

December 2000

Well!! What a year it has been once again. As Cheryl often says the one thing she has learned from our 30 years of marriage is not to try and predict the future - even a year out! Each of us has seen major change in our lives this year and so we end the first year of the Millennium (or enter it for the purists) with a fresh view of our situation and the certain knowledge that we can't be certain about anything next year. The great thing is that all of this change is good and the signs are that it will continue to be that way.

This letter is late this year and that is, as much as anything else, a commentary on our new life in US. We fully expect that those of you in the US and other parts of the world will get it pretty close to Christmas. (PS. Okay – so the 18th December is pushing it a bit even here. PPS. I guess the 18th December would have been good as it turns out!). But in SA we wouldn't have thought of mailing it later than November – we have just got used to the immediacy of the US. And there is the first part of the change this year. In May this year, quite unexpectedly, we got our treasured green cards and are now permanent residents. Only those of you who have labored for such a prize will understand the impact on every aspect of your life. We instantly had an end to the uncertainty of our stay here and were able to feel really at home. We have really enjoyed our 3 years here and did not want to think about having to leave but without permanent residence you are at the mercy of the Immigration service and your visa-holding employer. And so to some of the changes.

Lauren has now begun High School and seems to have overcome the initial challenge of the change from Middle (Primary) school to the different learning style now required. She has become a really lovely young lady and has now recovered her usual group of "A" grades at school. She has a solid group of friends and spends her spare time socializing with them. Mind you, she doesn't have much spare time. She has become very involved with her dancing group which is an outreach program of a local church. She does ballet and hip-hop etc and she and her friend, Lizzie, also choreograph their own dances from time to time. Interestingly, they put together a dance to the Auld Lang Syne / Lords Prayer song by Cliff Richard early in 2000 and were asked to perform it at several local functions and churches. She is now slender and close to 6 foot and beginning to overtake her mother and me but fortunately not overly fashion or fad conscious as it would cost us a fortune to keep upsizing.

Ryan started college in August. It was a huge adjustment for all of us as we lost a really important member of our team that has survived and flourished with the changes of the past 17 years. He did really well at High School and so earned a place and a good scholarship at Trinity College in San Antonio. That's only about 200 miles from us so its not a bad drive and he has been back several times. He, too, has had to adjust to the new style of learning and has had great difficulty adjusting to not staying up till 3am and then trying to attend classes at 8am! His finals in the last couple of weeks have now made it clear that he needs to change next semester and so he will probably get back to his "A" grades again. Let me emphasize that he hasn't done badly but he could have done better. Ryan has matured enormously and is a real pleasure to have around – we really miss his wicked sense of humor usually targeted at this mother who retains her renowned gullibility!

Cheryl has probably gone through the biggest change this year. She has hankered after starting work with Continental Airlines for some time and went after it in May and got selected and was then screened to the most minute detail, passed that and started work early October. Continental is headquartered in Houston and the call center where Cheryl works is about 20 mins from us. She is a reservation sales agent – one of those people you get on the phone when you call in to make a booking. It is considered the apprenticeship for the industry and opens the doors for all sorts of opportunities in the travel industry. She has done incredibly well, not having worked for anyone other than herself for 20 years, and consistently is commended for her work. The pay is not outstanding but the benefits are superb. We have free travel for the family (and friends after the first 6 months) and when she has worked there for 10 years those benefits are lifelong. After her initial 6 months she can move to part-time of 20 hours a week and still retain all the travel benefits. The job has limited her social activities a bit but she is still very active with the Republican Party women and other groups in our local area. I get to play a bit of Mr Mom so try to limit my travel to the days when she is not working nights.

I have had another one of those wild years at DACG. We have had several management changes and now have a totally new management group in US. Fortunately I had a very good sales year so survived all the changes. But the constant change over the past 2 years took its toll and I resigned just before Christmas. There was a great flurry of activity and they threw buckets of money and promises at me so I am staying. The money helped with some of the debts and makes a big dent in Ryan's college costs so it was very welcome. The first part of this year is looking good again so perhaps I will have a more stable year. I am still very happy with what I do and am somewhat relieved at not having to find my way around another company. Life out of work is mostly stuff around the house which I enjoy (eventually I am going to get good at it as well!!).

Our "trek" this year was out to the West Coast. We drove out via Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, El Paso and San Antonio. It was truly a magnificent journey and we continue to wonder at the size and diversity of the US countryside. We have now crossed US from coast to coast on the I-10 interstate highway. The 2000 trip is tentatively scheduled to be Chicago and the Lakes area. We really enjoy these rapid fire, day at a time, trips as we get to taste the flavor of lots of different areas that we can go back to later. Cheryl had a great idea that when we retire we should get an apartment and one of these mobile homes and spend half the year just cruising the US.

And so we start our 4th year all well, fat and happy – some of us too much of some of those and still really enjoying our American dream. I am so grateful to the folk who kept saying to me a few years ago that I should go to the US when I really wanted to head to UK. I think its going to be a lot easier to live here and visit there rather than the reverse. I miss my regular trips to UK on business but we hope to get across a couple of time this year and will look up as many as we can when that happens.

This note has been nearly a month in the making and it would be nice to think that it reflects in the quality of the content – perhaps next year!

Have a great 2001 and let us know if you are coming to US for any reason ...