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Rocky's Holiday Gazette

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HOLIDAYS 2005

A little late. See pg. 2 "Off to Paris Again" for the reason why...

10th Annual Gazette!!

Wow, it has been ten years since my first Holiday Gazette! A lot has happened during that time:

I was almost ready to turn 50 years old! (Now, I'm looking 60 directly in the eyes! It's funny how 60 used to seem so ancient.);

Leonor and I were simply a couple (Now, we are a family, raising two little guys—Jesse 15 and Jeremy almost 10); Leonor had just purchased a Post Office contract station (Now, she is retired, having been ousted after six years by the USPS building a new Post Office Branch in the immediate neighborhood);

I used to package up all of the Christmas presents for JoAnn and her family and ship them via UPS to France

(Now, I play Santa and carry them over in a suitcase every year in mid-December—a little more expensive, but worth every penny to get to see them regularly!); I had just celebrated the 20th Anniversary of my business, Professional Computer Services (Now, I've been freelancing for 30 years! I'm not yet ready to retire—I like what I do and I like my clients and I'm busier than ever); JoAnn had two little babies and Jennifer had one (Now, JoAnn's Zoë and Ian are 11 and 9 and both bilingual—thank goodness, since I can't speak any French! - and Jennifer now has two little ones, Nick and Carly, 9 and 6 and both outstanding students!).

A few photos from ten years ago



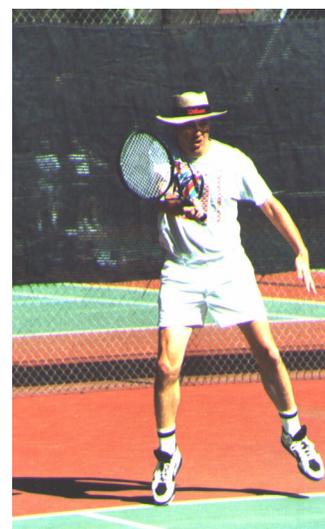
This was two-year-old Zoë loving her new baby brother, Ian.



Doug and Jennifer with new baby Nick.



Jesse, 7 years old



Here I was playing in a tennis tournament (who is that skinny guy???)

10TH ANNUAL (OR 11TH OR 12TH OR SO) HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

We have established a tradition (10 or 12 years or so now—we don't remember exactly when we started) at our home that continues to grow. We offer a Thanksgiving Day open-house for family and friends to visit us during the mid day. We serve

home made Tom & Jerrys - an eggnog like holiday drink - and champagne, coffee and wines for those who prefer them, and sparkling cider, soft drinks and juices for the children.

This year, we had 51 people come to join us for the open

house; then 23 stayed for a turkey and ham dinner. It was a lot of work to prepare (Leonor is a wonderful cook and very organized - I just do what I am told!). We had a great time!

After everyone was gone, we finished cleaning the house and went to bed very early!

South Africa, Here We Come!

It seemed too amazing to be true! A once-in-a-lifetime chance! Our friend Mervin Watson invited us to go on a month-long tour of South Africa in the spring of 2006. It sounded impossible: I've never taken even two weeks in a row off— how could I go away for a month without working?; I couldn't imagine ever going to South Africa; I don't know anything about South Africa, so how could I possibly even know where to go and what to do and see? Enter Mervin... He is a championship tennis player living in British Columbia, Canada, but he grew up in South Africa. He makes regular trips back there to visit friends and relatives and to play in tennis tournaments. He decided to take a small group of tennis people on a tennis vacation, and we were lucky enough to be on his list of possible invitees. In spite of sounding just plain out of the question, Leonor and I looked at each other and almost immediately said "Yes!"

So, we will meet Mervin and his wife Lyn and the other three couples in Cape Town in February, and travel and stay in several cities up the East Coast of Africa, ending our month in Johannesburg. I'm preparing to take about a million pictures and play a bunch of tennis. Jesse and Jeremy's dad will take care of our house and the boys while we're gone. I hope my clients don't have too many emergencies! I'll be able to do remote support via my laptop and cell phone; I hope it will work...

Some 2005 Photo Memories



JoAnn with her dad (ME!)



Zoë—11 years old

Ian—9



Jennifer & Doug



Nick—9 and Carly—6



Jesse—15



Jeremy—9



Leonor at National tournament in Kansas City. Her team placed fourth in the country!

Sad News

As we near the so-called "Golden Years", we are saddened to face the loss of some friends and family members. The biggest loss this year was Leonor's mom. Last Christmas Day, she went to bed as usual, but during the night, she suffered a severe stroke. Leonor's brother Andy found her unconscious on the bedroom floor on the morning of the 26th. The news from the doctor was not good.

Leonor flew to Yuma to be with her and the family. Mary passed away quietly at home on New Year's day. Sadly, three months later, Mary's husband Wally—Leonor's step-father—also passed away.

We will certainly miss them both, and will miss our trips to Yuma.



Off to Paris Again

Okay, my excuse for sending this letter a little late is: I did my annual Santa trip to visit JoAnn and the kids in Paris—but this time with an elf along. I took Jeremy, now 9 years old (almost 10) with me. I knew I'd want to write about his/our experiences...

After my trip last year, I had mentioned that I thought Jeremy would really get a lot out of a trip to Paris.

Well, he overheard me, and didn't forget it! So there was no way I could not take him this year.

We arrived in Toronto on schedule – but in a snow storm. After boarding our plane to Paris at 6:20 on schedule, we finally took off about 10:45—four hours on the ground is a long time, especially with a nine-year-old!...

Jeremy and Ian hit it off immediately, playing their Game Boys and Playstation. Ian's English improved considerably during the week.

Of course, we had to visit the most famous sites in Paris, so

we started with the Eiffel Tower. We rode the elevator to the top. That was a little scary, even for an old guy like me! But Jeremy was very impressed! And it was cold! Above freezing, but still very cold.

At the Chartres Cathedral, he actually was impressed rather than bored, and took a bunch of pictures.

We spent some time at JoAnn's new house—she just bought it and is renovating it. She took me shopping for a bathtub, sinks, etc. I'm looking forward to staying there next year.

Versailles was the next visit. We had told Jeremy about the Hall of Mirrors. We were very lucky—it turns out that the Hall and the adjoining display areas had been closed for renovation for 18 months, and had just reopened that day! I also took him to see the Mona Lisa, the Venus de Milo, on a riverboat tour, etc.

He will have lots of memories about that week! And, I guess, so will I!