon, Henry issued a press statement saying that the Government had no objection to the call.

Stuart Krohne's TV Chanel 5 had an excellent, well balanced story on their 6:30 news show that evening. Street interviews showed strong objection from young men and surprising acceptance by elderly women.

Controversy Continued. The weekend papers were full of editorials and letters to the editor, most of them anti. They were somewhat more specific about the behavior Belize might expect to see from the passengers in the middle of town than I chose to contemplate. Groups of ministers from strange churches banded in bible-quoting petitions against permitting the damned ashore.

^{*} *MS* before the ship's name means *Motor Ship*.

María and Alex ran into Number 2 Jefe* from the University. He is determined to line up his students for a demonstration when the cruise passengers come ashore.



It was only this past Monday that we got final official word that the ship will be allowed to call. I immediately went out and bought the 300 postcards and 500 stamps the Chief Purser requested. Alex and I weren't about to spend any money until we were sure the call was on. It was something of a project selecting some 20 different postcards from the 50 available. The call is unusually short because Belize is longer steaming time from Miami than is Cayman. The passengers have limited tour time. I tried to find either typical pictures or ones of places they might have seen. It took me most of an afternoon. Alex said I simply should have grabbed 50 of four different scenes and let it go.

Alex wanted to use the Fort George dock. It is closer to where the ship will anchor, shortening the tender time, and is in better condition than the Ramada Pier. However, at the advice of the Belize Tourist Bureau (government) and the Port Authority, the Port Captain of Norwegian Line selected the Ramada. The grounds are fenced in, so security is simpler. Passengers can board launches to the cayes or buses for inland tours inside the compound.

I talked to Mr. Sylvestre, the head of the Tourist Police. He was literally overjoyed to hear that they would use the Ramada. Some of the passengers want to be on their own, but they will have to use taxis from there, rather than walk. Nothing much is open on Sunday, so they may not wander too far. We are arranging for the National Handicraft Center to open Sunday afternoon for them. And there is the Maritime Museum. They may decide to walk from one to the other. Mr. Sylvestre says he will have both Tourist police and regular police on the streets everywhere the

* *Jefe* is Spanish for *boss*.

cruise passengers go. He also will have men on bicycles. I think they are doing everything possible to make this work.



Usually, the company that handles shore tours also arranges tenders. This time they aren't, so it landed in Alex's lap. To his surprise, all but one of the boat owners he contacted jumped at the multi-trip job. One quaint soul asked Alex if he could get AIDS from the passengers. Alex told him he couldn't, "unless you intend to have sex with them." No matter; he turned down the work.

I resent furiously that anyone should face the kind of reception Belize will give these visitors. The problem, of course, is that Belize is basically very conservative. People in huge numbers on holiday often behave in ways that are not socially acceptable. The Cayman Government said that its experience with homosexual cruises, and the behavior of the passengers, convinced them that they could not allow another one. I want this to go off with no trouble. Alex calmly says that it won't.

I will not be here, much to my regret. I want to be at the Ramada to welcome passengers ashore. However, the *Niagara Prince* cruise* that Luther Blount has invited me on leaves the day before the *Leeward* arrives.



From report dated February 6, 1988

On my cruise, the *Niagara Prince* anchored at Goff's Caye for snorkeling after lunch on Sunday, February 1st. The passengers all were ashore or swimming when several launches arrived and deposited some fifty more people on the caye.

Needless to say, our passengers were not completely happy about it. What they did not know, but rapidly surmised, was that these were some of the

* "Niagara Prince" on page 177 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

passengers from the *Leeward's* gay cruise. My closest friends on the trip reported that they kept to themselves and behaved perfectly.

One woman commented that her first reaction was that she never had seen so many handsome young men at the same time—and then it registered. Another passenger overheard a brief bit of conversation that clued her in. When I learned about our shared island later, I was delighted to hear no negative comment from anyone.

Hurricane Mitch

October 25 – November 8, 1998

From email sent October 25, 1998

Friday I told Alex that this one had our name on it.

We both have been watching the Weather Channel all day. A few minutes ago, Alex arrived with a bemused expression and handed me several pages of printouts from the Internet. One is a beautiful color map I really did not need to see showing that Mitch has made its expected turn toward the northwest. The predicted track is a lovely bright red line aimed directly at Belize City.

When I went down to see Alex and María this morning, Alex said that he did not think he could go to the CGM conference in Costa Rica. He is booked to leave Monday afternoon and return Wednesday morning. Current predictions put the storm ashore before dawn Wednesday. No way he could get back.

Callie Young has been in touch with me several times about the storm. The touching thing is that she invited the three of us to sit it out with them in Cayo. She is serious about the invitation. Originally, I thanked her wholeheartedly, but said that we probably would go to the office. Just now when I told Alex about her invitation, he said that we should accept it if the storm comes. It already is stronger than Hattie.*


I worried about the dogs, but Alex said we would take them. Callie and Ford have a large fenced yard. I also realized that, if necessary during the height of the storm, we could leave them in the car under the Young's car port with windows partly open. I could even stay out with them. That's not today's problem, however.

* "Hurricane Hattie" on page 263 in Book 1: *Life & Times, 1922 – 1979*

Alex and I both started making hurricane lists after the last scare. Mine got so long, I gave up. It is in the office laptop. I'll check it out tomorrow and go shopping. I'll also start packing.

This really is a nuisance.

I look around me and wonder if I will have a house to come home to.




Report written November 8, 1998

It has been a long two weeks. The first one was spent terrified that Hurricane Mitch would literally wipe out Belize City. The second was spent semi-disoriented from our close escape, putting home and office back in order again.

I exist in a haze of gratitude and a fog of guilt that the storm that was headed for Belize instead devastated our neighbors.

Through Monday and Tuesday, the 26th and 27th of October, it looked as if one of the strongest hurricanes ever was headed straight for Belize. We spent Monday afternoon securing the office. When we left, it was a wasteland of bare desks, duct tape sealing drawers in file cabinets and desks, and great mountains of equipment and furniture tightly wrapped in blue tarpaulins lashed with heavy ropes.

I was so exhausted physically and emotionally when I got home I could not make myself lift a finger to secure the house. The best I could force myself to do was start listing things to do and things to take when we evacuated.



Tuesday (October 27th) Mitch was 200 miles directly east of Belize City on a due-west track. We worked frantically through the morning and early afternoon securing everything, with no particular hope that the house would survive a direct hit. Alex's apartment floods in even minor hurricanes. He brought everything possible upstairs, enveloped in black

plastic. My guest bedroom and much of the library were piled shoulder high in lumpy forms of electrical and electronic equipment and heaven knows what else, shrouded in garbage bags.

Upstairs, I encased everything electric with garbage bags, tucked things away into cupboards and drawers where I will be finding them for the next year, and covered beds with shower curtains taped together with our beloved duct tape.

I filled both tubs, the washing machine, and every available container with water. It took forever for the guest tub to fill. I must have gone back to check the level two dozen times. I could have turned off the taps on the next-to-last trip. I flooded Alex and María's bathroom below it.

Belize plumbers don't connect a pipe to the overflow outlet on tubs. (We learned immediately after we first arrived here that one does *not* fill the tub, but instead, bathes in an inch or so of water.) So, if one ever fills a tub too full, the water simply pours into the floor beneath the tub and drips through the cracks. I forgot this little fact. María was wonderfully nonchalant with forgiveness. She might have been less kind about it had she known that all the water would leak out of the tub before we returned, so her private flood was in vain.



Ford and Callie Young had invited us to stay with them upcountry. Alex and I agreed that we preferred to shelter closer to Belize City for fear we could not get back from Cayo. Bridges could wash out, making roads impassable. Post-hurricane looting loomed in our minds as almost a greater threat than wind and water.

Tuesday morning, Emilie Bowen called to ask us to join her at the Coca Cola plant up by the airport. It is 13 feet higher than Belize City and about ten miles inland. Alex agreed that this was ideal. The Bowen family owns the Coke plant, Belikin brewery, and half a dozen other major interests.

Most of our hurricane-evacuation supplies were packed in great plastic ice chests and storage boxes. Alex filled the trunk of my car then put the

rest into his Trooper. When I turned the key in my front door lock, I truly never expected to see the house again. We set out with him in front and me following in my car with both dogs. I gave one long, last, loving look at my house...

...except it wasn't the last. Two blocks later, I remembered I had forgotten to re-close the bathroom windows. I signaled Alex and our little convoy returned. By this time, I was so shaken that I drove through the empty streets far less carefully than I usually do. I cut too sharply turning into our driveway and was within a hair of dropping a wheel into the deep ditch alongside it. Alex was not amused.



Facilities at the Coke factory were both better and worse than I had expected. People were settling into a huge warehouse among the stacks of cartons of caps stacked along the walls.

The owners of the Bellevue Hotel, sure that their annex would go down in the storm, had sent mattresses up to the factory. We were told to take what we wanted. This was utter luxury. We had expected to sleep on concrete. Alex staked out a corner of the room, put down shipping pallets, and arranged two double mattresses side by side about four feet from one wall. He arranged the chests of food and clothing along the end as a low wall, leaving a small pen for the dogs between the wall and the mattresses.

Emilie had appropriated a 6' x 10' space at the end of the room. Here she was ensconced on a small rocking chair she had brought from home. Her Spanish-speaking maid was sitting on a cushion on one side of her, next to the cage with parrots. Emilie's excitable West Highland Terrier was on her other side. Her Maine Coon kitten, she told me, was locked in her car for safety.

Four or five Belizean Coke employees and their families were established on makeshift beds among the crates. Kevin Bowen (Emilie's grandson), his delightful girlfriend, Caroline, and their huge but gentle Bull Mastiff,

Bruno, had a mattress between walls of cartons. Two old shipping friends shared a nearby bed. The couple from the Bellevue were the last of the group. The warehouse was large enough so that one had a surprising sense of privacy...along with the boredom.

Once settled, there was nothing to do but read or sleep. I was so ecstatic at finding my exile cushioned by an innerspring mattress that nothing bothered me.



Tuesday evening, Emilie came over to say we were invited to Kevin and Caroline's tailgate party. Their car was pulled up under shelter at the next building, inside which 50 Coke and Belikin trucks had been parked for the duration. We locked our dogs in Alex's Trooper for the night and joined the group. It was pleasantly convivial, though a little low key because the increasing rain and wind had all of us jittery.

Alex had his laptop and checked the Internet regularly for the most detailed bulletins. We realized that the storm had begun to sink slightly southward, but we still were very apprehensive.

The factory manager made his office bathroom in an adjacent building available to us. It was a longish trek through the rain, but a welcome facility. I also used the workmen's bathroom on the ground level once during the night.

Amber was not happy at being relegated to the car. Missy took it in stride. We did not dare keep them inside during the night. If anyone had approached us, Missy would have barked and might have attacked. Amber's barking from the car worried María, but I never heard a thing. It was as restful a night as I would have had at home—almost.



The surprise of the next morning (October 28th) was returning from early ablutions to find Alex kneeling over his camp stove in the dog's compound boiling water for coffee. I had not expected such luxury.

After breakfast, we let the dogs out of their nighttime prison. We reconvened with the dogs in their little pen and us on the mattresses to discuss plans. The storm still was moving south, but was so slow and so erratic that we were warned we still were in great danger. We decided to go home for a few hours and return for the night. We tidied our gear and left it surrounding our little compound.

The house still was standing, unlooted. The new PUP* Government proclaimed a curfew and had police and Belize Defense Force troops patrolling the streets. Looters were picked up, taken before a makeshift Magistrate's court, and slapped into prison without delay.

We had welcome showers, and the dogs had a chance to run free. Not that they much wanted to do it in our flooded yard. Missy had controlled herself for almost 24 hours by the time we brought her home. Amber, somewhat older, had better sense.

We luxuriated in the few hours at home. We gathered some forgotten items, packed clean clothes, and reluctantly set out for our shelter again. We did not know whether the storm would turn back to us, but were afraid that heavy rains and possible sea surge would flood the road and make it impossible for us to flee later if we had to.

Our same parking place under shelter was waiting for us at the warehouse. Friends greeted us. It was almost like returning home. The dogs settled down in their little pen without complaint. I took out the book I was trying unsuccessfully to finish.

That night there was another tailgate party. It was the tailgate of Kevin's vehicle, and Bruno was tethered to it hoping (successfully) for an occasional tasty morsel. Good food, good companionship, and a feeling that we just might be out of danger.



* *PUP* stands for *People's United Party*.

Thursday morning (October 29th), the storm remained stationary over the Northern coast of Honduras. It already had virtually wiped out the Bay Islands. Reports remained inconclusive: Mitch could move farther inland and break up over the Honduran mountains or it could cut across to the coast, rebuild over water, and proceed up the coast of Belize and the Yucatán peninsula. We decided to return home.

Kevin drove into town early and reported back that the highway was impassable for low cars. We packed all our gear. We put things we would need if we had to return into my car and left it locked and under shelter, out of the way of any possible company activity. We piled our ice chest, rain gear, and things we would need at home into Alex's Trooper. I sat in the back seat with the dogs. And back home we went.



I was vaguely disoriented from the pressure of the past few days and from the unfamiliar look of my home. We had moved living-room furniture away from the windows as best we could. Alex described the room as looking as if I had hired a crack-head interior decorator. Every flat surface throughout the house was piled with strange shapes shrouded in black plastic. Kitchen counters were devoid of familiar appliances, but cluttered with bottles of stored water. Part of my feeling of unreality may have been from being utterly alone for the first time in days. Pleasant but strange.

I went down to Alex and María's for lunch. It was what we had planned to fix if we had remained in the shelter: a large salad using potatoes María had baked, tuna I supplied, the last two of the hard boiled eggs I took up with us, and lettuce, and sliced onion / celery / green pepper I provided. Alex opened beers for each of us, and we had a fine, balanced meal. The cushions for María's furniture were upstairs, enveloped in plastic, but she retrieved them after lunch because sitting on slats was not the height of comfort.

We all doped off for the rest of the day. We unpacked only things we needed to use; we did not dare resettle. The Weather Channel and Internet still were predicting that Mitch might turn north back up along the coast

of Belize. We thought it was unlikely and that even if this happened, the storm would not be strong enough to force us to leave the house. But it made life seem relatively precarious.

I spent unnecessary hours searching for the dog sheet and the pillows for my legs. I had put them all into a large, black garbage bag and, I was certain, put them somewhere in my work room. I found three garbage bags of pillows, but not the right one. I searched everywhere. I was irrationally determined to find them and wasted far too much time and emotional strength. I finally settled with a clean dog sheet and a different set of pillows—as I should have done to begin with.

My bedroom looked fairly normal since Alex had set up my TV again. The only channel we could get was the Weather Channel. This had been a godsend, of course. However, when I found myself showered and propped up in bed with my dogs on the dog sheet, it seemed strange to be reading instead of watching TV.



We stayed at home on Friday (October 30th). I wrote an email to Carli to reassure her that we were safe, but had no idea when I could get it through to her. Apparently everyone in the city was working email. I couldn't even get my new messages. Alex explained that the telephone company closed down their email server on Monday. The Internet remained open.

I fixed us smothered chicken for dinner. I thought that, with an avocado salad, would be a good antidote to “hurricane fever.”

About six that evening, María telephoned up from their apartment downstairs to say that the water was within an inch of their threshold. Alex was sleeping; should she wake him? I said that indeed she should. She did. Alex growled, “High tide”—and went back to sleep. Outside my front window, water on the street was barely below the top of the seawall and waves were breaking heavily over it. I put on my rubber boots and clomped downstairs to see what I could do to help María secure the furniture left in their apartment.

Alex roused himself, put on his own boots, and went outside to see which direction the water was flowing. He came back to report that it was fresh water, runoff from swollen rivers and rain, rather than sea surge. He dipped a glass of water from his front doorstep and forced his reluctant mother to taste it. Right. It was fresh with only the slightest tinge of salt. Unfortunately, neap tides and runoff flooded Belize twice daily for a week. A&M accepted my invitation to spend the night(s) in my guest room.

Alex and María did what further securing they could and moved upstairs for the night. Here they had to move great unidentifiable-black-plastic-sheathed masses off the double bed to clear it for sleeping.

Alex's final check of the situation downstairs showed the water a half inch below the level of their apartment floor. Saturday morning (October 31st) brought a new high tide and the same water level. A&M remained upstairs. I suggested that Alex find one of his TV's and set it up in my library next to the guest room. He found two chairs and a few feet of space to establish a private area for María and himself.



Sunday (November 1st), the water was not quite as high, and we finally started putting our homes back in order. María's brother Elmer—who spent the hurricane in Orange Walk with their sister Miriam—came to help A&M move gear back downstairs. By the end of the day, that side of the house looked almost normal.

That same morning, my missing bag of pillows surfaced. I had put the bag in my desk chair. It had slipped off and settled in the knee hole. The room was dim, the site was dark, the bag was black. I literally stumbled over it before I saw it.

There still are a few things I haven't found, but today's mystery will be tomorrow's happy surprise.



You did not need this much information, but I find it easier to write than to edit. Perhaps it will entertain you. We were incredibly lucky. At one point when the threat was greatest, I remarked to myself that I was too old to go through this foolishness again. Then I realized that my experience in 1961's Hurricane Hattie here and the pragmatism of age put me in far better shape than many people to cope. I must say, I am just as glad that the experience eluded us.

Belize had only minor damage as the storm passed. Most of the docks on Ambergris Caye and Caye Chapel washed away. There was some beach erosion. Aside from that, tourism was not hurt. There was a lot of cleaning up of debris to be done, but little structural damage. The rains and rising rivers have caused flooding upcountry. However, people had time to leave their homes, and disaster teams already were prepared for a far greater emergency.

The unbelievable destruction was in Honduras and Nicaragua, with some in Guatemala and Salvador. The three bridges washed out on the main highway between Guatemala City and the ports of Puerto Barrios and Santo Tomás. They are completely isolated. Boats from Punta Gorda, Belize, take load after load of groceries, clothing, etc., across to them daily.

We received a heartbreakingly detailed fax from the CGM and Air France agent in Tegucigalpa. As Guy describes the situation in Honduras, it is far worse than even the TV news reports. He wrote to all their fellow agents, begging for any kind of help. As it happens, Belize is fully mobilized with food / clothing collection, relief accounts in all the banks, and volunteers going over to work in Honduras. I think everyone here has a strong sense of "There, but for the Grace of God, go I."

Hectic Holidays

December 1998

This was a weird Christmas season for us. I really don't know how I managed Christmas cards and wrapping of presents, I was so completely absorbed by Alex's 50th birthday party. Fortunately, all of my shopping was done in Japan.*


Somehow when I dreamed up this party in Japan, a hemisphere away from home, I managed to forget how much work there is catering a big party alone. I did some things ahead of time, but many of my offerings had to be done at the last minute. I probably walked 50 miles around my kitchen the day of the party. Dear Hearts, I'm not used to this. In the past—rather distant past—it was a lark. I was decades younger then. My last big party was Alex and María's wedding reception, and Carli and Tom were here to help.

The party was Tuesday the 22nd. I worked myself into a near collapse ahead of time, saw that the party was a roaring success, and let my brain go into suspended animation when it was past. The idea that Christmas was due in three days simply didn't register.

...which was all to the good. Our most valuable young man in the office had decided to take Christmas and New Year's weeks for his annual holiday. When Alex and I agreed with less than overwhelming enthusiasm, we expected only two ships during the period. Dwight did everything he could to get documents ready ahead of time. He even stayed late his last Friday to post my accounts in the computer—which I had no intention of his bothering with.

Well, Dwight no sooner had disappeared over the horizon than we learned that in addition to the two cruise-ship calls we knew about, we would have a container ship and four tankers.


* "Japan with Muriel & Don" on page 187 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*



The morning after his birthday party, Alex was out at dawn making sure that everything was ready for the 8-hour call of the cruise ship *Norwegian Majesty*. Allan, our other young man in the office, was out collecting a boarding party and entering one of the tankers. The secretary and I held down the office. Alex ran his legs off all day long.

The container ship *Hispaniola* anchored at daylight Christmas day to load as many as possible of the almost 200 containers that had accumulated here because of abbreviated calls. Belize is low man on the schedule. Whenever there are time problems, they cut our calls short or even cut them out altogether.

Happy Birthday and Merry Christmas, Alex!



Actually, Alex and I were perfectly happy about it. I assumed that the stevedores would grumble. However, when they came in to collect their annual bonuses, I was amused to find them ecstatic. After all, you can't knock triple time.

As for María, I thought she was going to expire on the spot when Alex told her the news. I simply laughed and told her we could have Christmas on the 26th or 27th just as easily. As a sales pitch it went flat. As far as María is concerned, Christmas is the 25th and that's that. I told her that Bucher and I celebrated our first Christmas together in January when his ship returned to New York late from a run to England during the War. The landlord saved the tree I bought, in the basement. He brought it up and I decorated it when Bucher called to say that he was on his way home. It was a beautiful Christmas regardless of the date.

In the end, we worked things out beautifully by opening a few presents Christmas Eve. The delightful thing was that when we finished our drinks and presents, we could look forward to another "opening" on Boxing Day, the 26th.

María invited me down to her apartment for Christmas day lunch. Her brother Elmer was with us. She broiled lobster, and I provided salad and garlic bread. With drinks before hand and wine with lunch, it made a pleasant little celebration even though Alex could not be with us.



As I said, my mind went into hibernation once the party was past. When we got together on the 26th for our traditional Christmas morning, I realized that I had failed to buy V-8 for the obligatory Bloody Marys. Later that day, I found I also had forgotten to buy butter for Alex's expected birthday cake—spice cake with butter frosting. No matter, he had birthday cake left from the party and had a New Year's cake this year. Alex finished work early in the evening Christmas night, so he was ready to start our second shift of package opening earlier than I was ready to receive guests Boxing Day morning. We had a lovely time, though coffee is no substitute for a Bloody Mary.

María and Alex invited me for Christmas dinner downstairs. Usually I contribute a couple of things, but this year they both insisted that they would do the whole thing. I was touched at the way they made the announcement. They obviously were concerned about all the work I had done for the party. Alex doesn't like turkey—mainly because it lasts too long. María had a ham with a new basting sauce that was divine. It was a pleasant little celebration.



We needed this deluge of work, but it would have been pleasant to have it timed more conveniently. The three-day New Year's holiday was exactly what I needed to recuperate after a stressful week and before another one.



Callie Young, Kate, and Carli, July 1999

Winding Down

Spring and Summer 1999

Early this year I tried to retire when Alex and I sold the major interest in our shipping agency, Marine & Services. I realized that a week full of eight-hour working days no longer was fun. However, José Gallego, the delightful young man who took over from us, insisted on my keeping the Air France agency as my own fiefdom. He said he could see how much I enjoyed it.

The idea was that the young man who has been helping me with Air France would continue so I would have the best of both worlds—enough work to keep me entertained, and hours flexible enough to dispel the stress and allow for afternoon bridge if I choose.

Guess what—that has meant full time so far.

Alex is custom-designing a bookkeeping system for me that does certain regular reports automatically, providing I have sense enough and discipline enough to put tons of information into the necessary forms in the computer. Once there, everything percolates quite nicely. However, Alex did not realize that the business does not run as precisely as he would have it do. For example, we write cash tickets, enter the information, then the passenger decides to pay by credit card. No problem as far as I am concerned, but it throws the computer into hysteria. Alex sorted that one out easily enough and expanded the program to cope in the future. He keeps asking me if there will be other exceptions to orderly procedures, and usually I can't think of any until they occur. Alex is vexed, and I'm amused. He doesn't have any trouble allowing for anomalies, but would appreciate knowing about them in advance.



May and June were busy, trying to wrap up the company books for the auditors. I was determined to turn them in before I left for Georgia to visit friends and family. The week before I was to leave, everything balanced.

I finished all the supporting schedules during the week. At 3:30 PM on the Friday afternoon before my departure on Saturday, I learned to my horror that a major component of the accounts that I thought had been balanced had not. That threw everything off. I was frantic. I knew what had happened and how to correct it, but it would take half a day. Just before I spun out, Alex told me to simply call the auditor, tell him what had happened, and say that I would turn in the accounts when I returned. I replied, “Oh no, *you* call him—on Monday.”

I did not have the expected glow of smug satisfaction I expected to have when I took off for Georgia at the end of June, but I survived.

I had been most concerned about Bucher’s sister Becky. She has had a succession of serious problems for the past five years. To my delight, she was stronger than I expected and in fine spirits. It was wonderful being with her. In Atlanta, I stayed with my dear friends Fran and Louis Bondurant. They both look ten years younger than their ages and are gratifyingly happy.

I came home to correct my books and finally turn them in to the auditors. Then I had about a week to get ready for Carli and Tom’s arrival.



In late July, Carli and Tom were here for a lovely two-plus-week visit. They came for Carli’s 30th high school reunion. Tom had a wonderful time using his new digital camera and showing the resulting pictures on the laptop computer he brought along with him for just that purpose.

Things were more quiet for the rest of C&T’s visit.

The middle of the week following the reunion, the three of us drove up to Cayo to see Callie Young. She had insisted that we come because she wanted to give Carli and me something. It was her mother’s antique amber beads, beautiful faceted things that catch the light unlike any amber I ever have seen. Callie said that their mother had the long string made into two shorter strands that could be worn separately or together. She and her sister Liz had the beads appraised, but decided they did not



Kate and Carli with Callie's amber, 1999

want to sell them. Liz has only one son, unmarried, and Callie has no children. They wanted to give the beads to someone who would appreciate their loveliness and would cherish the amber the way they themselves had done. Callie told Liz she knew exactly who should have the beads. Carli and I were deeply touched. Each of us has one of the strings, and I will leave mine to Carli so that eventually she will have both.

When we dressed for dinner the night before C&T left, we planned our outfits to show off the beads. I had a beige dress that was a perfect background. Carli had to borrow an off-white blouse to show off her amber. Tom took pictures of the beads against a plain background, then took pictures of us in all our glory with them. He will have them printed when he gets home and will send Callie two sets so that she can forward pictures to Liz.

The next weekend Alex, María, Carli, and Tom drove down to Gales Point, about two hours south of Belize City by road. It is an old-fashioned

fishing village on a tiny sand spit jutting out into a lagoon. The resort was simple but comfortable, and they had a gorgeous time.

Tom took us all out to dinner one evening. I suggested a new restaurant operated by Debbie (Tattersfield) and David Gegg. A small covered area is open on two sides to a luxuriantly planted patio set with tables here and there. The weather was unstable. I was delighted when Tom and Carli opted for a table in the sheltered area.

Not ten minutes later a ferocious storm blew in, whipping the foliage around and dumping water as if by the bucket rather than by the drop. Thunder rumbled and lightning flashed frighteningly close. Waiters moved tables and guests out of the deluge. Waitresses balanced trays of drinks in one hand while protecting themselves by an enormous golf umbrella in the other. We had about fifteen shatteringly picturesque minutes, and then the storm passed.

Dinner would have been an anti-climax, had it not been the best restaurant food I ever have found in Belize.

Carli and Tom took one of the water taxis out to St. George's Caye one day to see Sissy (Tattersfield) Plihal and her family. They had a delightful time after not having seen each other since the Seventies.



I have, as we say in Belize, “punished”^{*} with increasingly severe sciatica since I was in Japan a year ago September. I saw half the doctors in Atlanta when I was there. Diagnosis just what I expected—an incurable case of not being thirty years old. I came away deeply depressed about both my present and my future.

When Carli was here in July, she commented that I have managed to reach my 77th year without falling apart and shouldn't get excited if time starts to catch up with me.

* In this context, *punished* means *suffered*.

Welcome, Shadow

Summer 1999

Just before I was to return to Belize from my Georgia visit, Alex called me and asked, “What would you think about a third large dog?”

Tragically, the new head of the Baptist Mission across the street dropped dead in their yard with a heart attack. His wife found him a short while later. The ambulance was called. Blood was found where he had struck his head in falling on the walk. The police were called. They assumed murder and dragged the distraught new widow off to jail overnight. By the time she was released and came across the street begging Alex to take the Doberman “Shadow” they had inherited with the Manse, Alex had no option but to agree to take the dog.

Shadow was a yard dog. He never had known a collar, let alone a leash. They literally dragged the poor animal across the street with a belt. Fortunately, he has the sweetest disposition in the world. Missy immediately taught Shadow that she was the Alpha Dog. He accepted it (conditionally), probably with delight at having company for the first time in his life. Dear aging Amber was utterly unruffled at the appearance of a new member of the canine family.

Not long ago it occurred to me that there probably would be another puppy in my life eventually. It never entered my head that I would acquire a completely untrained 4-year-old animal.



It breaks my heart to see how starved for affection Shadow is. He has settled down fairly well, but at first it was painful to see his skittishness alternating with rapture at being given attention.

He was thin, not desiccated, but too thin even for a lean breed. Alex said his bowl looked as if it never had been washed. María had to soak it in suds and ammonia for hours to get it clean. At first Alex fed him

downstairs apart from the other dogs. Now I have integrated Shadow's feeding with that of Amber's and Missy's, and he is doing much better.

Missy tried to assert her control the way she has over our amiable Senior Citizen Amber, grabbing her by the scruff of her neck. I doubt that she could even feel it through her thick coat. Shadow, on the other hand, objected. We had some scary snarling sessions between Missy and Shadow—loud but brief. Neither dog actually tried to bite the other. It was all sound and fury.


I suspected that Missy was worried about being displaced in our affections. I gave her a lot of extra private attention, and I think she is reassured.



The worst part in the beginning was Shadow's marking his territory in the house. The resulting bellows of "no" with frantically flying females chasing him outdoors seem to have impressed on him that leg-lifting is not an indoor activity. We now are able to let him loose in the house without worry.

At first Shadow was easily "spooked." When he did not understand something, he put his head into the nearest corner and leaned against the wall. He was far too heavy for me to move. I had to pet and soothe and coo at him for a good five minutes before he would venture into the strange new world again. Even now I have to be careful to address him pleasantly, not with a firm command. The latter sends him into Automatic Shrinking Mode.


Once he became comfortable being in with us, poor Shadow had a terrible time trying to herd everyone into the same room. When Carli and Tom were here, someone was always wandering off into another part of the house. Then the maids were in the kitchen where he could hear them rattling around. He tried to station himself where he could keep an ear (if not an eye) on everyone.




I think the best way to civilize Shadow is to bring him in with the other dogs and let him learn our informal schedule. It seems to be working.

Alex and María have taught Shadow to sit, and I am continuing their good work. We have dozens of collars from former dogs, so Alex found one to fit him. I have tried a leash a couple of times, but it terrifies him. I hope to make myself start working regularly with him soon. Actually, in his case, I think making him feel at home and happy here is the priority. He obviously wants to please us. Other things will be easier to teach him when he no longer considers everything a threat.

We are very lucky that Shadow is such a loving, gentle dog. I never have known Dobermans and was a little worried about taking on an untrained one.



Despite their occasional differences, Shadow considers Missy his soul mate. He seems finally to have realized that surgery has made her unsuitable as a consort. I have started thinking about the two as “the twins.” Shadow is slightly taller than Missy. She is more heavily built than he. They both have gleaming black coats and similar markings, though Missy’s are far more striking. They charge up or down the stairs shoulder-to-shoulder or race across the yard haunch-to-haunch. It is a lovely sight. When a nose thrusts itself into my hand, I now have to look closely to make sure which dog is demanding attention.



Two was a very comfortable number of large dogs. However, Shadow is so grateful at being with us that I can’t possibly do anything but learn to love him, too.



Shadow, 2001

No telling when I will be able to take his picture. Shadow is terrified of a camera. He literally streaks off if any of us even brings a camera into the room. Alex thinks it is the click, rather than the flash, that scares him.

Things Will Be Better

September 1999 – New Year 2000

I knew the tour of Western canyons with my sister, Mary, and her family in September* would test my back condition. By the time I reached the Grand Canyon, I was in a wheel chair.

Carli and Tom, who joined us in Las Vegas, were deeply disturbed at the collapse of their active mother. Fortunately my niece Katy, who has had severe back problems for years, inspired Tom to discuss my case with some of his medical associates at Stanford.

I was able to get away again for a week to spend Thanksgiving in Palo Alto with Carli and Tom and had appointments with Stanford doctors



Nancy, Mary, and Ellis Robinson and Kate at Grand Canyon, 1999

* “Western Tour with the Robinsons” on page 261 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

while I was there. Upshot, I return to Palo Alto in January for neurosurgery to relieve the pressure on the sciatic nerve from bone growth that has closed up the spinal column for several inches. While I look forward to the procedure with all the eagerness with which one approaches a knife aimed at one's spinal cord, I expect to enjoy recuperating with Carli and Tom.

I really don't have much choice. I can get along on my normal routine with only moderate pain. However anything extra pretty well finishes me off. I can't lead the kind of life I enjoy, so I have to take the risk. Surgery should make it possible for me to travel again.

I am somewhat apprehensive because of my age and my history of blood clots. However, Dr. Shuer, the neurosurgeon, considers the surgery "straightforward." I'll probably sail through it and laugh at my own preoccupations.



Kate's Nativity set

In the meantime, I am gearing up for Christmas. I put the tree up this weekend, with help from María. I had confessed to her earlier that I no longer could do it alone. While she was draping the lights on the tree, Alex and María's brother Elmer were stringing lights on the veranda across the front of the house. And Alex installed new icicle lights at the top of the grills on the front windows. The job was done in no time at all, thanks to the little "bundling" gadget he bought himself last summer, which secured the lines of lights with little plastic bands.

The Italian Nativity set my mother sent for Alex's second birthday is in place on the buffet. The year is not complete until I get the beloved figures out of the same now-battered box they arrived in 49 years ago.

I feel properly Christmassy.



Since early spring I have had a succession of tiny doves nesting on a high ledge on my front porch. Number Fifteen took up residence just after New Year's.

The bird who built the nest initially became agitated whenever I came or went, but she soon realized that she was safe from me and from my two great, galloping dogs. The next inhabitant cooed at me whenever I



One of Kate's doves

appeared, to my utter delight. The others have watched us with interest but without avian comment.

I got in the habit of cooing to my doves, hoping to strike up conversations. When Carli was here in the summer, she was deliciously amused by my performance: “What do you suppose the neighbors or passers-by think of my mother when they see her on her porch, face raised heavenward, apparently talking to herself?”

You would think I would have the sense to slip into dignified dowagerhood, as befits my years!



I am the luckiest person in the world with my in-laws. Alex’s wife, María, is a joy every day of my life, kind, considerate, fun to be with. She and Alex are happy and share cooking and garden activities in a way I find hard to believe in the son I thought I knew. Carli and Tom have as happy a marriage as Bucher and I had. They are almost embarrassingly concerned about me. They make me feel completely at home when I visit, and we have a delightful, laugh-filled time together.

Back on Track

January – February 2000

From letter dated January 3, 2000

I return to Palo Alto the 18th of this month for surgery the 24th. I will be in the hospital for three to five days, then have been told to stay for six weeks before risking the arduous trip back to Central America. I feel like *The Man Who Came To Dinner*.

Carli and Tom are vastly relieved that I am switching my medical base from Atlanta to Palo Alto. Carli is looking forward to having me under her control during my long recuperation.

Assuming all goes well, I return to Belize the first weekend in March.



From letter dated January 12, 2000

I am rapidly becoming the person people would least like to be around. This happens every time I wind up for a departure. It is more extreme this time because I will be away longer than usual. I have to tie up all loose ends in my Air France operation so that Alex has no surprises when he steps in. I have to make sure that the house is supplied. I am living for the moment when the plane door closes and all my worries are beyond my control. At that point I may have time to concentrate on the reason for the trip.



From email sent January 29, 2000 to family and close friends

You have no idea how much your messages of good wishes, hopes for a rapid recovery, and suggestions for managing my recuperation have meant to me. They warmed me before, during, and after my surgery. I will write personal messages to each of you in the days to come. Meanwhile, I

hope you will accept this acknowledgement of how much support and comfort you have given me.

Carli and Tom are delightful, stern “caregivers.” I consider myself an ideal, cooperative patient. Carli not only has doubts, she manages to express them vividly when she thinks necessary.

Progress is slow—which I expected. I have had a couple of rough days with muscle spasms. The nurse who gave me my final instructions before leaving the hospital told me to expect them. I wasn’t listening, but fortunately, Carli was. Medication I was confident I would not need has helped. Meanwhile, I finally notice a slight improvement in my general strength. Not that I’m doing anything requiring strength except getting in and out of bed.



From email sent February 8, 2000 to family and close friends

Several of you have asked for specifics about my surgery. I asked Dr. Shuer three separate times to describe it, and each time he slid past the question and out of my room. Tom later described him as virtually catatonic when it comes to conversation.

Dr. Shuer is a handsome young man with an astoundingly fine reputation. He is very pleasant and concerned. But talkative, no. When I saw him last week to have my staples removed, I told him, “You are not leaving this room until you describe in full detail exactly what you did.”

The young intern who was in the room with us flew out. Dr. Shuer grinned and gave me a long medical sentence. I told him it didn’t mean a thing to me and to put it in English. By that time, the intern returned with a mock-up of a spine. Dr. Shuer gratefully took the model and showed me where he had carved away bone and possibly softer material that had been pressing on the sciatic nerve.

If you remember your anatomy, the front of the spine appears solid with bone separated by discs. The back, however, is open, somewhat as if you

crooked your fingers and spread them apart. It was obvious that the doctor could reach in “easily” to cut away bony growths as necessary. I had kept thinking that he would have to saw through the spine to get at the problem. Wrong again.

When I told the story to Tom that night, he was vastly amused at my forcing the taciturn doctor to tell me exactly what I wanted to know.



Progress report: In general, onward and upward. I crashed Thursday for no discernible reason and had to go back on medication. It lasted less than twenty-four hours. My niece Katy had warned me that this would happen, but I had been feeling that tiny bit better each day, so I wrote off her warning / advice.

Friday I was back on track. It was Carli’s birthday, and I was delighted to be here, both for myself and because Tom is in Florida for a conference. We had a pleasant day. Tom left Carli a box of See’s chocolates (to die for) and we managed to make substantial inroads before the evening ended.



As it happened, the night of the Super Bowl, we decided to order dinner from “Waiters on Wheels.” Carli has a thick brochure of fine restaurants in the area who offer food from their regular menus to be delivered. When the brightly uniformed man delivered out food, he was practically tongue-tied over the exciting game. When he learned that we had not been watching, he replayed the key points with gestures. We were in hysterics. He was absolutely delightful.


For Carli’s birthday on the Fourth, I suggested that we have a Waiters-on-Wheels dinner. The same man brought it. When Carli opened the door, he remarked, “We’ve got to stop meeting this way.” We told him how much we had enjoyed his replay of the game, and I proceeded to overtip him. When he thanked me, I answered, “We like you.”



I was determined to accompany Carli on her traditional Saturday trek. She and Tom always have breakfast at a charming little donut shop run by an amiable Vietnamese couple before doing their weekly grocery shopping at a nearby supermarket.


This was the first time I tried putting on my heavy surgical stockings when I dressed, and it was not a shining hour. It was not painful, but my incision and surrounding traumatized area felt seriously abused. As for me, once this tropical flower was encased in elastic, regular stockings, silk undershirt, slacks, blouse, and wool sweater, she felt as if she had volunteered for a straight-jacket. I suspect I walked very much like a small child encased in snow regalia.

The expedition was a pleasant venture out into the world and not especially wearying. On the other hand, I was delighted to get home, toss clothing in all directions, and resume my accustomed gown-and-heavy-robe costume. The fact that I took a long, pleasant horizontal nap in the afternoon had nothing to do with my morning exertions.



Last Sunday, when Carli and Tom had season tickets for the ballet in San Francisco, Tom's daughter, Kris, and her husband, Derek, offered to babysit me. I was delighted at the chance for a long visit with them both. Kris had planned a surprise late-birthday party for Carli with just us that evening. She topped our informal supper off with a delicious birthday cake. When Kris asked me earlier how many candles she should put on the cake, I replied, "Just enough to look pretty."

I have sat up typing this for as long as I am allowed to do and have run out of material at the same time. Lucky timing.



From letter dated March 11, 2000

My convalescence was easy, thanks in large part to Carli and Tom's warm attention. Carli was equally diligent at making me rest and at seeing that I took walks as I progressed. I loved being with them and did my best to allow them as much privacy as I could. They are wonderful hosts and delightful company. Imagine one's mother-in-law moving in for seven weeks the way Tom's did! He is a perfect dear.



My last week with Carli and Tom was hectic, with final checkups with both the neurosurgeon and the retinologist.

And then there was packing! You would think that with my being confined to the house most of the time, there would be no chance for my belongings to outgrow my suitcases. Guess again.

Think catalogues. I spent most of one day packing, and at the end, I was exhausted physically and emotionally, but was elated at my success—until I opened the closet door and found a box of miscellaneous purchases I had overlooked. I spent another day reshuffling. Back-ordered towels and wash cloths arrived at the last minute when I really didn't want them to complicate my project. I would not have succeeded without Carli's intervention. She thought of places to tuck things that never would have occurred to me.

The final complication was that I thought I was leaving on the Friday (when my flight was), but I left Palo Alto on Thursday. Carli drove me to an hotel near the San Francisco airport, where I prefer to spend my last night. I take their shuttle to the airport in the very early morning and fly all the way through on Continental. This means that I can be home the same afternoon, and I can safely check my overstuffed luggage through to Belize. Getting up at 3:30 AM is a small enough price to pay.

Tom joined us at the hotel when his plane arrived from Washington. We walked next door to one of their favorite restaurants for dinner. Mid-evening, they left me back at the hotel.



Carli and Tom insisted that I use wheelchairs on my trip home. I agreed, realizing that I could not cope with what I had to carry. Continental was helpful in arranging for me to use Frequent Flyer miles to upgrade to Business Class the whole way, so the trip was not nearly as tiring as I had feared. I considered it justifiable self-indulgence.

Alex and María met me at the airport, of course, and we talked our way back to town. Three large dogs were ecstatic to see me after my having inexplicably vanished from their world. It was wonderful to be home, much as I had enjoyed being with Carli and Tom.

I returned to a three-day weekend in Belize. Then came the shocker. I went in to my Air France desk brightly Tuesday morning, worked happily at going through the papers Alex and Dwight had left neatly organized for me, and fell apart at about 11:00. I came home, fixed a glass of iced coffee and collapsed in my recliner. I was completely wiped out. María and Alex absolutely forbade my returning to the office in the afternoon.

So that has been the pattern all week—about three hours of happy work in the morning then an afternoon of resting at home. I considered drifting into a Deep Dark Decline. However, a niece by email and friends by telephone—all far younger than I—have assured me that it had taken them six or nine or twelve months to recover full strength after surgery. I feel much better about my slow progress now.

Movie Extras

April 2000

From email sent April 10, 2000

A movie loosely based on a Hemingway story, *After The Storm*, is being filmed in Belize. I was asked to be an extra, one of a group of “wealthy ladies” on a yacht. When I stopped laughing, I agreed. How often does adventure come one’s way at my age?

I was dubious about it because it was not long after back surgery and I tired easily. I was assured that I would be needed for only five or six hours. Try twelve.

I arose at 4:00 AM so that I would have time for coffee, newspaper, and feeding the dogs before arriving at the production headquarters at 6:30. Fortunately, the set was aboard a yacht moored at the Fort George pier, and production headquarters were in a house facing Memorial Park, a block from my home. I joined a gathering group of extras. We all signed contracts giving away all rights to any present or future use of the film, including viewing on some planet in the future. I had been told that I would earn the vast sum of BZ\$35 (US\$17.50) for my efforts.

At 8:00, we were led to the end of the park where a buffet, long tables, and chairs had been set up. The food was lavish, with chafing dishes of “fry jacks” (triangular pieces of deep-fried dough), bacon, sausages, red beans, and scrambled eggs. Platters of fruit, Gatorade, and coffee were available.



After breakfast, we were taken to the Hotel Chateau Caribbean just across the side street, where a ground-floor hallway and adjacent rooms had been taken over for costumes and make-up. One by one, we were called back for our makeovers.

The movie is set in Bimini in the Thirties. We ladies all wore evening dress, long, flowing numbers in soft colors, and wigs with finger waves in front and curls low in the back. The “Yachtsmen” wore white tuxedos or white dinner jackets over pleated shirts with high winged collars. The “Card Players” wore bright suspenders that would show later when they draped jackets over the backs of their chairs. The only crewman in our group wore a high-necked white uniform with gold buttons.

Eventually, it was my turn to be fitted. The king-size bed in the make-up room was adrift with wigs of all colors. More were in a box, and two wigs were on stands on the dresser. The two women in attendance were in scruffy shorts and T-shirts and wore, strapped around their waists, tool kits with pockets bulging with a variety of equipment.

I asked for the rich red wig, but was told it was for the heroine. A black wig was held up against my face. I suggested that a softer shade was better at my age. I ended with a brown wig a little darker than my own hair, styled with a deep wave, curls at the back, and a heavy spit curl balanced on my left eyebrow. I had put on my usual makeup that morning, and they said I was all right without further attention. I noticed later that very little makeup was used on any of us.

A sturdy young woman with short black hair and enormous snakes tattooed over both arms, shoulders, and back led me to the costume room, where several long, elaborate gowns hung. The wardrobe mistress was lacing a buxom young lady into a corset of the kind my mother and grandmother wore. When her pale rose chiffon dress was eased over it, she looked a perfect Thirties. That was the only corset used for any of us. The first dress tried on me was approximately a foot too long. Next I was given a lovely pale tan chiffon gown with an elaborate, soft collar wide enough to reach down past my shoulders, delicately embroidered. The dress fitted firmly through the body then flared out into a full skirt. I was delighted with it.

I went next to get my jewelry. Arrayed on the bed of another room was what would have ransomed a king, had the gems been real—lines of

bracelets, necklaces, earrings, men's and women's rings, non-working Thirties wrist watches for the men. In the plot, the yacht sinks in a hurricane. The hero, having seen all the expensive jewelry the "Ladies," wives and companions of some shady characters, wore aboard, plans to salvage the gems. The ups and downs of retrieving the jewels is the main plot line.

I suggested a "dog collar" for myself, and the costume mistress said she had three. She held each up, and we agreed on the third, a two-inch wide lattice studded with "diamonds." I also was given a "diamond" bracelet. My own rings were considered perfect, though I wished I had also worn my blue topaz, as I considered doing.

I was told to go to the shoe truck outside to get my footwear. A giant bus with darkened windows stood by the curb. I walked around it until I found an open door. The interior looked like a tiny Belize or Mexican shop, festooned with belts, suspenders, and a mass of miscellaneous accessories. I ducked under hanging items toward the end of the bus where Caroline, engaged to Emilie Bowen's grandson Kevin, was lacing up a pair of pointed-toe ivory boots. One of the wardrobe girls crouched beyond her. Together we rummaged through boxes of the most beat-up shoes I ever have seen. I specified low heels, so we finally found heavy sandals with off-white toes and tan straps—absolute horrors, but they were comfortable and probably did not show under my long skirt.



I returned to the lounge adjacent to the hotel lobby to join other costumed members of the group. I knew Caroline and was introduced to a second American Caroline, who is here with Bruce Bowen's oldest son, Chris. Paul Hunt, one of the Card Players, is an old friend. I was seated next to Skippy Fuller's daughter and her delightful husband, one of the Yachtsmen. Laura and Steve Thompson from next door were in the group. Steve had agreed to let the film crew use his house for the bar scenes, so he and Laura were in the process of moving with their two daughters to the Fort George Hotel for the duration.

One of the group looked familiar, but I did not know him. He was an attractive, affable man of about fifty. I finally learned from his conversation that he was one of the actors in the company. His name is Arthur Nogrilla, or something similar.* He has small parts regularly, usually in gangster films, for which he is ideal with his strong New York accent. I learned later in the day (from Emory King, of course) that Arthur was a New York detective for twenty years. When he retired, he went into the movies and has worked there for nine years. He is a charming man and was especially protective of me.

The wardrobe mistress appeared with a man I had not seen. He walked by each of the Ladies, studying them, then pointed at me. I was told that I would have to give up my dog collar to someone else because she had worn it in a scene shot earlier. Back in the jewelry room I met a large actress of gracious age who apologized for the switch. She explained that the dog collar had to be taken off her dead body and assured me that I wouldn't enjoy that anyway. A lovely, delicate "diamond" necklace was found for me. It probably set off my costume better than the dog collar anyway.



There we all sat, wondering when we would be called. The man in charge, draped with earphones and walkie-talkie, stalked back and forth, looked worried, and assured us it would be another ten minutes. He explained that the scene being shot was running longer than expected. Finally, he called the Bartender, one of the Yachtsmen, and one of the Ladies, and led them off to the yacht. The rest of us continued desultory conversation that deteriorated into a series of more-or-less permissible jokes.

One of the catering crew came through with a large platter of fruit slices, artistically arranged. We all took advantage of it. Back came the three extras. They had been posed at the rail of the yacht's afterdeck watching its alleged mooring as a tackied-up local boat came alongside. The little

* Actually, his name was Arthur *Nascarella*.

launch had a flimsy superstructure from which was suspended an array of pots and pans. Suddenly the top bar broke, tossing the pans into the water. Prop men swarmed onto the little launch trying to rescue what they could. The director called for the crew to shut down for lunch.

The wardrobe mistress was not happy about our flouncing over to the park for lunch in our flimsy gowns. Those of us who had long-sleeved cotton shirts were told to put them on. Shirts were issued to the others. Off we trudged, a charming group with chiffon skirts billowing from under our shirttails. The lunch buffet was as nice as the breakfast one—rice, oven-roasted potatoes, grilled chicken, fish, mixed vegetables, and two salads. Chocolate cake for dessert. By this time, the overdue tent had been erected over the buffet and dining area to protect people from the brilliant sun.

As soon as we regathered in the hotel, one of the crew members, a pleasant black girl with shaved head and tattoos encircling both arms, came to collect shirts. She looked sternly at me and repeated her request until I thought to tell her that I was wearing my own shirt. By the time I had replaced it with my things in the locked room where we all had left shoes and bags, we were called to the set.



We walked a block, past some half-dozen giant trucks belonging to the film company, to the Fort George pier. We paraded out its length, chiffon swirling in the strong wind. The end of the dock near where the yacht was moored was a maze of cables. Sound equipment and cameras were set up there. We picked our careful way past equipment, over lines, and around crew, most of them stripped to the waist in the heat.

The yacht, *Mariner III*, is a lovely old girl, more than 100 feet in length. When *Mosquito Coast* was being filmed in Belize many years ago,* Harrison Ford chartered her to live on during the filming because he was not happy with local facilities. Paint is fresh, mahogany gleams with new varnish, posts and fittings shine as brass can do only when polished daily. All we saw of the ship was the large covered afterdeck. Equipment was set up aft. A beautiful large table was in the center of the area, with chairs around it for the Card Players. Hands already were dealt. Ashtrays and stubby glasses half-full of ginger ale were in place in front of the men. They took their seats and draped their white jackets over the backs of their chairs.

I had been told by Wardrobe to be sure to remove my glasses for the shoot. I asked one of the film-crew girls who was passing where I could leave my glasses safely. She suggested I put them in her bag. I spent the rest of the afternoon seeing “through a glass darkly.”

The Bartender took his position near the small bar at the forward end of the afterdeck. Yachtsmen and Ladies were positioned in groups along the rails. I ended up “talking with” Caroline, a lovely blond who had been transformed unsettlingly into a black-haired brunette. The director told us that I was married to the nearest Card Player (Paul Hunt), and that I was annoyed because he had been losing heavily, and I wanted to go back to our cabin. Caroline was to be annoyed with the “Sexy Blond” seated on the arm of the Gambler’s chair (Arthur) because she had been his earlier girlfriend. As a group we were given instructions:

- All is pantomime. Pretend to talk to each other, but do not say a word. The cast will have all the dialogue.
- Do Not Nod Your Head. The cameraman hates to see a lot of heads nodding in the background.

* “Mosquito Coast” on page 33

- Plan any action in the first run-through and never change it thereafter. Continuity demands that everything be done exactly the same, take after take.



“Sound—Background.” (*our cue to begin our pantomime*)

“Action.” (*cue for the actors*)

The Bartender starts with the group farther up the rail from us, all of whom accept drinks. He comes to us, and Caroline and I mouth “No, thank you” as the director instructed us. The card game begins with bits of dialogue. The Captain enters from the starboard walkway along the side of the vessel. The Large Actress staggers up to him, making a (to us) inaudible request. He listens politely then tells her he will attend to it later. She exits. The hero, Benjamin Bratt, the young detective in *Law and Order*, enters from the starboard passageway. Dialogue and business with The Gambler. Bratt exits.

It was fascinating to see how the director fine-tuned the action of the Gambler’s flipping an envelope to Bratt, handing him some cash, and Bratt’s exiting. We did the scene over and over until movement and timing were perfect.

As for this extra, I am not sure that anything but my behind will show up in the final cut. Instructions to Caroline and me were changed during revisions. Another Lady crossed from the far rail to join us, and we all turned our backs on the action to look out to sea over the rail (at a cruise ship we were agents for, which docked that day!).



We extras all trooped off the yacht and found plastic chairs on the dock to wait while the crew set up for another scene. And there we sat for a couple of hours as the sun got lower behind us, and the breeze, chillier. Arthur asked if I would like coffee, then went off to look for it. He returned to say there was none available on the dock, but that he had sent

for some. During our long wait, catering crew had passed delicious cookies, another beautiful platter of fruit, and finally, platters of sandwiches.

Arthur was called aboard for a scene. He returned as the boy arrived from the park with our coffee. I thanked him with feeling, then drank mine rapidly before the last calorie of heat vanished from it. Arthur could see that I was chilly and insisted that I take his jacket, which he was not wearing at the time. It was a blessed relief.

Four of our group of extras were called for another scene. When they emerged as light was failing, the director thanked all of us and said they were shutting down for the night. I spent an anxious several minutes searching unsuccessfully for the girl who had my glasses. Finally I cornered the camera man and asked for help. A moment later one of those shirtless young men wearing earphones located her, located her bag, and handed me my glasses. By the time I made the long and careful trip back down the pier and to the hotel, Arthur was awaiting me worriedly, hoping his jacket had not disappeared forever.

We all changed rapidly out of wigs and gowns. Have you any idea what hair looks like after having been held back by a wide elastic band, crimped into large pin curls, and crowned by a wig for most of a day? I had forgotten to bring a brush so I combed my hair as best I could with my fingers. The result looked as if it should be colored green to be in perfect style with a juvenile group of which I have no interest in being a part. I walked back past security guards and a police blockade to find my car, grateful for the growing dark.

I did not reach home until 8:30 that night. I was tired but energized. It had been a long, often boring, but fascinating day. I do not need to go that way again.



From email sent April 15, 2000

Alex and María were asked to be extras in the bar scene of the movie *After The Storm*. Our neighbor Steve Thompson had agreed to vacate his old Colonial-style house so the film crew could set up the living-dining room as a Bimini bar.

To Alex and María's dismay, they were told to show up at 9:30 PM on Thursday evening. They were among a group of some sixty extras. They had been told to wear their own shoes, dark pumps for the women and brown or black lace-up shoes for the men. Costumes were hung on long racks in the production center, where the extras could find something that fitted. The men had simple shirts and slacks. Women had Thirties cotton dresses, most of them in geometric or floral patterns. María was one of the last to get a wig. She said it was about the color of her own hair, but was utterly unkempt. It did not matter. About time for the filming to start, a cold front swept through Belize City with heavy lightening and thunder and torrential rain. Filming was postponed hour after hour until 3:30 AM, when everyone was told to go home and to meet again Friday afternoon.

The call was given for 2:30 PM. Alex and María asked to arrive later, since they lived so close to the center of activity. They arrived for costumes and wig at about 5:30 PM. This time María got a much prettier dress and a pretty wig in a strange blond shade. No matter. Like many of their friends, María never was called for one of the bar scenes. She sat patiently waiting until dawn.



Alex was called twice. He says that he thinks his back will show in one scene. The other was more dramatic. He was seated at a table off to one side with a girl. The director asked if they would like to dance. The girl agreed happily. Alex bellowed, "No way!" The director laughed at him and told him just to get out on the floor and move. Alex says that the music came from a cheap cassette player, only a few bars to get them started. Then the music was turned off, and they kept on dancing. In the

background, the musicians of the band pretended to play their instruments without making a sound.

Action involved a fight that ended with one of the characters dead on the floor. Alex described the fight, the pause for “blood” to be applied to the injured man, and for a trick knife to be fastened protruding from his chest. Alex and his partner ended up inches from the “corpse.” Alex is sure his black wing-tips will be in the movie.

Through it all, a fire engine was stationed in the street in front of the house, ready to turn hoses on the house to simulate a hurricane. Alex said Steve was lucky that the director decided against it because the force of the water would have taken out all the windows in the house. Both María and Alex said they should have taken advantage of the storm the night before to shoot the hurricane scenes.

Alex had a long time to observe the lead actor, Benjamin Bratt, and he commented on his professionalism. Several times Bratt suggested small movements “to fill dead time” or worked with other actors to smooth out complicated action or timing.



Alex and María got home at 5:30 AM Saturday morning. Alex realized that he had left their pay—\$50 per night for two nights for each of them—in the pocket of the pants he had worn in the movie. He walked back to the production office and went through the pockets of half of the pants on a long rack before finding the ones he had worn and retrieving their hard-earned wages.

Epilogue

In July of 2003, the movie showed on television. Alex was visible dancing in the rear of the barroom scene. As for me, only my elbow made it to the screen. I recognized it by the soft, beige drape of my collar.

Life Proceeds

June – October 2000

June 2000

I missed the most exciting thing to happen in ages. Alex came out to close the garage door after I left for work—eyes straight ahead—and he was alerted by loud splashing just beyond the seawall. Six manatee were cavorting in front of the house. He called María. She rapidly realized that their great leaps out of the water were a mating dance. They assumed there were three pairs, but learned later from a woman at the Fisheries Department that they it was one female and five males.

María called our major TV station, begging them to send a camera crew. They were late, arriving just in time to see—in the words of the announcer—“the departure of the horny manatee.”

(Note: It is my impression that *manatee* is both singular and plural. I have used it that way. I may be wrong.)

July 2000

Life has been pretty routine except for the annual French Embassy Bastille Day cocktail party. The French Ambassador is stationed in El Salvador, but covers Belize. She arrived with an entourage of large, brilliantly uniformed military and naval attachés. The party was in a large room at the top of the Villa Hotel, across the side street from the Fort George and now owned by it.

All was routine until lights began flickering during the official speeches. I had taken a small plate of French bread and the gorgeous cheeses these parties always offer, and was at the long bar-table at the back of the room, asking for a refill of red wine. The bartender was handing me the wine when the lights went out for good. Fortunately, I had a good grasp of my glass.

I felt my way along the table to the end. I found a little space between the edge of the bar-table and the rows of clean glasses, just wide enough for me to set down my glass of wine. I stood in the darkness and polished off my bread and cheese in obscurity.

When I finished, I picked up my glass of wine and felt my way back along the bar-table to the far wall. I eased my way along the wall, praying I would not trip over an unseen foot and that I would recognize a familiar face in the dark. I did—María's and Alex's, faintly illuminated by the tiny flame from a votive candle.

We stood for a time visiting with friends. No one in the great mass of vaguely seen black forms crowding the room appeared to move. I felt myself becoming faintly claustrophobic from the lack of air conditioning and the sense of being packed in the dark with some 150 unrecognizable bodies. I asked Alex to take me home. He and María were delighted.

There was no way we could locate and identify either the Ambassador or our host, the Honourary Consul for France in Belize, to make proper adieus. We felt our way toward the lobby. The elevator, of course, was out of service. By the light from a single bulb, we found our way to the staircase and started down. We had illumination for the first flight. From then on, we descended slowly and carefully to avoid plunging into the abyss. We met light from the lobby as we completed the five flights.

Outside the Villa, we were met by an hotel employee with a flashlight, who guided us to Alex's Trouper. I asked if the hotel didn't have a generator and was told that it had not been serviced that day.

We drove down the unlighted Marine Parade and into our dark garage. Just as Alex turned off his headlights, the power came back on citywide. We learned later that the blackout had been caused by a serious problem in Mexico. Most of our Belize City power now comes from the Mexican grid.

So much for life in the boondocks.

August 2000

I had a thrill last week. When I came home for lunch, I heard a familiar but unidentifiable noise. I discarded the idea that it was a boat. It sounded more like a fan, but there was no fan likely to be running near the front porch. The dogs and I started up the front stairs. When I got to the landing, I saw that the noise was the buzzing of thousands of killer bees swarming on the porch near my front door. I bellowed to the dogs, and fortunately, they turned and came back down instantly. With their short coats, Missy and Shadow were at risk of being killed by the bees.

I hurried the dogs into Alex's apartment for safety, then went up into my house through the kitchen. I grabbed a tin of bug spray and exhausted it aiming at the porch as best I could through the library louvers. I could see the wind dissipating the spray almost as soon as it reached the porch. However, the concentration of bees appeared to thin somewhat.

By the time we had finished lunch, the bees seemed to have vanished. Being of little faith, I went back to work through the kitchen door. I risked the front door on my return—cautiously. No bees and just a few dead ones on the deck. I hope the spray was enough to convince them that this was not a good place to establish a hive. Through it all, the little dove remained on her nest, apparently unconcerned. Either she knew that bees don't attack birds, or she was dedicated to protecting her eggs.



When the killer bees invaded Belize six or seven years ago, some settled into the decaying old building where our office then was. They built a hive between the ceiling of our back utility room and the floor above. We had the health department out several times, but they were not successful in dislodging them, so we learned to coexist. There always were a few buzzing around the fluorescent light. We kept a tin of flying-insect spray near the door so anyone could zap the bees on his way to the bathroom. No one ever was stung.

The situation went out of balance when honey began dripping down from the ceiling. We had to have the carpenters in at the same time as the health people to tear out the ceiling and disperse the bees. It was one hideous mess—wood dust, honey, shreds of wall board, in a great pile / pool on the floor. My mind refuses to dredge up details of the smell and the mess and the process of putting the office back together. Needless to say, that was shortly before we moved the office.

Not much later, a hive was established at a corner of my front porch. We tried to get rid of the bees without success. Then another swarm established their own hive. Guess what—honey in the ceiling and complete re-roofing of the entry. Same song, second mess. This time, the carpenter sealed it so that there was nowhere for the bees to get back in. I fondly hope that is one reason the new swarm left without taking up abode. I really am not in the mood for another round of killer bees.



Through all our trials with them, only one person was stung—once. Me. I was washing my underthings and thought that, improbable as it was, a straight pin must have gotten mixed in with them. When I looked at my finger, I saw the stinger. As I slushed my stockings, the dear little dead bee washed to the surface.

Last September – Early October 2000

Hurricane Keith came out of the blue. It was a minor depression off the coast of Honduras. Just before I left the office Friday noon, José came in to tell me that we had a hurricane about a hundred miles off the coast. It simply did not occur to me that it had time to build up into anything significant. The Met* Office reported that it was moving north-northwest and that it was expected to go ashore in the Yucatán.

Everything considered, Saturday (September 30th) was as pleasant a hurricane-threat day as I remember. We had power. My telephone died

* *Met* here is short for *Meteorological*.

early in the day, but aside from its preventing me from sending email, I was not inconvenienced.

By Sunday, we knew we were in for it. Our power went off briefly late in the afternoon. As soon as it came back on, not trusting it to remain, I decided to bathe while I could see. My bathroom is on the northwest corner of the house. The louvered windows do not seal tightly. A light mist blew in with each heavy gust of wind. I showered in hot water and was gently basted at the same time with a gentle spray of cold. I did not even dare leave my gown, robe, and slippers in the room for fear they would get wet.

María and Alex braved lashing winds and rain to come up to make sure I was all right.

The one charming note during the worst of the storm was having about 200 little birds perch on the grills on my living room windows. I counted them, both on the grill, mostly clustered near the top of each window, and eighty-plus of them perched on the railing. Many of them were the dear little ones with bright yellow breasts. Others were flying back and forth, in and out. When Missy saw them, she went on alert, utterly frustrated at not being able to get at the birds.

It was much less pleasant when the power went off, as the wind and beating rain increased. I never was worried about safety, but still, the noise and consciousness of the storm made it very hard to get to sleep. I became so accustomed to carrying my black umbrella into the bathroom that it stopped feeling incongruous.

Monday was less boisterous. The radio station gave steady, first-rate coverage throughout. The Met Office gave excellent, detailed reports every three hours, then answered specific questions from announcers. Lack of power was a nuisance. The high point of the retreating storm was the moment I went into the bathroom and realized that it no longer was raining in, and I could put the toilet paper back in its holder. It is not convenient having it in a sheltered location at the other end of the room.

Monday was a frustrating, wasted day. With wooden blinds closed against the rain, there was almost nothing I could do. Without power, I could not fill in time writing letters on my laptop. I went to bed with relief at 7:00 PM and slept until daylight woke me this morning.

Tuesday started out all wrong. The power was still off. I could not seem to light a top burner on the stove to heat coffee. The only matches I could find were limp and useless. I discovered that there is nothing wrong with a cup of room-temperature coffee. I went without breakfast because I couldn't think of anything that would not have involved opening a refrigerator or freezer door.

The day was dedicated to cleaning up. Just sweeping the front and back porches and stairs was a major job. My poor *Pride of Barbados* outside the front stairway was stripped naked, and the stairs were liberally decorated with tiny oval leaves. Five of María's carefully tended hibiscus bushes had been uprooted by the storm.

Every pan I own was positioned on three shower curtains in the middle of the living room to catch the water coming through the ceiling. All that had to be picked up—very carefully so as not to spill more water on the rug. Some eight bath towels and my bathroom rugs had to be put out to dry. Without power, the water pump did not work. I rather enjoyed washing dishes using a minimum of water in the way we used to do in the past.

Alex came up and did a major maintenance job on the generator. He remarked that he thought it had not been run in fifteen years. He got it running smoothly and hooked up only the refrigerators / freezers—including his own, thanks to a long, heavy extension cord. While he was up here, he checked my stove, which worked perfectly for him.

Alex gave the refrigeration equipment about an hour's worth of juice. Not long after he turned the generator off, the power came on. And then it went off. And then it came back on. It has been most frustrating. It went out again briefly a couple of paragraphs ago. Still no phone.

Another Year

January 2001 – January 2002

January 2001

My trip to Palo Alto for cataract surgery did not start well. When I cleared Customs in Houston, to leave both hands free, I slung my traveling handbag and the Dell crosswise, bandolier style, on opposite shoulders. It was a less-than-comfortable load. I hooked my wardrobe bag onto my roll-aboard and headed for the escalator down to the terminal train. The weight of the luggage nearly pushed me down two sets of moving stairs without benefit of steps, but I kept my balance by sheer willpower. I assumed that would be the end of my problems.

Not a bit of it. I sorted myself out, readjusted my hanging bags, grabbed the overloaded roll-aboard, and started down the endless corridor to the train. By the time I got there, I was cursing myself for not having called for a wheelchair. With noticeable lack of dignity, I reached the train and was surrounded by extremely large and loud Canadians, obviously all from a tour group. They pushed into the three cars. I begged them to let me board, pleading that I was about to drop. Somehow, with their help, Kate and luggage struggled aboard just as the doors closed.

Off we went, slowly, slowly. The train failed to pick up speed. We started up a short rise. Everyone was joking. I started the nursery story, “I think I can. I think I can,” and several people joined in.

The train couldn't. It stopped. Moans about missing connections. Wry suggestions that we might have overloaded the cars. I apologized that it probably was all my fault, but happy Canadians shouted me down. The train began to roll backwards. It stopped again.

The P.A. system instructed us to exit by the emergency doors. They opened onto a narrow, carpeted catwalk alongside a low wall separating the tracks from the broad corridor. I announced that I would need help. A large Canadian hoisted my suitcases as if they were as light and fragile as

a box of eggs, and another large man already on the other side of the wall took it. He waited until I had edged my way along the catwalk and out through the emergency gap onto the corridor.

Then we all had to walk to the next concourse. One of the Canadians grabbed my suitcase handle, over my protests, and took it as far as the next train station. There, the Canadians peeled off to their next flights, and I took an almost empty train on to the Hotel.

It was only a few yards to the elevator. I pressed the button for the lobby floor. Doors opened, and I did not see the reception area I expected. Three men got on the elevator. I asked if they were going to reception, and they said they were. They immediately took us to another wrong floor. By the time we finally decoded the buttons and found reception, we all were laughing so hard that it was a wonder we didn't shake the elevator clear of its cables.

They had my reservation so, in moments, the charming clerk was handing me my room key and announcing that I should go “out that door, down the escalator, and...”



Kate in Palo Alto after cataract surgery, 2001

“No way!” I exclaimed. “I need a room I can reach by elevator.” I gave her a very condensed version of my trials.

With a new room key, I set out and found that she was forced to put me on a floor that was being redecorated. The walkway between buildings and the corridor itself were piled high with furniture. No matter. I found my door and escaped into the tranquility of my room.

April 2001

Alex, María, and I were invited to the Belize Zoo reception for Princess Anne. The Princess is in Belize for a four-day visit, her first since the Eighties.

Our invitation arrived a couple of weeks ago. Alex handed it to me with a strange look on his face. I exclaimed with pleasure, then noted that it said “Kate and Alex Scott.” He and I are long-time patrons of the zoo, but apparently Alex never sent donations in as “Mr. and Mrs.” so María was not on the master list.

Alex commented, “María would kill to see a Royal!”

I thought I made it clear to him that she could go in my place, if necessary, though I intended to see that she was invited.

I called the zoo, explained the situation, and asked the flustered young woman to check with Sharon Matola, the Zoo Director and a long-time friend of all of ours. She came back full of needless apologies to assure me that María’s name now was on the list. María was delighted and told me she had given up hope of going because Alex thought I really wanted to go. I do wish my son would listen more closely. María had some unhappy moments without cause. They both should have known that I would cope.



We left home a little after 9:00 this morning to reach the zoo at the appointed 9:45 AM. The weather cooperated. A cold front passed through

Belize in the middle of the night, bringing welcome rain in our dry season. It cut the dust and cooled the air.

We expected a mob. To our delight, the guest list was pleasantly limited, with enough people to make a good show, but not so many as to make it impossible to see the Royal Guest.

We gathered just behind the Visitor's Building at the entrance to the zoo itself. The Governor-General arrived first with his Aides. Then, with little ceremony, Sharon escorted Her Royal Highness through the building and outside to where we were waiting. Princess Anne wore a simple white summer sheath embroidered here and there with flowers, flat white shoes, a high-crowned straw hat with colorful band, and of course, white gloves.

We were in the front row and had perfect views until the press cameramen pushed their way roughly ahead of us. Even so, we could see quite well and could hear Sharon's short speech.

Princess Anne appeared far more relaxed than I expected. I know the Royals all are pros at this public business, but I had thought her a rather unbending sort. She appeared to enjoy Sharon's speech, laughed in the right places, and seemed completely at ease.



Sharon announced that, in honor of the visit, the Princess would plant a mahogany tree near the cage of the red Macaws, just past where we were gathered. Sharon introduced Henry Fairweather, the 90-year-old former government surveyor who has spent his recent years planting more than a thousand mahogany trees in an effort to encourage reforestation.

When they were in position in front of the large enclosure, Sharon called to the Macaws. Lured by the nuts she held out to them, the brilliantly colored birds quickly flew to her, perching on the side of the enclosure and seeming to take a great interest in the goings-on. The Princess was entranced.

Princess Anne peeled off her gloves. Mr. Fairweather picked up the little tree, tore the bottom off the plastic wrapping around the roots, leaving

plastic circling the clump of dirt to protect royal fingers, and handed it to the Princess. She knelt down to place the tree in the waiting hole. As she did so, she turned to look back up at the watching Macaws and asked, “Did I do it right?”

Mr. Fairweather spryly shoveled dirt into the hole and stamped it firmly into place.



Guests were left behind when Sharon took Princess Anne and her entourage of attendants and Belize Defense Force guards on a short tour of the zoo. Later I asked the head of the zoo staff if the animals cooperated by emerging from their jungle-y homes so they could be seen easily. He laughed and said that the staff made sure they would. They fed the animals only half a meal the night before. Sharon carried food with her on the little tour to lure each of the animals to the front of its enclosure when she arrived with Her Royal Highness.

We retreated to one of the large rooms prepared for guests, with chairs and serving tables. Mimosas were pleasantly refreshing. I am not fond of either orange juice or champagne, but the combination is a lovely, light drink. Cheers, a nearby restaurant, had catered a light lunch, though we didn't feel like eating at that hour.

After her zoo tour, Princess Anne came into the room where I was visiting with friends. (For those of you who have been to the zoo, it was the small museum and snake display across from the cashier's cage at the entrance to the Visitor's Building.) We all stood up when the Princess entered, but as this was not a formal reception, Sharon did not introduce guests.

It was a delightfully informal morning. We all were charmed by Princess Anne. These Royal visits are interesting. Unless there is a reception line—and they are very short for such guests—one feels slightly invisible, but enjoys being part of the show.

December 2001 – January 2002

The high point of 2001 was the Christmas visit of my daughter, Carli, and her delightful husband, Tom. It was the first time in ten years that I had my whole family with me for the holidays. Carli and Tom came then to help celebrate my Seventieth birthday. This time they stayed over for my Eightieth. I doubt they will need to come in another ten years.

When Alex and María heard that Carli and Tom were coming, they decided that we must have a party to duplicate the one Alex threw for María's fiftieth birthday. The invitations asked friends to help celebrate C&T's visit, Alex's Christmas Day birthday, and my Eightieth. Alex and María stage-managed everything. All I had to do was enjoy.

The side yard bloomed with colorful marquees and balloons. The air was fragrant with the scent of barbecuing. Guests were a happy mixture of Carli's high school friends, Alex and María's friends, and my contemporaries. The weather did not cooperate, but no one cared. It didn't



Long-time friend Tom Tattersfield and Kate at her 80th birthday party

rain while the guest were arriving, and the few heavy squalls were windless, so we all were snug and dry under tents.



My life now would relapse to a gentle tempo were it not for my having succumbed to the charms of Raven, the tiny puppy we acquired after leaving Carli and Tom at the airport.

We had been waffling for a week about whether or not to take her. Raven is the daughter of our Doberman Shadow, who has had a long-standing liaison with Mallory, the Doberman next door. His behavior each time Mallory came into season was so maddening that, in desperation, I had Shadow neutered. A few weeks later Mallory produced 15 of his offspring.

With our “Notweiller” Missy and adored but aging Golden Lab Amber, this gives us four dogs. Fortunately, introducing the puppy into the tribe was not traumatic for any of them. The big dogs seem to be trying to figure out what this bouncing being is, and Raven thinks she is a big dog already.

As I settled down to sleep last night, the dogs began barking furiously—Shadow’s deep bark, Missy’s threatening volley, and the counterpoint of a high frenzy of tinny (two n’s intended) barking from the puppy. The barking continued for a full five minutes as I shook with laughter at the mental image of minute Raven’s bouncing up and down, trying to keep up with her giant friends as she matched them in warning off whatever innocent person or dog threatened to intrude on their territory.



Raven is a charming carbon copy of her father. Now she seems to add an inch each to her height and her length daily. The puppy is the delight of our lives, but a volcano of activity.



Kate taking Raven for a walk

Dog Walker

September 2003 – December 2004

From email sent September 21, 2003


I have a new project. It suddenly registered with me how sedentary my life had become. I decided that retirement was making me far too lazy. I did my regular morning exercises, but aside from normal errands, that was the extent of my activity. I always have hated walking for its own sake. Furthermore, I worry about street crime. It occurred to me that I could kill the proverbial two birds by taking two of our three dogs for walks. I doubt that the most reckless Belizean would attack me while attached by leash to a large Rotweiller-German Shepherd-Wolf (Missy) or a Doberman (Raven). So I decided to give the dogs a refresher course in heeling.

Raven, who is not that far from her early training, caught on quickly. She is a delight. We go out the garage door and walk the extent of the sidewalk, which takes us almost to the Fort George. She heels beautifully. Today for the first time, she saw a dog on the other side of the street, but a gentle correction brought her back to her normal heeling. There was a celebration in the park when we walked by today. She passed police, Belize Defense Force, and other people without breaking stride. I was delighted with her.

Missy nearly had a fit when I took Raven out the first time. I had to work with Missy in the house a couple of times to remind her about heeling. Two days ago, I gave her a test outdoors. We managed to get around the corner to our front gate before she was pulling steadily. I turned her around, and she heeled nicely back to the garage door. Each time we go out, we go a little farther before she decides to do things her way. And she always is perfect on the walk home. Before long, it should register with her that as soon as she stops heeling, we turn around and go home. I must say, though, she thinks she has done a beautiful job and is obviously proud of herself.

Poor Shadow is crushed. I brought him into the house yesterday and worked with him on heeling. He caught on, finally, and did reasonably well. I will continue with his training. However, I don't trust him. He is too strong for me, and I am afraid he would drag me down the street like one of those characters in a comic strip.

Day after day, Shadow runs up and down along the fence howling the entire time I am out with one dog or the other. He is heartbroken at being excluded.



From email sent November 16, 2003

The dogs finally got their walks yesterday after days of intermittent rain. For the first time in ages, the water pooled in the park had dissipated so I was able to take them along the walks intersecting it. Raven was pleased, Missy was ecstatic. Even Old Kate was relieved to do something other than the usual up-to-the-end-of-the-sidewalk and back.



From email sent January 20, 2004

Shadow has been inconsolable when I take the other two dogs for their walks. María says that Sunday her brother Elmer was so upset by Shadow's howling that he begged to be allowed to take him out. Permission denied.

Yesterday afternoon I kept Shadow in after lunch, put the choke chain and leash on him, and walked him around the house, repeating "heel, heel, heel" endlessly. I could not be sure that he figured it all out.

You know the old saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

'Tain't so.

This morning when I finished walking Raven and Missy, I let Shadow into the garage and put the collar and leash on him. We did a little practice

circling the cement. Then I decided what-the-h, being dragged through the streets isn't such a bad way to go.

I took Shadow out and started down the block repeating my "heel" mantra. He pulled, but not unduly. I kept him on a very short leash, right beside me, and continued to talk to him. We turned back at the edge of our lot. Twice on the way back to the house, Shadow actually let the leash fall loose, as it should. I praised him enormously, of course, each time. He seemed perfectly happy to return. My effusive praise continued.

After lunch today I did the same training routine through the house. This time, Shadow let the leash fall slack most of the time. I think he got it, I really think he got it. Can't wait for tomorrow's run (and I use that word poetically, not factually). My only problem now is deciding in which order I take the dogs out. I think I will try Raven – Shadow – Missy and see how that works.




From email sent February 1, 2004

As a survivor of two recent topplings by Shadow, I can assure you that I fall gracefully and without damage to aged self. The first fall was Shadow's fault when he darted in front of me. The second was my fault. He was walking innocently along when I hooked an ankle on one of his long, gangly legs.

Yesterday, Shadow suddenly realized that it was self-defeating to pull at the leash in excitement as we started our walk. He now heels quite reliably for the full stroll through the park. I praise him inordinately, of course, throughout the walk. Shadow's happiness and pride in his achievement are a delight to see. Most of the time I barely realize I have a dog at the other end of the leash. Nonetheless, I stay very alert while I am walking Shadow, just-in-case.

I get an enormous amount of pleasure—along with the exercise—walking the dogs. The private time with each of them is a delight. It is far more satisfactory now that Shadow is not left to grieve loudly alone.



From email sent February 20, 2004

Each day's walk with Shadow has become longer as I gained confidence in my control over eighty pounds of dog.

Today I was in the middle of my dog-walking, with Shadow heeling nicely beside me on the sidewalk alongside the park. Suddenly a tall, rangy, very black, bearded man appeared in front of me and grabbed my upper arm so hard it made bruises. He was scowling and talking rapidly but unintelligibly. I bellowed at him to let me go, in a voiced disciplined to reach the back row of a theater. The man drop his hand, possibly more scared of me than I was of him. My great watch dog, meanwhile, was cowering at my feet. I walked quickly around my attacker, Shadow happily at the heel, and continued toward home as quickly as I considered safe. The man did not follow me.

You remember my saying that I couldn't imagine anyone attacking me while I had one of the dogs by my side. Guess who miscalculated!

I came home, told Alex, and bravely went out again with Missy. This time I was watching for the man. When we reached the corner I could see him sitting on the steps to the grandstand. I took Missy into the park, but stayed on the northern walk, well away from him.

I told my housekeeper, Jean, and cook, Betty, about my "incident." Without my knowledge, they walked up to the park to see if they could identify the man. They did. They referred to him as "El Loco." The reason he looked familiar was that he wanders around the area with a trash bag, scavenging. They asked the security guard at the Taiwanese Embassy if he had seen the incident. He said he had not, but was very concerned. He and I have become casual friends as I walk past with one dog after the other, day after day. He agreed that the man was crazy and probably lived under the grandstand.

I suspect I am less, rather than more, reassured to hear that the man is loco.

I telephoned the police and made a report, emphasizing that I had not been hurt. The main reason for the police to look into the matter is the safety of all the tourists who wander through the park or up the street when the cruise ships are in.

The policewoman asked if I had notified the Tourist Police. I told her that I hadn't seen one around here for ages. She was horrified. I begged her not to let them know who had reported their absence, and she laughingly assured me that she would not. The police are very concerned with the welfare of tourists, so I feel quite sure that they will follow this up.

I see people sitting on the steps of the grandstand from time to time, but my usual track is not near them. Usually they are young men or women, and we wave back and forth as I start back home on the sidewalk past the grandstand. I do not remember ever having seen this man in the park before, but you'd better believe I will be watching in the future. I doubt that I was in any danger, but it was scary.

At least I am not vegetating in my Declining Years.



From email sent February 21, 2004

I feel fairly sure that the police will move my "friend" away from the park. Tourism is big business now, and the authorities are doing everything possible to facilitate and protect visitors. In the first place, after my report and the way it was received, I am sure that the Tourist Police will come back to this area. That will be a big help. We used to have an officer stationed at our corner. He disappeared as construction on the boulevard advanced.

As for a companion on my walks, I have the dogs. I think I did poor dear Shadow an injustice in my report yesterday. Everything happened so quickly that I did not see him when the man grabbed me. I strongly

suspect it was my bellow that made Shadow cringe. He was useless as a guard dog, but may not have appeared so at the critical moment. No one in his right mind would get near me when I have one of the dogs. It took a “loco.” And I don’t think he will be around.

I shall be especially alert, although I thought I already was. This man obviously came out of the park through the entrance near the grandstand as we passed. Until now, there has not been a threatening person in the park. Most of the time no one is there. Occasionally one or two people are sitting on a bench. Quite often, a young man or man and girl are at the front of the park sitting on the grandstand steps facing the sea. Children ride bikes in the park once in a while. The cleaning crew cuts grass and sweeps up. I recognize most of them and wave or exchange a few words. For the most part, the park is a benign place.

These walks mean a lot to the dogs and to me. It will take a lot to make me stop them.



From email sent December 30, 2004

You may remember that after long consideration of its tackiness, I ordered a Santa outfit for one of the dogs several years ago. I tried it on Missy, and she was ecstatic. She adores it and makes certain that the other two dogs respect her position in the family society.

Christmas afternoon, I took the dogs out for their walks and dressed each of them, in turn, in the Santa outfit. They all accepted it happily and caused pleasant commotion among passersby.

On the Boulevard

March 2003 – October 2004

March 2003

Marine Parade, the street in front of my house along the sea, is being made into a boulevard. Acquaintances visited from out of town this week. We had our drive around the city and came back to the house. Despite the wind, the veranda was pleasant. Thank goodness the machines were not working on our stretch of the new boulevard.



Filling on the sea side of the new boulevard progressed from opposite directions and finally met in front of my house. Yesterday a new machine worked for a couple of hours destroying the seawall that sticks up between Marine Parade and the rough rock fill. Quiet it was not. They finished only a few yards and apparently have gone off elsewhere to torture other residents today.



Wednesday it happened. We had very strong winds from the southeast with a high tide. When I looked out that morning, Marine Parade, Hutson Street, and my yard were flooded with golden muddy water. The new fill for the boulevard was almost completely under water. Waves washed over the rocky fill, past where the sea wall had been demolished, and into the street.

The next day, work began on a deep drain between the pavement and front fences. The walls of the trench are reinforced with concrete-block walls. It looks as if the drains will be topped by a sidewalk. This is all very nice, but I have yet to see a drain line from the new trench under the road and fill to the sea.

At this point, I am terrified that they will decide to build all of Marine Parade a foot or so higher than it now is, which would drain rain and high tides directly into my yard.



All the equipment used in the street-widening project has complicated traffic in our block of Marine Parade. Thursday I pulled out of my garage and turned onto Marine Parade as usual. Halfway down the block, a huge cement mixer and some other machine stood side by side, completely blocking the street.

I backed up and temporarily parked crosswise in my driveway. Meanwhile, two other cars had come down Hutson Street behind me. The policeman stationed at the corner to prevent people from using the unpaved extension of Marine Parade, came over to my car to tell me in an ugly voice that I could not drive up Hutson Street the wrong way.

I explained politely that Marine Parade was blocked. He denied it. I asked him to look again to assure me that it was open. He stalked off to deal with the other cars. By then one of them was backing up after not being able to get past the equipment. I decided to hell with him, whipped up Hutson, and turned left legally onto Eyre Street a block away, to cut back to North Front Street by Mirab's. We have had a lovely, friendly policewoman on our corner for days. It is too bad (for me) that she was replaced by a son-of-a.

At lunchtime, Alex grinned broadly as he presented me with two traffic tickets left by the unpleasant officer with whom I had tangled that morning. Alex said that when he returned to the house mid-morning, the policeman followed him into our garage brandishing the tickets he had issued to me and ranting about my misbehavior. Alex said he tried to defend me to the constable, but it was wasted effort.

While I feel (somewhat) justified, the tickets detail actions on my part that I can't deny—going the wrong way on a one-way street and deliberately disobeying the order of a police officer. Friday afternoon I paid \$525

apiece for my two tickets. I commented to the cashier at City Council that while I had done what the tickets said, it was only because the street was completely blocked, and that the constable was extremely rude when I tried to talk to him about it. She was very sympathetic and indicated that this was a familiar story.

Needless to say, I shall be meticulous about my driving behavior in the future.

April 2003

The construction gang finished work along the street on my side of the garage before they stopped work Thursday noon for the Easter holiday. The new concrete is covered with plastic to protect it as it dries. Meanwhile, I am leaving my car on Alex's side while they are away because I don't want to risk driving over nails in the boards the men used to demarcate the edge of the new concrete on the apron.

It is restful not having any machines rumbling and screeching for a few days. However, the dust continues to blow in, so I spend half my time dusting. The weather is sufficiently cool for me to keep the living room windows closed. However, I spend most of my time in the bedroom and have to keep the louvers open.

May 2003

The new lane of the boulevard from the Hutson Street corner to the park actually shows signs of progress. The fill has been leveled. The seaside edge is lined with two-foot-diameter rocks / concrete blocks holding the upper edge of black plastic intended to act as a seawall.

I have my doubts. I double-checked with Alex and verified that the correct way to do a roadway like this is to build the seawall first, then fill in behind it. He says the supervisor told them they are having to use twice as much fill as originally planned. Of course they are. The stuff slips happily off into the sea as the dump truck deposits more.

Today, for the first time, a compactor was run back and forth all day long on this part of the roadway. Nothing was done about the new mountain of huge blocks along the street to the north of our corner.

When work finally is completed, I may actually miss the endless speculating about why they are doing what they are and why they aren't doing what I think they should.



You have no idea what an ordeal this dry season has been. Not only did great machines deposited tons of rock and dirt along Marine Parade for the new boulevard, but successive massive yellow monsters crawled back and forth over it day after day, kicking up red dust. Our lovely winds carried it hither and yon, playing no favorites.

Dust married the salt spray on the front windows to make them opaque. In desperation, I had my occasionally-available helpers, Elmer and Eugene, spray them down from the veranda. The resulting mud drained down the lower front of the house. A shovel would be more appropriate than the hose to wash off the deck.

The entire inside of the house had a light layer of dust. Everything I touched felt gritty.

When the first downpour broke The Dry yesterday, strangers greeted strangers joyously on the street, in relief at the rain.

July 2003

Last week, a bulldozer moved in and scraped up the carefully leveled, compacted, and steamrolled stretch of new lane from the park to north, beyond Hutson Street. It built a ten-foot-high mountain of the discarded fill that so carefully had been applied to the new construction. The next, day dump trucks carried the mountain away in one noisy trip after another.

A couple of days later, trucks arrived with new fill that was spread evenly along the denuded stretch. When that was leveled, the steam roller

reappeared to pack it tightly. I don't know what you think, but I suspect the most untrained person could have done a more efficient job of organizing this construction.

August 2003

A trench hoe has been progressing to and past my home for a couple of days, digging a trench for the seawall. I need to ask Alex about the engineering efficiency of this. My idea is that a seawall should start at the sea bottom and project above the adjacent land, covering the face of the land's edge from top to bottom. This one is set into a trench a foot or two deep, four or five feet in from the edge of the new fill. In my view, that leaves the entire new lane protected from the undercutting action of the sea by only a fragile sheet of black plastic extending into the water and held in place by large blocks of cement from the former seawall.

Why don't people ask me for my advice before they dash off on inefficient multimillion dollar projects or decide how to run a country?



The new seawall is so high that it blocks the view of the water completely for all but the highest vehicles. I am heartsick. We never have seas or waves high enough to need a wall this high except in a hurricane. Under those conditions, I predict that the storm would undercut the road, knock down the alleged seawall, and send slabs of concrete careening into my home.

Day after day I see my adored sea view banished from sight. Fortunately my home is high enough for me to see over the monstrosity from my windows and veranda. My only hope now is that when the new boulevard is completed, the government will install "sleeping policemen" (speed bumps) to prevent its becoming a speedway.



The new seawall now is well past my home. It changes, but does not really disturb, my view from inside. However, it is so high that instead of

a lovely sea view driving along Marine Parade, now all I can see is a concrete wall.

Returning home, my heart used to lurch with pleasure as I turned down either Hutson or Park Streets because of the expansive view of blue water and distant cayes. Now when I turn, I am faced with blank grayness.

February 2004

Just this week, they began in our block on the original Marine Parade (the boulevard lane in front of my house). Layers of dark, messy, rocky dirt were dumped, spread, scraped up, and half of it carted away again in dump trucks. Today, a layer of well broken rock has been laid and rolled.

When I took Raven for her walk, the roller met us part-way down the block. Raven spooked slightly, but stayed close to me. To my amusement and Raven's horror, the roller backed up and kept pace with us as we finished walking to the embassy corner. A layer of fine gravel comes next, then scraping, taking up excess material and carting it away, rolling, and finally spraying with black stuff. Meanwhile, traffic is directed to the far lane (along the sea), already finished to that degree.

July 2004

In reply to your question about what the government plans to do with the median on the new boulevard, I still don't know, but they are starting *noisily*.

I write to the accompaniment of a jack hammer. From what I can see, they are breaking up small rocks in the middle of the two curbs forming the median. No idea what this portends, but I hope they finish this stage soon. This is sound I notice!

August 2004

I write to the accompaniment of several of the large machines whose absence I had appreciated.

The good news is that—allegedly—the boulevard, though not finished, will be open for traffic by the end of the month.

The bad news is that the contractors found their pseudo-paving did not hold up in the tour-bus parking area opposite the park. They dug up the surface and some of the fill, ran the roller to smooth it, laid down heavy plastic over the entire area, topped it with steel mesh, and are pouring concrete over it. From my dog-walking vantage point, it appeared to me that the concrete was too thin a layer.

The last couple of days, a backhoe has been digging fill out from between the concrete walls of the median. Dump trucks haul the fill away. I assume they plan to fill the median with black dirt* and do some planting eventually. They also have dug out some of the fill from the curving verges near the park. A great pile of black dirt was dumped near them. All this work may be noisy, but it may be worth it.

September 2004


The boulevard was not opened to traffic by the end of August. However, our part was resurfaced with tar / asphalt and pea gravel. I noticed that Hutson Street, from the end of our little sidewalk to the boulevard itself, was a sea of black. It was near lunchtime, so I walked out to ask the foreman how long it would take to set. I was worried about Alex and María's getting home.

The foreman smiled and assured me it would take only thirty minutes. Then he suddenly called forcefully, "Mind, mind, mind..."** I turned and saw the tar tanker was backing up toward me. The long dispenser was inches away. I was standing in the exact spot where—moments after my leap to safety—the driver began spraying the black goo.

My dog walks were abbreviated that day because the street between our block and the park was being tarred. Again, the dogs seemed to enjoy watching the work and didn't mind being led home early.

* *Black dirt* is rich loam for planting.

** *Mind* in this context means *be careful* or *look out*.




The completed boulevard is lovely. I still think the wall is too high, but it isn't as bad as I thought before they raised the level of the street. The median and various planters bristle with plants that will be lovely as they grow.

You don't need details of the to-do over renaming Marine Parade. It was to have been named *Javier Berbey Boulevard*, in tribute to Javier Berbey García, the Panamanian developer who envisioned the boulevard. I had argued to keep the name *Marine Parade*, which I love. To me, it is romantic and slightly archaic. (I also suspect cruise-ship passengers who stroll along the new sidewalks will feel the same way.) In what I consider a nice little compromise, they instead dedicated the major roundabout to Javier Berbey García and renamed our street *Marine Parade Boulevard*.

October 2004

On balance, I am delighted with the new boulevard. I still regret that the view of the sea from my living room is not as "right in my lap" as it used to be. And I miss my view of the sea when it is blocked by the higher seawall. Traffic noise has increased, partly because of the tar-over-gravel surfacing. Some nights cars, often two or three together, park on the far lane, turn radios up at top volume, and have noisy parties. They easily could go north the equivalent of a block and enjoy themselves away from any homes where people might be trying to sleep.

However, I love seeing families perched on the wall enjoying the view and breeze. It is pleasant to watch the numbers of early-morning joggers and walkers on the sidewalk alongside the seawall. It is a pleasure to drive the length of the boulevard, bypassing crowded streets. When we have a storm, as inevitably we must, the extra width of the boulevard and the height of the seawall will offer somewhat more protection than we used to have.



Yesterday was the formal opening of Marine Parade Boulevard. To his amazement, midweek two men from City Council called on Alex to ask him to speak at the ceremony.

I wish you could have heard him. He did a beautiful job. He admitted in the beginning that he was no public speaker, then went on to give an entertaining, informative, often amusing talk. Afterwards, a surprising number of people came up to congratulate him. One of the sisters from St. Catherine's spent quite a while talking to him and asked for a copy of the speech.

The ceremony was nicely done. A small stage and lectern had been set up at our end of the bus park, and rows of chairs arranged for guests. Speakers were the mayor, Alex, a representative from the contractors, and the prime minister in that order. The weather cooperated—cloudless sky, but a pleasant wind to moderate the temperature. The ceremony started almost on time around 4:00 PM, and we were home by 5:00.

Bits and Pieces

2002 – 2007

October 2002

Let me tell you about my life on an island. The last three days have been noteworthy for the highest tides I ever remember. The streets on both sides of the house are under several inches of water morning and evening. The sea water creeps all the way up to the bottom back step and floods parts of the yard.

Today, in addition to the usual morning flooding, we have had a heavy rain storm. Alex called me a few minutes ago to say that the water in the garage is up to my hubcaps. Under the house, the pallets that form the dogs' beds are floating.

10:40, Alex called again to mention that before the tide began going out, the water on Marine Parade had reached the level of the seawall. On Alex's side of the garage, it was up to within a half inch of the doors of my Dodge, parked in front of his Trooper. That side of the garage is a couple of inches lower than my side of the garage.

I just looked out and find that the streets suddenly are dry. And the rain has stopped.



Next week, Jimmy Murphy will go to the States for medical attention following a recent heart attack. Regardless, he insisted on playing Duplicate Bridge last night. The only difference was that he let someone pick him up to go to the Fort George, and the Turnell's chauffeured me. I have known Yvonne and Victor Turnell for years through business; in recent years, we have become friends at Duplicate.

Jimmy seemed pretty much normal. He said that he was able to concentrate better than he had at an afternoon bridge game the day before.

Yvonne Turnell now is in charge of Duplicate. She cut down on the number of hands played so we would finish fairly early.

Even so, by the end of the evening, Jimmy obviously was tired. I had dreaded having to stay late while Yvonne and Ian McIntosh tallied all the little individual sheets for each hand to calculate scores. It is a complicated business. Bless Victor, he insisted of driving both Jimmy and me home as soon as play ended so that we did not have to hang around. The Turnells are exceptionally thoughtful friends.

December 2002

We had our Duplicate Bridge Club Christmas party Thursday night. We all contributed bocas, wine, and a present. The room the Fort George gave us had a large Christmas tree, beautifully decorated, to help set the scene. More that the regular number of people came, as is usual for our annual party. It was a delightful evening.

On the other hand, it was almost midnight before Jimmy brought me home. For some reason I could not get to sleep—overtired or overwired. Friday was an exceptionally long day.

January 2003

María and Alex's birthday gift was an excursion to the Belize Zoo with lunch afterwards at Cheers. Today the weather is gorgeous, cold and windy but bright and sunny. Thanks to the weather, more of the animals were out prowling than usual. The black jaguar was sitting on the edge of her pool, accepting the admiration of her gallery. Alex got some beautiful pictures. Later we saw her again, strolling alongside the wire of her enclosure. She is a magnificent beast. We did not see the male jaguar. When we ran into Sharon (Zoo Director) on our way out, she told us the black jaguar loves attention and poses by the hour; the male loves to perch in a tree. It did not occur to any of us to look upwards in search of him.

We were walking out the front door as Sharon strolled up with a small hawk perched on her gloved hand. We all were startled to see each other.

She was delighted to hear that the visit was in honor of my birthday. She thought it highly appropriate. She was furious that we had not called to say we were coming so that she could have laid on something special and given us a guided tour. She has urged me to do that other times, but I hate to impose on her. Sharon protested that it would be a pleasure, rather than an imposition, and insisted on pledges in blood.

We proceeded to Cheers. They have doubled their seating space with a second open-air section beyond the original one. María was so entranced by the large display of plants lining the dividing low partition that she hardly could eat. I knew we would never get her out of there without a plant in hand.

The daughter of Cheers' owner is the plant guru. María went wild over some orchids she doesn't have. A man walked off with the one she was eyeing, but she decided she didn't need it anyway when she heard it cost \$60. She had difficulty deciding between two orchid plants, but finally chose a charming imported one with long stalks covered with tiny variegated blooms. I surprised her by buying the other one for her, a local feathery white one and less expensive.



A few minutes ago a beautiful floral arrangement arrived from Jill and Mick Bell. Jill never forgets my birthday.

This has been a lovely birthday. Now I can concentrate on getting ready for my trip to visit Carli and Tom.

July 2003

The week started out nicely with another traffic ticket. This one was for driving an unlicensed vehicle. I was blissfully unaware that my license expired in June. I have warned Alex that he must be far more protective of his rapidly aging mother.

Fortunately, the policeman who stopped me was a perfect dear. Obviously he came from a fine Belizean family of the old school, because his

manners would have pleased my grandmother. I was horrified at my error, apologized profusely, and thanked him for notifying me of my lapse. He was equally apologetic as he explained that he had to issue a ticket. I replied that I expected him to. I had broken the law. We had a fine little conversation as the ticket was written, and I drove off to relicense my car before another officer caught me.



I was driving about four miles per hour down Queen Street on my way home. A Spanish man on a bicycle ahead of me was wobbling all over the street. I pulled over to the left as far as I could on the narrow street to ease past him. Just as I pulled even with him, the man turned his head, saw me, appeared startled, and fell over on his bike. I did not hit him, and he did not hit me. The falling bike, however, hit a passing woman who took temporary umbrage before stalking off.

I stopped instantly, pulled into the Angelus Press loading space, got out of the car, and went over to the bicyclist who was sprawled on the pavement with his bicycle on top of him. He complained that his leg was hurt. A policeman appeared by magic and questioned the man in Spanish. We pulled the bike off the rider and settled him back on his feet.

I told the policeman that the bicyclist was riding erratically, and that I had startled, but not hit him. The bicyclist, meanwhile, had told the officer in Spanish that I hit his back wheel and repeated that his leg was hurt. There was no sign of damage to either my car or the wheel, but the policeman obviously chose to believe him rather than me.

The officer fatuously explained to me that bicycles have as much right as cars on the street. I agreed, but asked if riders did not have a responsibility to stay on their own side of the street and proceed in a straight line. The policeman agreed that I was right, but added that since I was the one in a car, the fault was mine.

The policeman asked the rider if he wanted to prefer charges. The reply, to my great relief, was “No.” The policeman then told me I must take the

man to the hospital and wait until a doctor examined him to see if, at that time, he decided to bring charges against me.

I agreed without hesitation. The policeman and rider loaded the bicycle into the trunk of my car where it protruded by the diameter of a wheel. I helped the bicyclist into the front seat, thanked the policeman, and drove off.

We were hardly past the police station when my injured passenger said that he did not want to go to the hospital, but wanted \$50. I was furious at being blackmailed because I had suspected from the beginning that the fall might have been deliberate. I was equally relieved, however, at not facing the rest of the day in the molasses-slow hospital emergency room. It was almost lunchtime, and I had bridge scheduled for the afternoon.

I drove home to get the money. On the way I happened to glance over at my passenger. To my horror I saw that he had unzipped and partially pulled down his pants to show me where his leg was hurt. I saw nothing but white thigh before frantically averting my eyes. He was a quiet man and the action, though unwelcome, was innocent.

I left the man in the car while I went in to explain the situation and borrow \$50 from Alex to save myself a trip upstairs. Alex said I should take the man to the hospital, but to me, it was worth the money to get rid of him.

I went back to the car and paid the man off. We retrieved his bicycle, and he pedaled off happily.

That afternoon I told the story to Ann Crump and Jimmy Murphy when we were driving to bridge. Jimmy agreed with Alex and said that if it had been he, he would have sat at the emergency room for a week before paying his alleged victim a cent.

Ann said she had a similar experience at the intersection of Freetown and St. Thomas Streets. A Spanish man on a bicycle sped out of St. Thomas. Ann pulled as far over as she could, trying to avoid him, but his handlebar hit her car and made a dent. Ann's fallen bicyclist yelled, screamed, and threw his arms around in proper Spanish hysteria. To shut him up, Ann

gave him \$50, which was the only bill she had in her wallet. He apparently decided it was a good deal.

I accused Ann of setting the scale for deliberate bike accidents.



You know that, for years, I have talked of Ian McIntosh, the delightful Jamaican who moved back to Belize with his Belizean wife a couple of decades ago. He took me in hand and forced me to sharpen up my bridge.

Ian is home recuperating after bypass surgery in the States. He can't drive yet, so we are taking bridge games to him. Much to his dismay, we limit the length of time we let him play. I'm one of the most vocal at giving Ian orders. I was amused last Wednesday when Charlie Hyde told me that on their drive out to Ian's, Jimmy had informed him, "Kate is in charge!"

Our regular Wednesday bridge, the fun-plus-learning session, is this afternoon. I probably will let us play for a total of 2-1/2 hours today. We have increased time steadily since the first one-hour-only game during Ian's recuperation. I learned from a mutual friend, whose husband had bypass surgery, that I must stop Ian in the middle of our games to make him have something nutritious to drink (despite his protestations).

Ian obviously is healing well and is gaining strength. We all have been scared out of our wits about Ian for a long time and are relieved to know that he's had the necessary surgery and to see how well he is recovering.

August 2003

No Duplicate last night. Yvonne Turnell could get only five players. Several regulars were on holiday, and others had prior commitments.

The Turnells have become close friends through bridge. They already have a nice home in Lulling, Louisiana, outside New Orleans, and talked about moving for good after they sell their business in Belize. I have been dreading the day.

Today when I called Yvonne, she said that Victor has announced that he never wants to leave Belize. They probably will continue their present schedule of regular trips for a few weeks to Lulling. I was greatly relieved.

One of the produce shippers with whom Turnells do business regularly gives Yvonne leftover fruit and vegetables. She supplies Jimmy with a box of papaya almost weekly. Today she said she was sending me some avocado. Next week I will get breadfruit.

The funny one was the time the shipper gave her what she described as 100 pounds of peppers. My mind went to green peppers so I said I would take a couple off her hands. Yvonne frantically explained that they were habaneros, and that she had no idea what to do with all of them. I took enough for Betty to make a nice batch of her hot sauce.

My favorite of Yvonne's offerings was the spaghetti squash. At one time, she kept me supplied the entire season. Yvonne told me today that the farmer who grew them went out of business, but that someone intends to plant them for next season. Fingers crossed.



I have begun going to the Tuesday morning communion service at St. John's Cathedral. It is a pleasant service, with a congregation that is primarily old crones like me. When I attended in the past, there was no singing. Now we are faced with half-a-dozen hymns no one seems ever to have heard of, judging by the quality of the wobbly warbling. On the post-Communion hymn Tuesday morning every voice quavered out except that of the woman minister who bravely finished the first verse before giving up.

After the service, I told Father Neal that we most certainly were not "making a joyous noise unto the Lord." I suggested cutting out the hymns in view of the fact that most of us did not know the hymns, could not read music, and could not sing.

Father Neal explained that he was hoping to encourage happy music during the services. I made the injudicious comment that as a committed Episcopalian, I thought the music of the Anglican Communion was pretty sorry, though there were some lovely old hymns that everyone enjoyed. He agreed. He also indicated surreptitiously that it was his assistant who selected the hymns for the services.

The woman minister (whose name I didn't catch) stopped me before I left and said that she asked the congregation for suggestions for hymns and would love to have me offer some ideas. It ended up with my bringing home a hymnal. I shall go through it, pick out singable favorites, and type up a list for her to choose from.

How do I get myself into these situations when all I intend to do is sit quietly in my pew and make up for all the times I did not go to church?

September 2003

This year is the half-century anniversary of the Fort George Hotel. A charming young woman named Lucy Williams is preparing a brochure in celebration. She called me several weeks ago, asking for information about our staying there in the early days. At her request, I met her this morning for a delightful hour of sharing memories about the Fort George.

She showed me the fine selection of photographs she and associates were able to dig out from the government archives in Belmopan. Most of them are from postcards issued by Angelus Press. She has them all in her computer, which made viewing easy.

Lucy promised to let me see whatever she writes from our discussion so I can make any necessary corrections. I found a couple of errors in what she had written from our telephone conversation. She is easy to work with and probably will do a nice job on the brochure.

October 2003

In October, Carli and Tom met me in Sarasota to help me go through things I had in storage for years. To our uncomprehending dismay, all the

things I had been paying rent and insurance on since the beginning of time had been stolen. It was a crushing discovery both emotionally and financially.

November 2003

For the first time in (literally) decades I am having a turkey. Alex does not like turkey, primarily because it does not disappear from the menu for weeks after its initial appearance. Also, he is not much on holidays. When we first came to Belize, no one but the handful of Americans here celebrated Thanksgiving. Through the years, as airline connections and TV brought Belizeans closer to the U.S., more and more people here adopted the holiday. It is not a public holiday still, of course, but there is quite a lot of celebrating after work.

To my amusement, I found that Thanksgiving means a lot more to María than it does to Alex. She always has asked me to have roast chicken for our midday meal. This year, I thought she deserved a proper Thanksgiving, even if it is a rather hasty one because of her office schedule. I went into action early this morning to do the dressing and get my modest turkey ready for the oven. It went in at 9:30.


This will save my roasting a turkey for myself on Boxing Day. For many years, María has fixed our Christmas dinner. She always serves ham in deference to Alex. I want my turkey to snack on through the holiday and for the leftovers I try to disguise so Alex won't recognize them. Having had a turkey so recently, I will not feel the need to fix my lonely one later.

December 2003


Our Christmas was traditional—Christmas Eve drink in my house, presents in the morning, and Christmas dinner downstairs with María's baked ham. All very relaxed and delightful.

The only activity I have planned for this four-day holiday is Debbie's surprise party for her father and our long-time, dear friend, Tom

Tattersfield, on at 1:00 PM Sunday. Tom will be 90. All three of us are invited. Debbie said she is keeping it very small, just close friends.



While I don't think presents are in order for Tom today, I went through all my photo albums looking for family pictures. I found only four of Lia. I took them to Jeremy Spooner. He cropped, brightened faded old prints, and enlarged them so that I have four equal-size photos of my dear friend. The only way I could think of to mount them was on one of those plastic-covered black pages intended for 3-ring binders. The pictures are fuzzy, of course, but I think Tom will be pleased.



Let me tell you about Tom Tattersfield's birthday party. The big surprise for him was the arrival of his older daughter, Sissy. She flew over from Guatemala that morning and went back the next day.

Debbie had told me it would be just a small group of close friends. By the time we arrived, her guest list had grown to about thirty.

The catered luncheon included turkey, roast stuffed pork, saffron rice, mashed potatoes, steamed mixed vegetables, and three desserts: a towering mocha cake that Tom cut himself under Debbie's guidance, pumpkin pies, and tiny mince pies.

Tom has problems, but his mind is bright. We had a sprightly conversation before the party broke up around 4:30 PM.

It was a thoroughly delightful afternoon. Tom, in his retiring Guardsman's way, was pleased with the attention. It was a happy group, most of them old friends of different generations.

January 2004

The reason you have not heard from me in days is that my email connection died Friday. I was utterly perplexed. It had worked normally a short time before. I kept getting "no dial tone" messages. I checked every

connection repeatedly for thirty or forty minutes before giving up. I thought that the line connecting the modem to the surge suppresser might be bad. I have had trouble with that connection in the past.

It was late Saturday, when I tried to call Jill Bell to thank her for the gorgeous birthday flower arrangement she had sent, that I found my telephone was dead. Why checking the phone didn't occur to me earlier, I have no idea. Signs of age. Next time...

This morning the telephone crew arrived, so I am back in the world of instant communications.



I had a lovely birthday. Alex and María took me out for lunch to a new place at Mile Fourteen on the Western highway. The name is Gran's Farm. It covers many acres, much planted with fruit trees and ornamentals, more left in its natural state with wide, surfaced nature trails through the bush. A raised swimming pool had attracted several children. The main area was on a raised deck with an open buffet and separate open bar on one side and picnic tables with benches under canvas shade on the outer rim.

The couple who have developed it are a local dentist and a young woman María met years ago when she worked for a nursery / landscaper. Mrs. Usher now has her own nursery on part of the farm. She walked with us as we followed the boardwalk down to Hector Creek, a short walk through the bush. Trees were alive with orchids. I was amazed at how minute the plants are when they first attach themselves to a tree.

María and Alex each had escabeche. I had delicious barbecue. It is a delightful place.

February 2004

We just have had a delightful visit from my nephew Scott Bryan. He has spent a week with about sixteen friends from Columbus, Georgia, scuba diving at Turneffe Reef. Scott called me on Thursday afternoon to ask if it

would be convenient for him to come by Saturday morning. Of course, I was surprised and delighted. He said he had a little free time. I did not have sense to ask who was with him, how many, and if he could stay for lunch. In the absence of information, Alex said the easiest thing would be to take him out for lunch if he could stay.

Yesterday (Friday) I went into a panic of housekeeping, of course. I knew that it wouldn't register on a man, but it mattered to me.

Scott arrived at 9:30 this morning, a bit earlier than he had expected. María and Alex just had dashed off on a quick run to Ro-Mac's for their weekly shopping. That gave Scott and me a pleasant time to catch up.

Alex and María returned fairly soon. We all had a delightful visit on the veranda. I did not comment, but even I thought it was too warm until a slight breeze picked up.

Scott had to meet his group back at the marina of the Princess Hotel (formerly Ramada) by 1:00 PM. Alex suggested we go to the Calypso, the informal restaurant by the marina. We had a very nice, leisurely lunch. Midway through it, Scott's trip companions arrived. They had gone up the road intending to do the inner-tube drift through the river. The van had a flat tire. By the time it was fixed, it was too late for their excursion. Two of the women told us they should have stayed with Scott and visited his aunt.

It was delightful having Scott here. He looks very well and seems very happy. We all enjoyed his visit.

September 2004

Missy, our dear Alpha Dog, has taken on new responsibilities with age.

I recently have started making myself a pot of tea and saving it in the refrigerator for an afternoon iced tea. For the first time, Missy was in the house when I put the kettle on. I went back to the bedroom to finish whatever I was doing that morning. Suddenly, I heard Missy give her special woofing bark that signals me she needs attention. I went out to the

kitchen and found Missy sitting in front of the stove looking up at the whistling kettle that I had not heard.



I have wonderful news. You may remember my telling you about my friend Marj Gerstle. She is the woman who had a heart attack on the *Caribbean Prince* years ago.* We were agents for the cruise line at the time. I visited Marj at least twice daily while she was in the hospital here. We became good friends. We met again serendipitously in Japan when her ship happened to dock in Kobe while I was in Tokyo.**

She was booked on a cruise to Belize last spring, but had a serious fall. During treatment, doctors discovered advanced lung cancer. They gave her six months. I have been writing Marj two or three times a week ever since, sometimes a letter, sometimes one of those funny things I get on email.

Yesterday I received a letter saying that she and her niece are booked on a Norwegian Line cruise due in Belize on October 12. I am ecstatic at the chance to see Marj again.

Marj refused treatment and is spending her time eating what she wants and taking cruises here and there. She worked for many years as art / handcraft activities director on various major cruise lines. I think this is her third or fourth cruise since receiving her death sentence. She is as gallant as anyone I have known.

Marj obviously booked this cruise specifically because it is coming to Belize. I haven't had time to work out details, but hope to spend her entire in-port time with her.



* "Emergency at Sea" on page 157

** "Japan with Muriel & Don" on page 187 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

I just have returned from my Tuesday church service. The head of the Anglican schools asked for help with the four-day literacy program planned for the end of October. Unfortunately, one of our church regulars, a young woman who is involved with the cathedral, zeroed in on me, saying she hoped I would help by reading to children or speaking to one or more groups.

I would love to read to children, but for as long as I can remember, reading aloud instantly inflicts me with endless yawns. I can't control it. However, I think I would be comfortable talking to young people about the value and joys of reading.

October 2004

This week has been built around the visit of my old friend Marj and her niece Tina on the *Norwegian Sea*.

I called José (who bought Marine & Services) to verify the ship's arrival and get an idea of when the non-tour passengers would come ashore. He is agent for Norwegian Line. To my horror, the ship arrives *very* early. I have to be at the Tourist Village wharf around 7:30 to meet Marj. I was thinking in terms of Ten or Eleven.

I pulled myself out of a busy dream early Wednesday morning. I was at the wharf a bit before 7:45. Marj and Tina walked smilingly down the pier from a large launch at about 8:00.

To my amazement, Marj looked almost exactly as she did last time I saw her in Kobe, Japan. Erect, good color, same size. She walks a little more slowly, but don't we all at this age. One never would suspect that she is dying of lung cancer. She told me that two doctors gave her until this past August. Now she has a new oncologist who told her to ask him how much longer she had in another year, and he might be able to tell her. Whether or not he is right, it eased her stress enormously.

We came back to the house to regroup. I wanted to find out what Marj could or would like to do for the day. To my delight, they both jumped at the suggestion of visiting the Old Belize Museum.

I wish I could have snapped a picture of Marj's face as she walked into the rain forest. It was awash in wonder. Hundreds of butterflies fluttered through the jungle. I had not realized that the walk through the exhibit actually is a tunnel of netting so that the butterflies pass over one's head. It was unnerving until I noticed the black net overhead.

Both Marj and Tina were as impressed with the museum as I had hoped. A pleasant young woman named Michele was a wonderful guide, informal, relaying information conversationally, not in a rote performance. She was careful about standing on Marj's left side, near her best ear, so she could hear everything. The entire experience was a delight to all three of us.

We returned to the house. My standard guided tour of the city was cut short because we ran out of time. They both decided to try orange squash;* I had my usual iced coffee. We adjourned to the veranda.

I was dismayed at the speed and noisiness of the traffic. My veranda is virtually useless now that my delightful home directly on the sea has been transformed into one on a busy highway. I have learned to live with the view that has changed from a low seawall at the edge of the street, with the sea beyond it seeming to start just at the edge of the veranda. Now it is a vista of pavement with a higher wall and the sea more of a distant view than an immediate neighbor. I regret the days when the sand lighters** sailed past our house, seeming almost close enough to touch. It probably won't take too long for me to tune out traffic noise and forget how pleasant things were with the sea as our front yard and only quiet cars creeping past.

After days of agonizing over what to serve my guests for lunch, I came to the logical realization that they needed something light because the ship served dinner at night. I decided against a one of the fancy desserts I

* *Orange squash* is a popular soft drink made by mixing an orange-based syrup with water or club soda.

** *Sand lighters* are large sailboats that used to carry sand dug from sandbars in rivers to Belize City.

considered, because 1) most older people don't really want dessert, and 2) the ship probably offered them wide varieties of gorgeous goodies several times a day.

Apparently I guessed right. They were delighted with my chicken salad. I must say it was a good one, including avocado and toasted almonds and a special dressing.

Tina wanted to stop at the National Handcraft Center on the other side of the park on their way back to the ship. They both enjoyed browsing, but had bought the things they wanted at the museum gift shop that morning.

We said our goodbyes, and about three o'clock Marj and Tina boarded the large launch for the trip back to the ship.

I returned home to collapse.



I may have told you that I was coerced into agreeing to give a couple of talks to schoolchildren about the joys of reading during Anglican Literacy Week. Yesterday was the dreaded day.

I found my way to Queen's Square School in one of the worst areas of the city. The only danger I faced was the possibility of being splashed by one of the delightful little boys happily running through mud puddles in the courtyard.

I was handed from one teacher to another, then finally ushered into a room full of children I think must have been eleven or twelve. They stood and recited a formal welcome, but actually smiled as if they meant it. I stood in front of a sea of bright-eyed little faces and half-talked, half-read my prepared speech. The children were quiet and attentive. At the end, a couple of them even had good questions for me. I thanked them for listening, and they thanked me for coming.

I was shown to the classroom next door. Same greeting. Same polite audience. Same talk. Same exit lines.

I sighed with relief at having lived through my moment on stage, but the teacher awaiting me said, “You’re not through,” and led me to another classroom. The children in this one probably were thirteen and fourteen. Certainly they were at the early teen age when they didn’t want to be told anything by anyone. Surface politesse. Closed faces. I hit the high spots and cut my talk short, fearing that I might have a revolution if I ran the full ten minutes. No one had questions when I finished, but I suspected that every one of them was waiting for me to leave.

At the end of each talk I said something along the lines of hoping that whether or not the children remembered what I said about reading and literacy, they would not forget my enthusiasm. If even one child in each classroom turns into a dedicated reader, I will have succeeded in my mission.

January 2005


My life is relatively routine these days. I spent most of January in Palo Alto with Carli and Tom. Allegedly it was a medical visit, but I spun it out for pleasure. The doctors at Stanford confirmed my own diagnosis of a badly deteriorated back and hip. Nothing to be done “at this time.” Both the neurosurgeon and the orthopedic surgeon prescribed heavy doses of aspirin. This controls my pain and seems to have cleared up the inflammation. I still can take my dogs out on their daily walks with no trouble.

May 2005


The Duplicate Bridge group is continuing under new management. The Turnells are in the process of selling Belize holdings and moving to Louisiana. They will be back periodically. I refused to take over responsibility.

My error was offering to collect the \$7 fee from players for our first tournament to help Georgia, who was busy setting up tables. Georgia, who took over from the Turnells, handed me a grubby zipper bag and

said, “You can handle the money. You live next door to the Fort George to pay bills.” And that’s how I became treasurer. I don’t really mind.



My sister, Mary, and her grandson Chris arrive mid-afternoon on May 25th. I have roughed out a schedule of activities and meals for their eight-day stay. The new roll-away bed Alex gave me for Christmas was set up in the library yesterday. I will let it air out for a couple of days before making it up for Chris. I was a little surprised to find it a full twin-size bed, not the narrower cot-size I expected. No matter. There is enough room for it, and it will be that much more comfortable for guests.



Mary and Chris seemed to enjoy their visit as much as we enjoyed having them.

Mary looked well. She has lost a lot of weight since her Durango days. This was her first time away from Ellis since his Alzheimer’s was diagnosed. She needed the break. We spent a lot of time by ourselves enjoying the wind and view on the veranda. She talked at some length about his condition, about their life back in Toledo, and about herself. I know it did her good.

As for Chris, he is a delightful, mature 15-year old—attractive, thoughtful, poised, pleased with everything we did. Our sightseeing included the Belize Zoo, Old Belize Museum, the Baboon Sanctuary, Xunantunich, and gift shopping. I think Chris preferred the last. He is an avid shopper, but selected his gifts carefully.

We hit the zoo just as one of the keepers was tending the tapirs. April and a new young male named Ceiba that they hope will mate with her eventually were at the fence. We all were allowed to feed them peanuts. April hates Scotty, the male first obtained as a mate for her. They have had to keep them in separate enclosures. Ceiba came in as a baby and only now has been allowed into April’s pen. She apparently likes him.

Mary and Chris loved a new restaurant on the river at Boom that we lunched at after two of our outings. Belize-R-Us has a pool, and they both had a swim before lunch. It is a lovely place and one we will enjoy in the future.

Mary suffered from the heat, though we had strong winds for most of their visit. Her timing could not have been better. The week before they came, we had the same high temperatures with no wind. It was a killer. They left on Friday the Third. Sunday we had a power failure that lasted from 7:30 AM to 5:15 PM. No fans. Mary would have expired. Then Tuesday we got the edge of Hurricane Arlene, to the east of us. We had heavy, gusty rain for eighteen hours. We all were delighted after our long drought, but it would have been inhibiting if it had happened while our guests were here.

I am very glad Mary came and was delighted at the chance to know Chris. All in all, it was a most successful visit.

August 2005

My schedule involves bridge, a charming Tuesday-morning communion service for the Old Crocks, walking my dogs, and correspondence.

Gradually, almost accidentally, I have developed a program of writing regularly to people who, because of age or illness, need the brief pleasure of finding an airmail envelope with pretty stamps among the daily junk mail. Some friends I write a couple of times a week. Writing is no problem for me, as you know. I enjoy it. I have a backlog of files in my computer from which to draw amusing material. This takes up a fair amount of my time.

September 2005

I am sitting at my computer next to the open door to my veranda. It is the 21st of September, Independence Day. School bands and floats are parked along Hutson street, beside my home, and Marine Parade Boulevard in front of it, positioning themselves for the parade that will form at

Memorial Park, a block away. Students and families walk purposefully through the sunlit street toward the park, where the official ceremonies will begin in less than an hour. I hear the quiet commotion and listen to the irregular roll of practicing drums. My sideways view through the glass louvers on my open door and the railing beyond it alerts me to colorful movement. I step out onto the veranda to watch from time to time, hoping for increasing activity as the time approaches.

Attending the ceremony myself is not an option. Sitting—or, worse, standing—in the blazing sun listening to speeches is close to the bottom of my List.

María and I watched the traditional fireworks from my veranda late last night. September in Belize is big on these displays. The first came on “Quince,”* September 15th, the eve of Mexico’s Independence Day. They had the usual lovely show, set off from barges in the sea almost in front of our house. Three days later, one of our community leaders set off fireworks near a park on the other side of town. It was visible through my bedroom window and probably would have been even more visible if I had bothered to go out on the veranda. Last night’s display was Government-sponsored with fireworks, contributed by the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Belize’s fireworks are modest, not the horizon-to-horizon multicolored sparkling blanket you are used to in the U.S. Still, the booms are gratifyingly scary to children and dogs. Bombs blast into the sky, flashing trains briefly attaching them to the ground they just left.

Girls of St. Catherine’s Academy, half a block up my side street, just passed, row after row after row of teenagers in crisp white uniforms, each class distinguished by the color of its scarf.

Soon the playing of the national anthem by one of the major bands will signal that ceremonies have started in the park.

* *Quince* here is not the English name of a fruit, but rather the Spanish word, pronounced *KEEN-say*, meaning 15.

October 2005

I am off to Georgia the end of the week to visit friends and family. I fly up on the 8th. I will wait in the airport for Carli and Tom, who will arrive about an hour later. Tom has booked a rental car, so we will drive to our close friends, Fran and Louis Bondurant. Fran asked if she could invite her children to see us when we arrive.

We will spend the night with the Bondurants. On Sunday, we drive in our separate cars to their lovely house on Lake Rabun in the North Georgia mountains. We will spend two days there, joined by Fran and Louis's son, Louis III. Then Carli, Tom, and I will visit Bucher's youngest sister, my adored friend Becky Bryan. She lives in Jefferson, a charming North Georgia mill village established by the Bryan family several generations ago. Carli and Tom leave on the Friday, but I will stay on for a longer visit with Becky.

Some time—not yet established—during the next week, Fran and Louis will drive over to Jefferson to pick me up. My original plan was to stay in Georgia only two weeks. Fran begged me to give them another week. I couldn't see any reason not to do what I wanted to do anyway, so I agreed. I return to Belize on the 29th of October.

May 2006

Yvonne and Vic Turnell are in town for a week. As it happens, Wednesday bridge is at my house. We always have six players, who take turns cutting it. I invited the Turnells to join us so, for once, we will have two full tables. I think everyone will be surprised and delighted to find them here.



Our bridge afternoons are as stylized as a ballet: 2:00 PM, arrive; ice water when everyone is settled; bowls of salted nuts; around 3 o'clock, drinks, usually wine; 3:30, put kettle on for tea; 4:00 PM, serve tea and cookies; 5:00, first guest leaves; 5:45, last of the men booted out so I can relax.

Somehow, serving eight people is a lot more complicated than coping with four to six. I think I spent more time running to and fro than I did playing. Fortunately, everyone helped clean up, taking glasses into the kitchen and replacing chairs around dining room table.



Our Duplicate Bridge games have fallen apart since Yvonne and Vic left. I couldn't get enough players together to cover the cost of the hotel fees. Last week, with them back, I was able to get three tables.

Everyone was delighted to have another Duplicate session and to see the Turnells, but I doubt that I can corral enough players next time I try. We ran very late. Two of our players were novices and played very slowly. Everyone was patient. They are delightful people and will be steady players before long. It was almost midnight when I got home, exhausted.

July 2006

Recently I noticed that my slacks were bunching around my ankles. I remembered that some years ago I discovered, to my dismay, that my traditional 5' 2" height had shrunk to 5' 1". I asked Alex to measure me. I now stand 5' 1/4".

Why can't girth vanish as imperceptibly as height?

September 2006

Independence Day. It is amazing that I am upright this morning.

The government wisely decided to have their major fireworks display at nine o'clock Independence Eve so children could watch without having to be kept up until after midnight, as in past years. People, mostly families with small children, crowded the sidewalks in front of the house and along Marine Parade as far as we could see in either direction. Parked cars lined Hutson Street. The street itself was a river of people.

María joined me on the veranda for the show. Alex was busy and chose not to come up. There were two displays, one from a barge some fifty

yards (my estimate) right in front of our house and the other from a second barge to the north, probably off the little park in Kings Park. We could see both. Of course, the major one was directly ahead of us, but we kept our necks under constant quarter-rotation, trying not to miss the fireworks we could see clearly beyond the end of the veranda. It was fun, fascinating, and frustrating. The display this year was by far the most lavish ever.

We appreciated having the fireworks set off from barges. In the years they based them in Memorial Park or on the unfinished boulevard just north of us, wind blew fiery remnants scarily close.

The show was late starting, waiting for the noisy convoy with the visiting president of Panama. Even so, it was ten o'clock before I was back in my bedroom. I knew trying to sleep was a little silly. While some people may have taken their children home after the show, plenty remained. I managed to drift off to sleep off and on until midnight, when speeches wound down at Memorial Park and the final fireworks celebration began. The first sonic boom brought me back to reality with a shock. I lay in bed wondering whether or not to bother looking at the display. Finally I got up and watched for a couple of minutes from the darkness in my bedroom. Then I went back to bed, but hardly to sleep.

Soon after the fireworks stopped, the band from the official ceremonies marched up the boulevard. They stopped in front of my house, then I heard a command of dismissal. Bandsmen with their instruments peeled off, heading up Hutson Street. Quieter it was; quiet it wasn't—for perhaps another hour, as the crowd took its time about dispersing.

March 2007

The last week or so, I was preoccupied with our long-delayed Duplicate Bridge Club party. For a year or more, we seldom have had enough players for what used to be bi-weekly sessions. When the Turnells were due back for a visit, I decided to round up enough players to warrant a party.

We play at the Fort George. The young woman I deal with there made it very clear that while we could bring our own wine, we could not bring any food—except for cake. I became the accidental treasurer when Yvonne and Vic Turnell, who used to run things, moved to the States. We had accumulated a fair amount from our regular fees, so I decided to buy everything instead of having people contribute food and wine, as we have for past parties.

I ordered a marble cake with butter-cream frosting from the young woman who made the delicious cake for my 80th birthday. And I commissioned Alex to make one of his marvelous cheese cakes.

I expected to have four full tables, but one couple did not arrive. Still, it was a pleasant evening. To my surprise, very little wine was drunk. I think I was among the heavier tipplers with my two glasses, downed after I could see that refreshments were being well received.

People loved both cakes, but raved over Alex's contribution. I was able to salvage a tiny sliver to bring home to María, who had complained that she had to help Alex with it, but wouldn't get to taste any. She told me this noon that she barely had a bite because she felt she should share it with Alex.



John & Marta Woods, Carli, Kate, and Tom at Old Belize Museum, 2008

Kolbe Foundation

2004 – 2007

I visited the prison from time to time as a shipping agent when a stowaway had escaped from one of the ships we represented. The prison then was located not far from where I live now. It was a great, dismal Victorian brick building with enormous, clanging iron gates. Treatment of the prisoners dated back to that era, too.

In an effort to improve living conditions, a new prison was built a few miles outside Belize City. Even so, Government quickly realized that because of endemic corruption and fraud, they could not manage the facility. The Rotary Club of Belize City set up and funded a foundation to manage the prison. The new Kolbe Foundation, named for the patron saint of prisoners, set out to build a place of “help and healing.”

A long-time friend, John Woods, is the head of the Kolbe Foundation. His wife, Marta, and Carli have been friends since the early 1960’s. At their high school reunion in the July of 2004, Marta told Carli and María about a prison report John was working on, and they volunteered my services to help him.

August 2004

John Woods was pleased with my first editing of the prison report. Other officials suggested additions, which probably will involve some reorganization and further editing. I feel more comfortable altering things in the report now that I have learned that John didn’t write it. He expects to get the new material to me tomorrow.

On Tuesday, John took me out to visit the prison. I am overwhelmed at how much Kolbe has accomplished with very little money. It would be a shock to anyone familiar with U.S. prisons. The prison is a series of one- or two-story buildings with lots of space for playing fields for the various cell-blocks and a circular pool created from the great hole dug to provide fill. John explained that cells are unlocked except when a prisoner locks it

himself. Inmates are free to move about within their own compound. Wire fences, not walls surround the prison and enclose the various compounds. Of course, there are watchtowers with sharpshooter / guards. However, aside from a couple of men soon after the handover to Kolbe, the inmates do not try to escape.

When Kolbe took over, the kitchen was a horror. It was a little shack with an outdoor fireplace. Cats by the dozens roamed on the uneven floor, fighting the cockroaches for space. Food in great pots was stirred with shovels, which then were tossed onto the ground. Food was delivered to the inmates in wheelbarrows. If the prisoner had a plate, food was slopped onto it. Otherwise food was ladled into his outstretched hands.

Unbelievable corruption in kickbacks and stealing severely limited the funds and supplies available for feeding inmates.

Now the kitchen is a large, airy room adjacent to a mess hall. The floor is tiled. Bread is baked in an enormous oven. Six gigantic pots simmered on a long stove. I saw four inmates shaping dozens of trays-worth of the fist-size rolls. The speed and precision with which they worked was fascinating to watch. They all looked like regular Belize “street boys,” but they were clean, wore caps, seemed pleased to have visitors, and were openly polite.

John said that the prison kitchen is the largest in the country. A few weeks ago, the Rotary Club were invited for lunch at the prison. Most of the men went reluctantly. They were amazed at the quality of the food.

Recently, one of the government ministries asked John if he could cater a lunch for 600 people. John laughed and said that if the prison kitchen could feed approximately 1,400 people three meals a day, it would have no trouble with the job. The meal was a big success, and the prison cleared \$1,500 on it. John hopes to encourage more catering as a fundraiser.

A large garden supplies vegetables. Chickens are raised for meat and eggs. Prison-raised pigs supply pork. Prisoners tend all of these projects.

The government pays \$12 (equivalent of US\$6) per day per prisoner. That covers meals and staff pay. Kolbe has to come up with funds for maintenance, operations, and improvements.

Everywhere we went, inmates greeted John or waved. He called many of them by name and introduced me to both staff and prisoners as we went along. The atmosphere was pleasant, and the men, friendly. I never had a moment's apprehension.

John even took me on a tour of the maximum-security section. Most of the inmates were outside their cells, lounging against the walls or sitting on small wooden benches. John stopped and spoke to most of them, usually introducing me. One of the men invited us inside his cell. It was tiny but neat. As John had explained to me, these cells, designed for two men, housed as many as a dozen in the past. Most of them slept without cover on the damp cement floors. Now every inmate has a bed, sheet, pillow, and blanket.

As we went along, I shook hands with most of the men. As we advanced down the walk, many more waited with their hands out so that I wouldn't skip them. I had brief conversations. Most of the men were friendly. An occasional one glowered. I shook their hands anyway as if I had not noticed their blank stares. John told me later that as I moved on, he could see the change in their expressions after having been treated to ordinary courtesy.

Several prisoners took a moment to tell me how the new prison routine had changed them, most of them explaining that they had found God. Becoming religious is not unusual in prison and often doesn't survive release. However, in keeping Kolbe's focus on "health and healing," the prison radio station is on all day long, broadcasting religious music, sermons by people the caliber of Billy Graham, plus some of the hip-hop the inmates like. The man running the station, Sebastian Biser, a fine looking, well educated man serving a long sentence, accompanied us on our tour of the prison. At the end, we saw his new studio. It is an

air-conditioned corner room overlooking the pool. Equipment was impressive, as was the library of CD's.

The studio is in the newest, finest building, gift of a U.S. foundation. It also houses the six-room clinic and hospital, classrooms, and the computer center.

The prison has an attractive non-denominational chapel and a resident chaplain. They have a few dedicated counselors, but need more. I asked John what they do about the small number of Belizean prisoners who are converted Muslims. He said they tried catering to them, but it didn't work.

John said ministers of the various churches visit regularly, holding services and counseling, but not proselytizing. He banned one hellfire-and-damnation character for sending the wrong message. Kolbe tries to convince prisoners that they are valuable human beings who can turn their lives around.

A wide variety of work and training is available to the minimum-security prisoners and to the young ones who are housed separately, away from the harder adult inmates. Most of them eagerly join workshops or classes, especially in literacy and math. Those who work around the prison earn 20 to 35 cents per hour. Half of their pay must go into individual savings accounts that they cannot tap except for emergencies.

We ran out of time and energy before reaching the women's prison. At the moment they have only 37 inmates, most of them illegal alien "waitresses" brought to the country for prostitution. Of course, the group includes a few annoyed women who discussed marital or extramarital differences with a machete.

September 2004

September 1. I cleared my calendar for the entire week so I could finish up the Kolbe prison article by Friday's deadline. I worked myself almost blind for three-and-a-half days and was able to email John a first draft on Monday.

Yesterday, he took me back up to the prison to get some colorful quotations for the article. John left me in the radio studio with Santiago Biser, whom I had met on my previous visit.

I had told John which men I wanted to talk to, plus ideas for other quotes. He deposited five men in the hall outside the studio, and I saw them one at a time. I had asked Santiago to stay with me—which I think he intended to do anyway. It made my interviewees more comfortable, I think.

One of my captives was Mark Thompson, who runs the clinic. He is an emergency medical technician (EMT), thanks to a 65-man strong class held in the prison. Santiago also is an EMT and told me when we were alone that he came tops in the class with Mark right behind him.

A great, strapping, handsome man, a Fairweather, is the HIV-AIDS counselor. I got a lot of good information from him. He told me that he himself has AIDS. On our drive home, John told me that Fairweather was taken into the prison on a stretcher, he was so wasted and weak. The prison regimen of medicine, regular doctor's visits, and special diets brought him back to stability. John says that since Kolbe took over the prison, AIDS patients are recovering instead of dying. They get far better care than they would on city streets.

My last inmate introduced himself as Anthony Craig, the recruiter for various classes and trades, and a poet. I exclaimed that I had heard him the night before at the opening of the Old Belize Museum, where he read his poem about the museum. I never saw him because the podium was behind a column. Craig is an energetic, almost overwhelming man, possibly Garifuna. He insisted on giving me a copy of his museum poem.

As he was about to leave, Craig asked if he could recite his poem *Prison Life*. He leaned lankily forward so our faces were almost uncomfortably close and dramatically, without referring to a written copy, spun out a fairly good poem about finding God in prison.

Craig pressed his own hand-written copy on me later, hoping I would include it in my article. I mentioned it later when I was back with John in the CEO's office. Both of them grinned and together called out the name

of the poem. When I said I had the only copy, John took it off to photocopy. I have typed it up and will print four copies to give Craig next time I have a chance.



Today I adjusted copy in my draft to suit some suggestions John had made. I inserted my interviews in the logical spots. I want to look over the text once more after lunch before emailing it to John.

I am wound up with this work, living for the moment when the article is on its way. It isn't deathless prose, but I think it is a full overview of the prison, before and after. There are some vivid visual moments in it. I think there are remnants of officialese in it, which I hope to revise on my final run-through this afternoon.

I am having a wonderful time. I love having something useful to do. With luck I will survive until Friday.



September 6. I emailed my final version of the prison report to John on Thursday. He added the photos we had selected, along with captions, and sent the lot to the editor in California. I was limp from the stress. Only now am I beginning to feel like myself.

I told John that he had to find new work for me. I loved doing this. He said that he has produced some sort of handout every month and hoped I would work with him on them. He said it would entail a visit to the prison every month. I accepted with relief. You can't imagine what it means to me to be doing something worthwhile. The trouble with retirement, especially for someone living alone, is that one doesn't feel needed.

February 2005

When I finished the prison report, I found myself in charge of writing an article about the rehabilitation efforts of the prison, compared to what it was in the past. After the article appeared in a U.S. corrections industry

magazine, John distributed it at a Rotary meeting. One of the members, Lord Michael Ashcroft, was so impressed he immediately handed John a check for \$5,000 for Kolbe.

John took Lord Ashcroft out to visit the prison. That resulted in an offer of a quarter of a million dollars if John could come up with a suitable prison project. John already had one—a drug rehabilitation center. As in the U.S., a large percentage of our crime is drug related. I drafted a letter for John to send Lord Ashcroft, laying out his idea.

May 2005

John has co-opted me for another prison project. This time, the government wants a new video about developments there. Yesterday at the prison, I saw that the forms for the ground floor of the drug rehab are in place and concrete is being poured. Inmates are doing the work under the supervision of a professional builder.

John has taken me out to the prison the last two Wednesday mornings. I am astounded at the improvements. Last year I toured the main Learning Center. Now, I find, an entire new Learning Center has been established just for the Max-Medium cell-block. They remodeled an unused building next to the Max-Medium that had been intended for punishment cells. They knocked out walls to create eight nice-size classrooms. One houses a library, one a computer center, and several are classrooms. The last room in the row has been set aside for a technical training program they hope to begin soon. Raised planters abloom with lavender flowers line the entire entry wall. Inmates trained as landscape gardeners tend them to immaculate perfection.

I walked miles around the sunny prison compound both days. It was too stimulating to be tiring. Throughout the prison, programs have been initiated or expanded. A handsome gift shop just outside the main gate offers an incredible variety of handcraft. It has a small fast-food restaurant, picnic tables, and U.S.-quality rest rooms. Proceeds from gift-shop sales underwrite projects like the new, enlarged, secure visitors' center.

The jewelry shop has a million dollars' worth of donated equipment for things like creating pewter pieces, working with silver, and gold plating. I was fascinated at being shown steps in their various processes. The jewelry shop is staffed by a handful of highly skilled, trustworthy inmates.

I was a little put off when John told me I was to work on a video. Never have touched one. I looked up video scripts on the Internet and actually found a sample. Most interesting layout, completely foreign to me. Fortunately, John explained that the government publicity department will do the video. All they want from me is an outline of the scenes they are to shoot with my comments on each, from which they will write the voice-over.

I already have written the basic text from my first visit. I will write up in my own style my notes from yesterday's visit. Then I will go back over it all, decide on camera views, and lay out the accompanying voice-over text in as close to video style as possible. I will send it to John for editing. When it suits him, he can give my material to the government office.

October 2005

The new drug-rehab center already is half built, just outside the main prison fence.

My latest project is somewhat more daunting than earlier ones. John gave me a 350-page Canadian manual for parole-board members and wants me to use it as a basis for a short guide for our parole board. I have a rough working draft nearly finished. There are two main problems: avoiding duplications, and putting jargon into simple English. Luckily, John says there is no deadline for the guide.

Frankly, I'm having a ball! I enjoy the work and know I can end up with a valuable guide. Furthermore, at age 83, it is wonderful to feel useful.

February 2006

I think I told you that John gave me the dubious honor of compressing 350 pages of a Canadian Risk-Assessment Guide for Parole Boards into a dozen simple pages for use in Belize. By the time I submitted my draft, it was decided that it should be slightly amended to include prison authorities as well as parole-board members. It was a simple enough matter to rework some things and add some others. I sent what I hoped was the final draft off to John late December or early January. He forwarded it to his friend in Canada for approval.

Meanwhile, I had received a draft of material for a little Kolbe brochure. John explained that he is not satisfied with the wording, but had to have some of the brochures printed in time for him to take to Washington, where he was invited to President Bush's Prayer Breakfast. John, the prime minister (Said Musa), and his financial adviser (Ralph Fonseca) all were invited.

John said they got a wonderful reception. People from many countries had read my article about what Kolbe is doing with the prison here and wanted to ask John questions. Singapore was especially interested in learning more about what is happening in the country from Said and Ralph.

Charles Colson, formerly of Nixon's staff and of a federal prison, was delighted to see John. He is head of a foundation that works with prisons world-wide. He is serious about setting up a branch here. John said Colson already has picked a retired member of his foundation who is interested in spending a year in Belize to set things up. I don't know details, but this would be a separate unit within the prison, cooperating in the rehabilitation program.

John and I will get together in the next week or so to revise the wording for the brochure and give me another tour of the prison to see all they have accomplished since my last visit.

August 2007

I ran into John and Marta Woods at a recent party. I told John that after my Danube Cruise* in June and family reunion at Higgins Lake in July, I was back home to stay—in case he needed me. The next day I had a call.

John explained that he wanted a sort of catalog of the departments, activities, and aims of the prison. It would be a basic publication and could be upgraded as needed. Someone in his office had written the initial version, which they had been distributing. He wanted me to edit and smooth it out. Arrangements were made for her to come to see me that afternoon.

To my delight, the young woman turned out to be someone I had met several times on visits to the prison, where she was secretary to the superintendent. Hardly thinking about it, we embraced in a friendly hug. I never caught her name. When I confessed that, she explained that most people couldn't understand her name and called her all sort of things, "Shakira" being the most common. Her name actually is Taheera Ahmed.

She is a very tall, slim, attractive girl, her head enveloped in a pretty but hot-looking scarf. I knew from earlier visits with her that she was well educated and very bright. She now works for John.

The catalog is quite good. I want to leave things in Taheera's words as much as possible, of course. I know how protective writers are of their creations. However, I think she will accept some rewording of long, involved sentences. And I may be able to reword some of the duplications rather than axing them. If I am flexible about wording I don't really like, and if Taheera understands why changes are suggested, we may come out of this still friends.

I am very happy to be of use again.

* "Danube River Cruise with Muriel & Don" on page 341 in Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

Duchess

December 2007

From email sent December 1, 2007

Yesterday at lunchtime María asked if I remembered the last visit of her niece Soraya and her family. I did—vividly. I went down to see all of them. After a little while, Soraya’s husband Andy grinned at me and said, “I don’t think you have noticed.” He looked downward, and I followed his glance. There, happily sleeping at his feet was a beautiful black Lab puppy, probably not much more than six weeks old. Of course, I ended up holding her.

María continued that Soraya just has told her that Andy intends to get rid of the puppy because he has decided she was not purebred Lab. He has a purebred male and wants to breed proper Labs. Soraya said she and the children are most unhappy about it, but Andy was unmovable. She offered the puppy to María. María said she would have to check with me.

And that was a laugh! Before she finished her story I had remarked firmly, “Take her.”

I think the puppy, who’s name is Duchess, must be about six months old now. Soraya will have her spayed there by our vet friend, Sheila. María



Kate (with Raven) meets Duchess, July 2007

and Alex are going to Corozal in a couple of weeks for Soraya and Andy's daughter's quinceañera celebration* —a real blast. María hopes to be able to bring Duchess back with them.

I did not intend to get another dog yet. However, we all think having a playmate will be wonderful for Raven. She needs company to romp in the yard now that Missy can't do it.

I think both dogs will accept the puppy.

To my great relief, Missy's health did not deteriorate during my absence. She still limps sadly, but she struggles up the steps once or twice a day. We all know the time is coming when her back legs fail her and she can't stand up. I just hope she can continue as she is for a while longer.

Duchess will be the third dog we have adopted after the owners, for one reason or another, couldn't keep them.



From email sent December 17, 2007

Duchess is a beautiful black Lab, small, friendly, active. Our first information about the reason Andy wanted to “get rid of her” was wrong. She is purebred, but small for a Lab. He didn't want her for breeding purposes.

Missy and Raven were understandably taken aback to see a strange dog racing around the garage. Missy quickly informed Duchess that she is the Alpha Dog. Duchess rolled over on her back to pledge acceptance. Raven seemed afraid of the new dog.

The somewhat tentative acquaintance continued as we took the dogs out into the yard. Duchess raced off, circled around, and came back to try to make friends. María and Alex kept the three in their apartment for the rest of the day, where they settled down reasonably well. Both Missy and

* *Quinceañera* is Spanish for (female) *15-year old*. Traditionally a lavish birthday celebration marks the transition from childhood to young womanhood.

Raven occasionally made their displeasure with the new dog known and were reprimanded. A&M kept Duchess in with them overnight, thinking it inadvisable to leave her out with the other two.

I heard Missy crying not long after I had gone to bed and brought both Missy and Raven in to spend the night with me. I hoped it would ease their unhappiness at the new dog's having been allowed to stay inside with María and Alex.



This morning I fed Raven and Missy early then sent them outdoors. I called Alex to ask him to bring Duchess up. She explored the house thoroughly, but would not touch the food I had prepared for her. I hand-fed her a tiny bit, but it did not convince her that kibbles mixed with a little canned dog food was edible. I'll offer the food to her again next time she is in the house. I suspect that eventually she will decide to eat.



Duchess tags around after Raven, who will have nothing to do with her. Actually, Raven seems shaken by the appearance of another dog, as if she is afraid we won't love her any more. I am giving her extra attention, hoping to settle her down.

Alex and María decided just to leave the dogs out together when they went to work and to let them figure out how to get along. I will be home all day and will go down to check on them regularly, of course. Fingers crossed that things sort out quickly.

Once Missy and Raven accept Duchess, I think she will be a nice addition to our pack. Duchess is a loving little thing, and I hope she will win them over quickly. Raven has needed a playmate.



From email sent December 20, 2007

It was not been an easy three days. We all were enchanted with our new, busy, loving, beautiful black Lab. However, it broke our hearts to watch Duchess cavorting and trying to make friends with Missy and Raven, only to be repulsed by snarls and barks.

My main problem was getting Duchess to eat. Finally I succeeded in having her eating a small amount, thanks to a silly system that was the only one that worked. I brought Raven in with Duchess. I offered the puppy a tablespoonful of the canned Alpo, which I thin slightly with water and use as a gravy over the big dogs' kibbles. Duchess finally decided that it is edible and licked most of it from a small plate that I held under her nose. Then I let Raven clean the plate. Another tablespoonful...and another... Ridiculous. We went through that process about three times now. Both Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, I felt Duchess ended up having eaten an adequate amount. I decided I had played that game long enough.

I am pleased to report that this morning, I brought Duchess in with our other two for breakfast. I fixed a dog bowl with a small serving of kibbles mixed into plenty of the canned dog food, and she ate it all without hesitation. I think having Missy and Raven gobbling up their food nearby may have helped inspire her. Gradually I will increase the kibbles and cut down on the canned Alpo.



A few minutes ago I had my first training session with Duchess. She “sits” without hesitation. I was surprised that she also would “stay” for the brief time I asked it of her. She was a little reluctant to “come,” but I put a very light strain on the leash, and she responded happily. I’ll try to work with her once or twice a day for the recommended five-minute sessions.

I had all three dogs in the house during bridge yesterday. The players are dog people and like to have them. Raven and Missy simply lay down and

slept throughout. Duchess prowled around a bit then settled down and slept in one or the other of the “caves” she has found among the living room furniture. I worried about her having an accident, but she was upstairs from before lunch until after 5:00 PM with no problem.

By the end of the afternoon, it was obvious that Raven was ready to make friends with our intruder. Duchess now tends to run shoulder-to-shoulder with her. Raven looks a little mystified, but no longer snarls. Even Missy has mellowed slightly.

Life is a lot happier than it was just a day ago.




From email sent December 21, 2007

Duchess is the most eager, affectionate little dog ever. She is a perfect beauty of a Lab, despite her size. The situation with the older dogs continues to improve. Raven tolerates Duchess, but has a what-has-happened look in her eyes these days. I am giving her extra attention. Missy goes along in her accustomed way, secure in her Alpha Dog position. She snarled at Duchess when they came in this morning, but Alex and I both jumped on her, and she acted properly chagrined.

I have had two brief training sessions with Duchess. Obviously Andy started training her. I reinforced the “sit,” “stay,” and “come” this morning and added “down.” Some success. Anything involving “down” is an improvement for me. I never have accomplished it in formal training with any of our dogs. They learn eventually just through life-with-us and respond well eventually.



Missy and Raven are in my bedroom. Duchess has been in and out of the house. A little while ago, she ceremoniously presented me with one of the large glass Christmas-tree ornaments, unbroken. I convinced her that it was a no-no, and that the tree was off limits. Maybe.



Apparently Duchess is causing chaos under the house at night. She gets into things that, until now, have remained untouched. Alex said that last night she attacked his new case of Diet Coke. How they intend to handle her depredations, I don't know. María remarked yesterday that she couldn't wait for the weekend so she could investigate her yard and see what the new team of Raven / Duchess might have done to it. This time of year it is too dark for her to go into the yard when she comes home from work. The last night Duchess stayed in the house with Alex and María, she chewed up the book Alex was reading because he had dropped it on the floor when he fell asleep. Fortunately, it still was readable despite looking somewhat fringed.

This will sort out eventually, but it makes for an exciting holiday season this year.



From email sent December 24, 2007

Duchess finally seems to have won Raven over completely. They are inseparable—which obviously is the puppy's choice, not Raven's. As for Missy, she is her same, secure self, snarling at anyone canine or human who intrudes on her space.

From email sent January 1, 2008

Already Raven tolerates Duchess's puppy cavorting and plays with her. When Raven lies down, Duchess usually goes over and lies down next to her. Raven still prefers to be on my bed when we are in the bedroom half of the house. Duchess is furious. She circles the bed over and over in obvious frustration, occasionally barking in protest. So far she hasn't figured out Raven's system of getting onto the bed using the footstool I leave for her. And I haven't shown Duchess because I don't consider it a good idea to let her invade Raven's private space.

New Project

2008 – 2012

May 2008

Long-time friend, Dr. Betty Flinchum, is here briefly. We have become close friends during her regular stays as a visiting professor at the university. She has written a book about the Governor General, Sir Colville Young. She is here for the introduction of the book amid great ceremony. Betty is giving all the proceeds of the book to the university or perhaps to her program of sending special Belize students to her University of North Florida for graduate work. I always enjoy Betty and didn't think the couple of hours involved in lunch would be a strain on me.



Yesterday's lunch with Betty was delightful. She always stays at the Chateau Caribbean, so I suggested that we eat there. Used to love it, but



Kate and Betty Flinchum, 2007

have not been there in years. I was most interested in hearing about the reception for her book. We laughed over her three TV interviews. She obviously baffled the reporters slightly when they accused her of supporting Colonialism or complained at an outsider's having written the book. Her replies were polite, cogent, and unexpected.

I was touched and very flattered when Betty asked me to write a review of the book. I hope that, with luck, I honestly can come up with something that can be used to promote it. And she also wanted me to edit it carefully to find any corrections necessary for the second printing, expected this fall.



Betty had a copy of the book autographed by Sir Colville and by herself delivered to me this morning. I have read the first third of it and am most impressed. The writing is reasonably easy. I see the odd punctuation error that I expect to catch when I go back through the text line by line.

Sir Colville is a remarkable man, literally a Renaissance Man. I had no idea how musically talented his entire family has been for several generations, including a five-year-old grandson. He has several degrees, is a recognized linguistics authority, is a musician, composer, poet, and playwright, and has been both a teacher and an administrator.

I am absolutely delighted to have a new project and am thrilled to be a part of this modest book.

June 26, 2008

I just have sent the most recent version of the Sir Colville Young book off to Betty. She returned from Italy early this week and didn't need as long to recover from an arduous return trip as I expected. We have had a flurry of messages back and forth. I sent her a general message asking her to read through the entire text before trying to compare it with the original. I also sent a list and some details of changes. She seems happy about everything.

July 2008

I just have had a telephone call from Sir Colville Young. He wanted to thank me for the review I wrote for his biography. He talked for quite a long time and was highly complimentary. I look forward to meeting him (again), perhaps next time Betty is in Belize.

February 2009

Betty was in Belize for a week. She went directly to Belmopan to work with the university. She took time Saturday before her flight out to have a brief visit with me. Things look good for the book. It has been decided to cut down the stock of first editions by supplying the books to all the schools and libraries in the country. That will leave room for a second edition.

November 2010

Betty has been back in touch about the second edition of her biography of Sir Colville Young. She also is back at work on an autobiography. Her colleagues here in Belize have been urging her to write one. I have promised to edit it for her. This time I may be able to do a better job, starting from the beginning.

I am delighted at having something concrete and useful to do in all this free time I have these days.



I am busy editing anecdotes for Betty's autobiography. Enjoying the work. I think we finally settled on a design for the cover of the second edition of the biography of the Governor-General.

February 2011

Betty is in the country briefly on University business. We are busy together on her autobiography. She does a chapter, then emails it to me for editing. It is pleasant work, and I am enjoying her tales.

Betty came for tea this afternoon so we could have a nice, unrushed visit. It was delightful. She gave me a copy of the newly released second edition of the biography of Sir Colville, autographed by both the Governor-General and herself. We had a pleasant time discussing the current book. Solved some problems that are handled more easily in person than by email. Betty is obviously pleased to have me editing her writing, and I am delighted to have an author who follows her editor's suggestions.

Betty returns to her lovely, weatherized log-cabin home in the North Carolina mountains tomorrow.

February 2012

Betty is in town on business. She came to see me Monday. We had a wonderful time. Betty also gave me a card with a lovely thank-you for the editing I am doing on her travel book. She enclosed a payment on account. She talks about a contract for the work I am doing. However, I haven't a clue about the monetary value, and I am having a ball doing it.

May 2012

I have been working on Betty's travel book. She brought a particular naïve, ebullient male student into several anecdotes. It has taken two chapters and much weaving to put it all together nicely. Now I understand that I never received her Yorkshire stories, so I will have to find the right places for them.

I am happy to know that I have more editing waiting for me.

Getting Along

May 2008 – October 2010

May 2008

Tuesday morning my favorite taxi driver, Mr. Bailey, drove me to church. As it happened, the Bishop took the service. He is a delightful man. Interestingly, Phillip Wright is the Anglican Bishop and his cousin, whose name I can't think of, is the Catholic Bishop. After the service, Mr. Bailey took me to Save-U for some quick pick-up shopping. Then I had the afternoon to rest.



I already had told Ann Crump that I would not plan to play bridge Wednesday afternoon. That morning, a delightful young man arrived from the Social Security Board to audit my account. This happens every few years. To my embarrassed delight, he found that I had paid December twice.

Apparently I paid it the very beginning of January. Then in my dizziness, I made out another form for December, found it just as I was leaving to see doctors in the U.S., and asked Alex to take it in when he got back to Belize, after flying with me to Houston.

The credit note covering the extra payment, plus interest charged for the alleged late payment, covered all of my April return plus some of the May return. I gave the man a check for the balance of May and am paid up until the June return comes due in early July.



Weekend coming. For once, I can use the rest. Next week should be a lot quieter than this one. However, I think it is good for me to get out and see people as long as I don't have a physical backlash.

I am living for the day when I can drive again. I mentioned the approaching possibility recently on a day when I felt especially level. Alex gasped in horror: “You might kill someone!”

June 2008

I still have The Dizzies, though much reduced. The problem is that any untoward activity leaves me dizzy and exhausted. For example, Saturday I was on my feet for about 2-1/2 hours doing this-and-that. When I finished, it was all I could do to get to my bed. I felt wretched until evening when, to my delight, I suddenly was back to what passes for normal these days.

The only activities I am continuing at this time are our old bridge foursome on Mondays—if, occasionally, four of us are in residence—church Tuesday mornings, and Annie Wongsam’s for my hair appointment on Thursdays. I still have not returned to the Wednesday bridge.

I have learned the hard way that I have to move around enough to rebuild my strength gradually without exhausting myself. Not easy to calibrate. This is lasting longer than I hoped or expected.

July 2008

Today we received nine issues of weekly *TIME Magazine*. They spanned a three-month period. Where an issue was missing, we assume it arrived on schedule by its little lonely self during that period.

My fury is compounded by an accompanying letter from the company advising me that my subscription expires on the 4th of August and reminding me that they have been successful in keeping the subscription rate low by their splendid low-cost shipping.

In the same mail, I received my latest American Express statement showing that *TIME* had taken it on themselves to enter a resubscription for me at a time when I intended to write a hot letter to everyone from the CEO down.

In the glorious, distant past we received the U.S. version of *TIME* regularly. Then the company transferred its Belize subscribers to the Latin American edition. We weren't pleased, but lived with it for several years. Then we found ourselves transferred to Amsterdam and the European edition. I don't mind, but Alex hates it.

I began getting gracious notes from the Amsterdam bureau asking if I were satisfied with delivery. I wasn't and told them so—again...and again...and again. Instead of improving, weeks of two or three issues at a time, interspersed with the occasional single week bringing its very own issue, went to four or five issues at a time. Today's nine is the ultimate.

I shall write the sort of furious letter an Edwardian gentlewoman might write, describe the horrors they have inflicted on us in the name of weekly news, and ask that they instantly cancel my new subscription and issue a credit through American Express.

Considering the quiet life I am leading, that's a lot of excitement for one day.



I have decided to see Dr. Smith, the orthopedic surgeon here—letting him know that because of Medicare, my major medical needs must be met in the U.S. I want a new X-ray of the hip that I then can forward to my doctor at Stanford.



I just have returned from a delightful visit with Dr. Smith. He says that my X-rays show increased deterioration of the right hip ball-and-socket joint. Distance between the two has virtually disappeared so that bone is rubbing on bone. (I suspected as much.) There has been more deterioration of the ball part of the joint and the beginnings of what they call cysts. These will lead to gradual deformity of the joint, which would be an extra complication.

Dr. Smith says that the hip needs surgery, the sooner the better, both to avoid further damage and to stop the pain I am experiencing so that I can begin rebuilding my strength and get back to a normal life.

August 2008

While he was driving me to Annie's this morning, Alex said that he and María suggested that, if I liked, I invite friends for our Sunday barbecue. When I returned from my marketing spree, I called Jill Bell to invite Mick and her for this Sunday. She was absolutely delighted.

Jill has been most attentive during my recuperation, so I am happy to be able to do something for her. Alex and María know the Bells. Jill always is funny and entertaining. Mick is a marine engineer (South African) and Alex hired him regularly when we had to have ships inspected. They are old friends with a lot of interests in common. I think the barbecue will be pleasant for all of us. Naturally, I am touched at Alex and María's thoughtfulness.

The awful thing, however, is that when Alex made his suggestion, I realized that I have almost no close friends left. Jill and Ann Crump and Jimmy are the closest. All of my other close friends have either moved away or died. It was a chilly feeling. Not that I intend to waste time worrying about it.

December 2008, Christmas Letter to Family and Friends

Good old 2008—

The first six months, I was very sick with severe dizziness. I flew to California and stayed with Carli and Tom while the Stanford doctors failed to identify a cause. I returned to Belize. Fortunately, the dizziness finally dissipated by itself.

As it did, an old hip problem reemerged, necessitating a total hip replacement. I returned to live with Carli and Tom in August, had surgery in mid-September, spent ten days in rehab, recuperated with Carli and Tom, then returned to Belize mid-December. Carli turned into an

excellent nurse and therapist, and Tom was unbelievably welcoming to the mother-in-law who spent most of the year with them.

Alex and María held the fort at home, caring for our three dogs or, perhaps, cared for by them.

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

As for me, I can't wait for 2009.

February 2009

I am walking well after my hip replacement and even finally can walk up and down stairs normally. However, I still have not recovered lost strength and tire easily. I don't know how much of that is from the surgery and recovery and how much is simply my age. Anyway, it is a nuisance.



Jill Bell came by for a visit Wednesday afternoon. If anyone ever lifted the spirits of the people around her, it's Jill. She is effervescent. And now I'm up to date...Jill knows everything about everyone.



Time to think about dressing to go out for lunch with Yvonne and Vic Turnell. They are here with Vic's son and family, so haven't been able to get away so we could see each other. The younger generation left yesterday. Yvonne and Vic leave tomorrow.

April 2009

We had a low-key, pleasant Easter weekend. Friday was pretty much like any Saturday.

Saturday we had grandstand seats for the bike races. They end at the roundabout on Marine Parade, just before the park, so we have a perfect view of the winners. María invited Ann McKinstry and her visiting brother, Phillip, to watch with us. Alex invited us all for his famous burgers afterwards.

Around 11:00 AM, the sidewalks on both sides of the boulevard began filling with onlookers, more on the seawall side, of course. Many of the women carried umbrellas as parasols against the hot sun, and the bright colors were pleasant to see. We relaxed on the veranda with beers, cameras, and conversation. There was almost constant motion on the street below us as police cars, attendant vehicles, and police motorcycles zoomed back and forth for no obvious reason except enjoying the excuse to speed unhindered.

Just before we could see the leaders, the radio announced that the Mexican rider who was ahead had lost a tire and was out of the race. His compatriot came in first. The unseated rider steadfastly wheeled his bike past us and on to the finish line. It was a surprising several minutes before other riders began appearing. All of us on both sides of the street clapped and yelled encouragement until the last straggler had passed. I'm no lover of bike races, but it was a gorgeous day, the excitement was contagious, and the company, delightful.

We adjourned to María's patio, where we had another beer while Alex tended his grill.

Sunday I made my usual mid-morning visit downstairs. These days I especially want to spend a few minutes patting and talking to Missy. I didn't worry about her this weekend because she had company on the patio for two of the four days.

Alex had a special Easter barbecue—grilled boneless pork loin roast that had been marinated in a wonderful concoction of sauces and seasonings, Alex's special macaroni and cheese, and sliced tomatoes. For dessert, butter pecan cake with his favorite butter-cream frosting, a recipe and a half, of course.

Monday I made some inroads on my two-page list of things I might or might not do over the holiday.

May 2009

I'm off to California again for a checkup with my orthopedic surgeon. María and Alex will fly to Houston with me, spend the night at the airport Marriott, then continue to New Orleans, where María has a family graduation. When I leave, Carli insists on flying as far as Houston with me, spending the night at the Marriott, and seeing me safely on the plane to Belize. My children don't think I can travel alone, which is sheer nonsense.

October 2009

Thursday is my favorite stay-at-home day; we have three to six cruise ships. The traffic of tour buses, vans, taxis, horse carriages through our twisting, narrow streets is horrendous. I have no desire at all to go out in it. It is rather restful to have a mandatory day at home. I catch up on some of the items on my To-Do List.

November 2009

You don't need to know all the things that have gone wrong in the past few days. Take it from me that the world is not treating me nicely. Most of it didn't matter and was settled quickly.

And then came Sunday. Alex asked me where in the world I had been to get the front of my car, as high up as the radiator, covered with mud. I didn't have a clue except to say that Friday, both leaving the post office and when I took the back road home from Brodie's, there were some deep, muddy pot holes.

At this time Elmer was washing the cars. A short time later, Alex came back to me to exclaim, "Did you know you had lost your front license plate!"

I knew what must have happened. When I was out on Friday, I parked in the messy lot behind the post office so I could check our post office box. I hit a concrete block as I was easing into an empty space. Short as I am, I could not see it as I was moving forward. I felt a lurch as I eased away

from the damned thing. Obviously the block managed to snag my license and tear it loose. Thank goodness for the mud on the front of the car. It probably masked my lack of a front license plate. No unwelcome police officers accosted me for the rest of the morning.

Early Monday I went back to see if, by any chance, I could find my license plate in the dirt and leaves. Answer: no. I talked to the guard, who has become something of a friend through my frequent calls at our P.O. box, which is close to the gate into the back lot. He said that a man who works in the building the other side of the fence keeps that block in what he considers his private parking space. I had the impression that this was not the first time someone had trouble with the block.

I thought straightening out the license thing would be a real hassle. In the past, licensing the car has involved stops at two different locations and waiting in three separate lines. Endless. I had learned that one trick is to go to the Traffic Department directly after lunch, before the crowd arrives. Now, too, they are computerized. It took me a full ten minutes to turn in a letter explaining the loss so it could be put on the warning list of licenses used for stolen cars being exported, turn in the remaining back plate, pay the hefty charge of \$15, and walk out with a pristine new set of car license plates and a new car registration.

I am enormously relieved to have this taken care of and amazed that it could be done so easily and quickly. Alex will put the plates back on today or tomorrow, and I will be able to go to Annie's as usual on Friday, the next non-cruise-ship day.

April 2010

Our Easter holiday began at noon today (Maundy Thursday). After lunch, I settled back to finish my half a glass of iced coffee and to read on further in a pleasant, light book I am enjoying.

Tomorrow (Good Friday) Annie will be off on an Easter vacation so I will do my own hair for the first time in three or four years. Maybe longer. I can't finish it well, but it will have to do.

The Holy Saturday Classic Bike Race finishes at the end of our block, opposite Memorial Park. For the third year in a row Alex and María have invited Ann McKinstry to join us to watch the end of the race from my veranda. Elmer will be with us too, of course. My back refrigerator is bulging with beer to lubricate throats hoarse from yelling encouragement to finishers.

Easter Sunday Alex will grill a ham for a patio lunch, and I will contribute my fine macaroni-and-cheese with Gorgonzola topping. Alex is not sure what he will have for dessert. He is waffling between Boston Cream Pie, which he has been eager to try, or Pound Cake with ice cream.

Earlier this week Alex asked if he could borrow a cake pan. Problem was that we couldn't find one. Tore the kitchen apart. Then María remembered that, some years ago, I decided to clean out my pots and pans. I offered her first choice, then gave leftovers to the maids. The cake pans probably went, because I had no intention of making another layer cake. Alex was off after lunch to Mirab's to buy himself a cake tin.

Easter Monday—no special plans. I hope I will mix up the dry ingredients for two or three loaves of bread. On the other hand, lassitude may take over.

May 2010

Yesterday Alex and María invited me down to their patio for a Mothers' Day lunch. Ahead of time, Alex had asked me what I would like him to cook. Both of them were very surprised when, without pausing, I replied, "Alex's famous hamburgers!" I have not had any for ages and was hungry for them. Alex expected something fancier and more complicated like pork tenderloins, beer-steamed chicken, or ribs.

It was a gorgeous day, warm but with a strong breeze. Alex had bathed the dogs that morning so we were joined by two half-dried canines. They don't understand why petting them is less attractive to humans when they are wet.

Lunch was Alex's burgers with all the fixings. María made French Fries, which she, in the British way, calls *crisps*. Very good. María had talked Alex into fixing my favorite-of-favorites for dessert—plain cheesecake. He does it beautifully. A piece always accompanies me home after lunch.

Elmer was with us, of course. He has been very sick recently, but apparently is feeling well now, and his COPD is under control.



As I was getting my car out of the garage a few days ago to go my Monday-afternoon bridge game, I heard a familiar pounding on the pavement. Down the boulevard trotted a happy sorrel horse, naked of harness, bridle, or saddle, his mane floating freely in the breeze. Fortunately, the horse was going the correct way on the right side of the boulevard, and there was no traffic.

Moments later a small motorcycle roared past, the driver crouched down over the handlebars as if he were trying to push it even faster. I wondered if he were chasing the horse.

I pulled out behind the cyclist. My route followed the horse. It already was out of sight. I drove fairly slowly, not knowing if the horse might have decided to swerve over onto the grass paralleling the pavement and might dash out in front of me.

When I was close to the end of the boulevard at Eve Street and the Barracks, I saw the captured horse being quietly led by a mounted horseman, back the way he had come.

I told the story about the runaway horse to my bridge companions. They said that they had seen similar free horses wandering on St. Thomas Street. We decided that they were replacement horses for carriages, taken to the Tourism Village area to be ready for exchange for tired animals. It was the only reason we could think of why some of the carriage horses would be loose in a residential part of the city. If this were so, the carriage drivers were careless about confining the horses until they were needed.

We agreed that the situation is unhealthy and dangerous. Traffic can be heavy and, for Belize streets, fairly fast. It is almost inevitable that ultimately a car will strike, probably kill, a horse and injure passengers. Carnage. No way to win tourism medals.



The dogs have been with me almost full time since Friday. The wind dropped completely, and the mosquitoes arrived by the millions. I let the dogs out for relief purposes, but they show how pleased they are for shelter in the house by waiting on the back porch for me to let them in.

At night I close the dogs and me in my side of the house. The dogs have selected their nighttime spots. Raven stretches half the way across the rug in my workroom. Duchess sleeps near me alongside my bed. If I get up in the night, Duchess considers it her obligation to rouse herself and accompany me. When I return to my bed, she stretches out alongside again.

The only time the dogs get a little obstreperous is while I am fixing their breakfasts. I have no trouble making them calm down. Aside from that, they are delightful companions and good company.

There is a little breeze today. The mosquito are not bad under the house, but are swarming in the yard. Yesterday it rained all day, such fine rain it was almost a mist. Today is blazing hot and damp-feeling. The dogs have no intention of going outdoors for any but immediate reasons, and then, for the shortest possible time.

June 2010

Life limps by pleasantly with no change from week to week. We had bridge this past Monday at Betty Lindo's house. This will be our last game for a while. Ann Crump is off on one of her every-five-weeks trips to take John to the eye doctor in Florida, then is going on to England for Wimbledon, as she does every year. She gets home on July 8th. After that, Betty will start disappearing to St. George's Caye regularly, as her

foreign-residing children and grandchildren return for summer vacations. I enjoy our games, but don't feel especially deprived when they are cancelled.

The large Frangipani outside my bedroom window has begun blooming. I hardly noticed as the leaves began reappearing last month. There is one blossom so far, quite a deep pink. It is on a limb close to my window, which is convenient. Last year was awful—literally three blossoms on the tree the entire season. I had the tree fertilized, and I hope that has helped.

I am feeling well. Walking is a little wobbly, but I am staying with my exercises, including the ones for balance.

July 2010

More socializing for The Elderly this week. Yvonne Turnell has been in town for a week. She still has business here, including probate of Victor's will.

Yvonne brought her daughter, Judy, down with her. Judy is absolutely delightful, a bright, bubbling young woman, probably in her late forties. Yvonne took over the conversation in the beginning and filled me in on her situation—which I wanted to hear. We had a pleasant lunch at the Smokey Mermaid. Yvonne, Vic, and I always managed one lunch there together whenever they visited Belize after they moved to Louisiana.

August 2010

Sunday we celebrated María's birthday two days early. She and Alex were supposed to spend the weekend with a niece and family in Orange Walk to celebrate two or more family birthdays, but everything was postponed because the woman who was to fix relleno for the party was sick. Alex decided to have a family party here instead, with the two of them, María's brother Elmer, and Old Kate, in María's green bower of a patio.

Alex was especially eager to try out his repaired grill. He had to order new parts for it recently when something vital rusted through. He sanded

down everything that wasn't replaced and repainted it with heatproof paint. It looked brand new to me.

Alex grilled his special hamburgers. And for dessert he made a cake María has been begging for for ages—Red Velvet. It was delicious, though Alex thought it a bit too sweet—so did I. It involves a white cake mix, a package of vanilla pudding mix, and of all crazy things, two entire bottles of red food coloring—the kind of bottles that provide drop-by-drop color, and three drops is one too many. Alex said their kitchen looked like a TV murder scene with red blotches on every surface.

October 2010

You may have known that after Uncle Frank's death, Uncle Walter sent me the shoe box filled with my letters that his brother had saved all those years. I simply did not want to go through them at the time, so put the box in a safe place and forgot about it. I knew that now the time had come to go through the letters, since there would be lots of my Reports among them. To my amazement, I found that I already had done so—heaven knows how long ago—extracted a lot, and set up a binder with Reports from Sarasota and early Belize. I am rereading them now and think they are something you may be interested in seeing some day.

I threw out a lot of my earliest, fatuous Reports that really would have been of no interest to anyone but me. And there were a lot of notes, Christmas cards, and letters to both Grandma Van Brunt and Uncle Frank that I also Deep Sixed. The box is empty now. I can't think of throwing it away after all it has been to so many people, but will put it in the cupboard with my Box Box.*

Probably no one will want to read my trip reports, but I enjoy going through them.**

* Kate's *Box Box* was a large shipping box in which she saved empty boxes for later use.

** And for those who *are* interested, Kate's trip reports can be found in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994* and Book 4: *Travels, 1995 – 2007*.

Hurricane Richard

October 23 – 29, 2010

From report dated October 27, 2010

Hurricane Richard didn't look like much. It was a little thirty-mile-an-hour something wobbling around the Caribbean south of us. We knew from weather reports that it had strengthened somewhat and probably would pass up the coast toward the Yucatán. We knew we would get some wind and a lot of rain, but I was perfectly comfortable with that—until...

Alex came up to see me early Sunday morning, 24th of October, and said that we had to evacuate. Before I could argue, he said, “because of the cars.” I have had to have my car commercially cleaned three times already. This time, Alex thought the water might get his SUV, too.

Alex and María made trip after trip, bringing things from their apartment up to my guest room for safety. The bed was piled high with bulging large black lawn bags of clothes and heaven knows what else. They knew their area would be flooded.

I packed hastily, forgetting several things, and we took off at noon for Burrell Boom. María's employers and long-time friends of both A&M, Lourdes and Giovanni Smith, had invited us to shelter at their home outside Boom.

Alex loaded all his computer equipment, plus things they would need, into the back of his car. My trunk held my things. María and the three dogs rode with me. Alex suggested that he follow me, but I told him that would make me nervous. I would follow him.

Alex drove at a Mother-friendly speed. We expected bumper-to-bumper traffic on the Northern Highway, but the road was fairly clear. The trip took about forty-five minutes.



Lourdes and Giovanni have a charming, large, sprawling home. They even had a kennel for our dogs, who hated it. It was a great relief for us, since our other option would have been to leave the dogs in my car the whole time. Raven howled most of the time we were there, while Duchess sat next to her quietly. They had a roomy doghouse for shelter from the rain. The dogs made a muddy mire of the grassy run they had started with.

Relatives of our hosts were in the party. We totaled ten. By a miracle, they had beds for all of us. The large bag of frozen chicken I had prepared to give Lourdes was one of the things left behind—partly because Alex never came with an ice chest to clean out my ice makers. I think she was just as glad because she was fixing three chickens for the crowd for dinner.

Just sitting and waiting for the storm was aggravating. Alex had his little radio and kept track of coordinates of Richard as it approached. I had trouble hearing either conversation or the radio because my hearing aids couldn't cope with the number of voices plus the rattling wind. I excused myself and took a nap. Allegedly, Richard had 90-mph winds when it came through our area.

We had a nice dinner together. I excused myself early and was in bed by 8:30 PM.

Monday morning (October 25th) we could see that the only damage was a tree down and miscellaneous branches and leaves scattered about.

Giovanni and Alex left for town in his larger SUV, hoping that the road was open. It was. Downed trees had been removed, and the only water was in Belize City and was shallow enough to drive through. They checked Giovanni's office and our house. On the way back, they checked on a few friends and relations to make sure they were safe.



Alex had talked to our next-door neighbor, Steve Thompson. Steve reported that the sea washed over our 3-foot-high seawall and splashed halfway up the lampposts. Three sections of our fence were down, and the

scavengers already had been run out of the yard by Steve and by the watchman in the new building across Hutson Street.

We packed up quickly and drove back to town. It was two vastly relieved dogs who were freed from their prison and were back in the car with two-thirds of their family.

There was an inch or more of mud in the garage and under the house. The water had been almost two-feet deep in Alex and María's apartment. The water had drained out, leaving deep mud. Thanks to help from Steve, Alex was able to get two men to make temporary repairs to the fence so we could let the dogs into the yard. Cleaning Raven and Duchess up every time they have been out is another story.



Yesterday after a tip, Alex retrieved one of the missing sections of fence from in front of the Peace Corps building on Gabourel lane. It had washed two blocks up Hutson Street, turned the corner, and continued for about another block. The contractor who supplied workmen to do the temporary fence repairs says the whole fence needs upgrading. Alex and I knew that.



I had water in a small spot in the living room and my bedroom. Nothing damaged. Water poured in under my bedroom door that leads onto the veranda, soaking my runner. Aside from water blowing in through louvers that won't seal shut, which I get on any bad rainstorm, my house was not damaged.



María and Alex are sleeping in my guest room and having meals with me. Gradually, they are getting rid of the mud in the patio and garage. Just today Jill Bell told me of a company that did a remarkable job cleaning Ann Crump's downstairs apartment. Alex has called them, and the man in charge is to meet him here later this morning. If his people can sort out the

apartment, it will be a godsend for María and Alex. And it will go on the insurance claim.



From email sent October 29, 2010

Two men have been working on A&M's apartment for three days. They finished this noon. They moved almost everything movable out of the apartment and under the house, pressure-cleaned everything, and polished frantically before putting things back. María said her house never had been so clean. The furniture is back in the apartment now. María has to put kitchen supplies back in drawers and cupboards. The mattress from their bed was taken off to be dehumidified, sprayed for mildew, and dried. It should come back later today. I think this will be their last night upstairs with me.

I have enjoyed our evenings together. They come in after dark, covered with mud. They shower, change, and join me for a revivifying beer. We have a light supper and early bedtime.

My damage was slight—small leaks in the ceiling in living room and bedroom, mildew on the couch by the windows, and the loss of a riser on the bottom front step. Insurance will cover it. However, it won't cover repairs to the fence.

Alex and María are exhausted, but finally feel things are falling into place. I'm fine. I still find it hard to believe that the small storm I paid so little attention to turned into the first real hurricane to hit us in a few years.

Quiet Life

2012 – 2014

January 2012

I did not send Christmas cards in December. I have wanted to write to you, but have had computer problems. You really don't want a hand-written letter. Once my parents gave me a typewriter when I was sixteen, my handwriting went to pieces. It is all I can do to write a legible check now.

I am recovering from a bout of thrombophlebitis last August in what I considered my "good" leg. This one came on with no pain, so I did not recognize it at first. My first onslaught, in the other leg, happened in the Seventies and recurred in the Eighties with severe pain. The current long clot is dissolving slowly, so I will be on blood thinners for another couple of months. Meanwhile, I am beginning to regain lost strength. I am trying to make myself return to my exercises, but am not very faithful about it.

Christmas was a four-day holiday in Belize with Saturday, the Sunday Christmas, Monday Boxing Day, and Tuesday, too, to make up for Christmas Day's being on Sunday. The Christmas season was especially happy because Carli and Tom came from California to spend it with us. They stayed for my birthday in early January.

Carli was wonderfully attentive and helpful. Tom, meanwhile, sorted out both of my computers at great length and put them back into perfect order, then kept himself busy finding odd jobs around the house. Alex and María were with us much of the time, of course.

I had told María that I did not want a birthday party. I am short of contemporaries. My close friends Jill & Mick Bell and Ann & John Crump will be away. That leaves only Jimmy Murphy here. We had a small gathering of just the five of us to celebrate my Ninetieth birthday.

I have trouble believing I am this advanced age. Actually, it even was a great surprise when I was around to greet the change of the century some



Kate, 2012

years ago. I am in remarkably good health, everything considered, aside from the usual this-and-that.

I have no special plans for the year except that late spring or early summer I probably will go to California to visit Carli and Tom. This is my annual trip to see them and to check in with my myriad doctors.

June 2012

In mid-March, a scan showed that my blood clot had dissolved after a six-month recuperation. It was a relief to be off blood thinners and in a

position to try to regain lost strength. I am definitely stronger now than I was during the thrombophlebitis period, thank goodness, though I am far from my normal strength (i.e., pre-age-Ninety strength). The lightheadedness is abating, though I still have brief spells of dizziness. My balance problem is permanent, the result of brain damage due to a drug I took for years. Everything considered, I am pain-free, comfortable, and in reasonable shape.

In view of my general weakness, dizzy spells, and long periods of lightheadedness, Carli suggested that I not make my annual visit to them. It was hard to give it up, but I really could not face the hassle of air travel with nights at the airport hotel between flights.



I don't know whether I told you that the Carli and Alex convinced me that it was time for me to give up driving. A contribution to the safety and security of the community, considering my dizziness and lightheadedness, not to mention age-deteriorated reflexes. It was very hard for me to give up the independence driving gave me, but I knew it was a wise decision. I am used to it now. I have two reliable taxi drivers available. While the out-of-pocket fares shock me, I try to remember car expenses. For your information, our gasoline now is more than \$12.50 a gallon. Even at 2:1 to the U.S. dollar, that's more than US\$6 for regular and even more for the premium we use because of the poor quality gas available here.



We have had a series of holidays, starting with the four-day holiday for Easter in early April. Since then, local holidays have given us several three-day weekends. We are thoroughly spoiled. The good times are over now until the National holidays in September. My life is so quiet these days that I don't know why a holiday even matters to me. It may be that on weekends and holidays, when the maids are not here, I indulge myself in a beer before lunch and an afternoon nap.

April 2013

I had a lovely time when Carli and Tom were here for Easter. They arrived the afternoon of the 27th of March and left on the 4th of April. Good weather greeted them—breezy and cool.

As usual, it was perfect having them here. The only problem was that the maids were off for a four-day holiday. I am not able to do much and María's left hand was broken, so Carli and the boys filled in. Meals were kept simple, many of them Spanish dishes we ordered for the holidays. Carli and Tom insisted on doing dishes.

Tom sorted out some problems in my computer, so it now is in good shape. He is a marvel with these things. Conversation involved computers often. Alex, María, and Carli all are involved with them, of course. I listened and did not understand most of the time.

The “children” did a shopping run for María and me, then Alex took Carli and Tom on a run through the city—not an easy project since many of the main streets are being repaired and detours abound. Carli was amazed at the new, large buildings going up everywhere.

While I miss Carli and Tom now, I am grateful for their visit. They have a full schedule at home, and I appreciate their taking time out to come to Belize. They will be back in June next year for Carli's high school reunion.

June 2013

I don't write as often as I used to; my life is so much stay-at-home that I don't usually have anything to say. Fortunately I can keep myself occupied with books, the computer, and TV. For the record, I do not indulge in the personal computer programs like Facebook. I can't imagine wanting to put personal information out for public consumption. Various friends-and-relatives invite me to enlist in their personal programs. I find it easy not to do so.

September 2013

My thoughtful son brought me a Kindle from his recent trip to the States. My vision has become slightly hazy (age!) and reading books had become a problem. Not a bad one, luckily. The Kindle solves the problem.

I wasted literally hours and hours over a period of days trying to register my new “toy.” I finally asked Alex to enter my registration—which he did handily.

After much communing with the Kindle instruction book—which Alex had printed out for me from the Internet—I was able to get Jane Austin’s *Pride and Prejudice* free from Gutenberg (or some such name).^{*} I thought I read it in high school, but found that I never had read it. It is a gem in its way, but by the end I was struggling. Most sentences took up almost an entire page. And it is almost all dialogue with little description and no color.

November 2013

I am the proud possessor of a new computer. My very old one had been giving me constant trouble. There was some thought of hooking my laptop up to my monitor, large keyboard, and printer, but I have problems with the laptop because the Yahoo print is too small for my cloudy vision. The new one is fine, though I have a lot to learn before I can use it easily. The wonderful thing is that Alex has given it to me as an early Christmas present.



I am getting used to the new computer. Unfortunately, it is Windows 8, which is an unhappy attempt to meld computer and touch screen. Alex has fixed things so that the latter isn’t really in the way for me. The computer itself is fine, though I preferred certain features on my old one. This will take a little getting used to, but I have both time and patience. Besides, I use a limited number of computer features. I had settled on

^{*} Actually, the site is *Project Gutenberg*.

buying a new computer myself, but left searching and selection to Alex. His deciding to give me the computer for Christmas was a wonderful surprise.



The weather has been wretched. For almost a week we had intermittent squalls due to a severe storm in the Yucatán. No sooner was that finished, but we had a rainy cold wave that still is with us. No matter. Weather doesn't worry me, and I can stay warm in the house with heavy clothes.

January 2014

I have had another six-month bout of thrombophlebitis. That is back in the not-so distant past. Now I am recovering from severe swelling of both lower legs. Not the thrombosis this time. Ultrasound proved that the problem is bad veins and arteries. Nothing to do about it, but wear compression socks and keep legs elevated most of the time. Meanwhile, I use a walker or cane to cope with my constant dizziness and poor balance. A lot of my other problems are due to age. No point griping. I'll be 92 Saturday.

February 2014

I had a delightful visit yesterday from Betty Flinchum, the friend for whom I edit writings. She lives in the mountains of North Carolina, but visits Belize every February to see officials. She worked with the university for years, arranging scholarships for Belizean students at University of North Florida. Some 250 of those students have returned to Belize to work here. She stays in touch with the Belizean education system and its officials. It was wonderful to see her. We had a splendid afternoon visit.

April 2014

I wish I had something interesting to tell you, but I haven't.

Correspondence was easier during the years when I was traveling. I am grateful now for all the interesting trips I took. Fun to dream back over.



This weekend is our four-day Easter holiday—Friday through Monday. María and Alex have invited me for Easter Sunday dinner on María's patio. It is a pleasant place and open to the breeze. Alex will grill two pork loin roasts. He does it beautifully. I look forward to the event.

Aside from that, I have no plans. The days will be like ordinary weekend ones. That really suits me. The dogs usually come upstairs in the morning to be with me. I enjoy their company. Duchess, our black Labrador, is her usual, bustling self. Poor Raven, our aging Doberman, has trouble with her hind legs. Often she can't manage my stairs. Fortunately the problem comes and goes.

June 2014

It is hard for me to write these days because I am almost house-bound. Nothing interesting to say. Fortunately things will change temporarily in a couple of weeks when Carli and Tom come for Carli's high school reunion. I am in something of a panic because I had it (ridiculously) in mind that they were coming in July. Alex's wife, María, was in the same class, so all four will be busy much of the time, but it will be wonderful for me to have them here.

Please excuse any typos. My new computer lamp is not bright enough, and I have trouble seeing.



Kate, 2014

July 2014

I am glad my back waited until Carli and Tom left to go bad. I am in no shape to be seen. The most excruciating of the pain—on getting up and lying down—has moderated greatly. Standing and walking are very painful. This, too, shall end—but when!

Looking Ahead, Looking Back

Looking Ahead

This unfinished poem and notes are reproduced below just as Kate typed them, probably in the 1960's. Her note before the poem indicates that it is not her original draft, and her note afterwards indicates that she intended to modify it further.

— Carli Scott

DRAFT

(because original paper too tattered and torn)

*Death, let me love you. Let the golden glow
Which lives beyond the darkened walls of life
Illuminate and richen this short time
I live and work and wonder.
Let me seek the what-will-be and leave
The what-is-now.
No, not too soon. This world has challenges, too.
I love its many masks. But seeing through
The haze of here the blaze of there, I wish
I knew what form that is—or lack of form,
Perhaps. I'd love to know whose guess is right;
Which prophet or which church, which poet, seer,
Or unwarned, visioned one has glimpsed the truth.
Or do their earth-dimmed eyes deny them faith
In what their spirits see?*

not finished. May want to change lines to looser form

Looking Back

Kate died at home the evening of September 17, 2014. She left instructions that the following letter should be read at her funeral instead of a eulogy. She went on to decree that none of her family or friends should be asked to participate in the service in any way, saying she felt that would be “a sad, difficult, and unnecessary duty for loved ones.”

— *Carli Scott*

Cherished family and friends,

Please let this be a time of comfort and even joy. I have lived for some time with the consciousness of coming death. I always have felt that the only thing promised us at birth is death. As a Christian, I consider this a blessing.

My life has been exceptionally happy.

- Adoption by strong and loving parents
- A beloved extended family
- Gratifying school years
- Years of stimulating jobs
- A marriage my husband, Bucher, and I both considered happier than any other marriage ever had been or ever would be
- The family we always wanted—Alex, our son, and Carli, our daughter—both exceptionally bright children, then adults, of whom we could be proud
- Belize looms large as a major blessing in my life. We came here for three months more than half a century ago. The Belize world was slow-paced and gracious; the climate, benign; the people welcoming. Through the years my heart was filled with love for the gracious friends I made among foreigners and Belizeans, clerks and stevedores, bank tellers and boatmen.
- Boats—we always had boats. Our lives revolved around the sun and the sea, the reef and the cayes.

- Dogs—we always had at least one dog. One after the other they gallumphed into our lives and our hearts.

The one tragedy in my life was Bucher's early death. The love we shared carried me through the years without him. More by accident than by intent I found myself traveling almost annually. The number of countries I visited surprised even me.

The last years were quiet. I was alone but not lonely. I do not know now how death came for me, but I know that I was ready for it. Faith is the cushion of both life and death.



Kate as she'd probably like to be remembered, 2007

Editor's Notes

These notes are by no means necessary for understanding and enjoying my Mom's accounts. Rather, they contain additional bits of information, as I might relate to a friend who had just read the relevant chapters.

— *Carli Scott*

1. Kate's Stockings

In Mom's account of her fall in Belmopan during her cousins' visit in 1980 (page 3), she wrote:

Tore two holes in my leg...which would heal...and one in my new surgical stockings...which wouldn't.

Mom was hospitalized for thrombophlebitis in 1975 (while visiting those same cousins in Saginaw). Thereafter, she had to wear custom-fit elastic compression stockings, which assisted blood circulation by applying graduated pressure on her veins, decreasing from toe to thigh.

When it was time to buy more stockings, Mom needed to make an appointment to visit an authorized vendor in the U.S., where her legs were remeasured to insure that the new stockings fit and functioned properly. Because of the difficulty and expense of replacing a pair of stockings, Mom viewed any serious damage to them as a minor catastrophe.

2. Kate's Leg

In Mom's description of her activities while hosting the Anglican Canon from Jamaica (page 5), she commented on sitting through a long church service:

I can manage the short communion service (which I go to on Tuesday mornings), but an hour and a half of cramped sitting and kneeling was too much for my leg.

Due to her thrombophlebitis, Mom needed to keep her leg elevated while sitting. Attending any kind of event at which she had to sit in a standard

chair for long periods of time was very hard on her, often causing her leg to swell.

3. Why *Box*?

After I reread Mom's description of getting a new refrigerator (page 82), it occurred to me that her use of the word *box* might perplex or confuse younger readers or those who grew up in the tropics.

When she writes:

The box I wanted was a side-by-side refrigerator / freezer to replace the second-hand one that has given me reliable service for more than ten years.

readers will probably realize that *box* refers to the new appliance, but they may wonder why she chose that word.

On the other hand, when she writes:

The gang moved the box...

readers may assume that the refrigerator was delivered in a large cardboard carton (it wasn't) and that *box* refers to such a carton rather than to the refrigerator itself.

In Mom's childhood home (and many houses in Michigan at the time), the kitchen contained an *ice box*, an insulated cabinet that kept foods fresh and chilled by means of a large block of ice, typically harvested from a frozen lake in the winter. When home refrigerators replaced ice boxes, Mom and others of her generation often called this new appliance an *ice box* out of habit, using *box* for short, the way we use *fridge* today.

Kate V. Scott was a journalist, a wife and mother, a private pilot, a bookkeeper, a shipping agent, an airline agent, a dog lover, a bridge player, a traveler, and a tireless correspondent with a uniquely engaging writing style.

This is the second of four books in a posthumous autobiography that her daughter, Carli Scott, assembled from Kate's letters, reports, and other writing. In it, Kate writes of her experiences as a widowed American expat living and working in the newly independent nation of Belize.



Kate with daughter Carli and son Alex on her 70th birthday,
January 4, 1992