

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

Well, my Christmas newsletter seemed to go over so well last year that I thought I'd do it again. This has been a year full of many fun experiences and changes in my life. Last Christmas was a fun and busy time. Lee and I spent the morning with his parents in Sumter, SC. Then we traveled to Camden to eat dinner with my parents and my mother's family. For supper we went to Lugoff to spend the remainder of the day with my dad's family. All in all, a VERY BUSY day!



The year didn't start out too well. I had my first hospital stay back in Feb. I ate some bad turkey and ended up in the hospital for about 3 days. Unfortunately, this happened about 2 weeks before my qualifying exam and people at school were kidding me about eating turkey for weeks. The good news is that I passed my qualifier and so I only have one more to go before concentrating solely on my research at school!



Also at the beginning of the year was our annual ski trip through the church. We had a lot of fun. It was SO COLD! I didn't go skiing, but a group of us went to a local mall while the others went down the slopes! While there, Lee and I wandered into a pet store, and there were some little conures that, once they got on my shoulder, refused to leave. Lee tried to put them back on their perches and they bit him. Poor Lee. A parrot also really liked my sweater. I guess he thought the design was really food in disguise! Anyway, in the mall, I got chosen to participate in a local radio contest. They put me in a booth and blew money around me. I could keep what I caught, and I caught about \$45. Cool, huh?



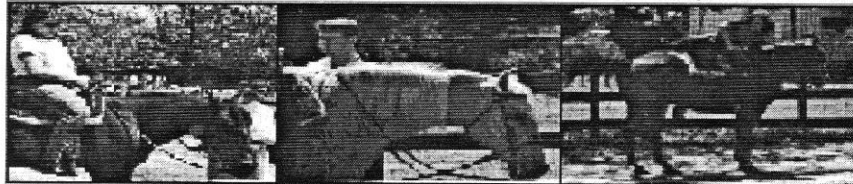
Last Spring, Lee and I joined his roommate Keith and friends Darrin, Michelle, Jeff, and Laurie for the Aiken steeplechase. While there we saw my friends Suzanne and Tom. It was really fun! Keith's family had a "spot" there and lots of great food.



Lee and I spent Easter in North Carolina at his aunt's home with his family. I got to meet his grandmother and spend time with some of his cousins. We even had an Easter Egg Hunt. I used to love those. I'd make Mama hide eggs around the house (plastic -- in case we missed finding one!) and would hunt them all through the Easter season. It was a lot of fun!

Here, we have 3 generations -- Lee, his mom, and his grandmother.

Later in the Spring, our Single's group decided to go horseback riding. We went to the Equus Farm about 30 minutes north of Columbia. It was so cool -- we went on a trail ride through the woods. Five of us could go at a time and while a group left for their hour's ride, the rest of us ate and played volleyball. I really enjoyed this since I no longer have time for lessons.





Another fun thing the group did was go to the beach. There's a person in our church who allows us to rent their home at a reduced rate twice a year -- once in the Spring and once in the Fall. It was a really nice house about a block from the strand. One thing that struck me as cute were these little frogs. I'd never seen frogs this tiny. They were so CUTE!



Also, during the Spring semester, I continued teaching CSCI 101. I really enjoy teaching. It's great to interact with the students. It's also very gratifying when they ask you if you're teaching 102 or say that they are thinking about choosing Computer Science as a major. Between the Spring and Summer semesters, our department changed buildings, so for those of you who don't have it, here's my new office number: 803-777-3768. I now have an office with a window and LOTS of bookshelves! It's great! I share it with 3 other TA's, so it's not as private as my old office, but I will be moving in to my advisor's area (hopefully) within the year, so that shouldn't be too much of a problem. Besides, the people are nice, and sometimes, you just NEED an excuse for taking a break -- talking for a few minutes works for me!

As the year progressed I had many opportunities through school. The first was that of helping make the lab manual for CSCI 101 better. So, Chris Eason (another 101 TA) and I rewrote the manual for the 1996-1997 school year. We updated old assignments and created some new ones. From what I understand, the students and current TA's are enjoying it.

So why am I not teaching you ask? Well, that was the other opportunity. You see, in June, my advisor, Dr. Huntsberger, asked me if I wanted to try for a grant. I would work part time with a company and part time on my own research in return for a full time salary from the University. I applied and was accepted to this program. However, my company was a little far away. I began work for Silicon Graphics, Inc. (SGI) in Mountain View, CA on July 14th and remained in California for 3 months. As you can imagine, I had many adventures there and met many interesting people and new friends. For a full accounting of my "excursions," just let me know and I'll send you a copy of the email that I sent to some friends who wanted to keep up with me. I must warn you that I wrote quite a lot -- between 20 and 30 typed pages! However, for the highlights, read on.

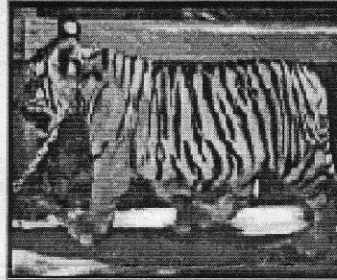
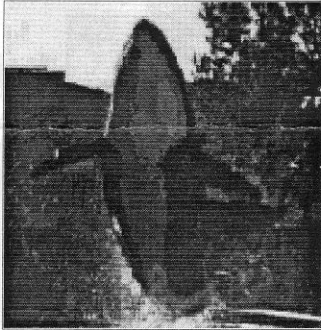


I arrived in CA on July 14th with Morgan in tow. PC stayed with Mama and Daddy, but for a 3 month stint, I felt that Morgan would miss me too much (he's such a Mama's dog!) and that I would need his company, so SGI agreed to allow me to bring him along. They provided me with an apartment and a car, and Morgan could come into work with me as long as he was quiet. SGI is a very laid back company. Jean's and T-shirts were acceptable work clothes and pets and children are allowed as long as they are well behaved. In fact, Morgan had many friends there. Diana Hui was a friend who would give Morgan a bagel every Wednesday morning. He came to really look for her. When I'd go to lunch, Leslie Webster would watch him for me. She was so sweet to do that! I learned a lot from SGI, both in my field and in my life experience.

(Upper left, SGI. Lower left, Morgan and I.)  
(Right, Diana, Morgan's bagel friend!)

The first thing that really hit me hard upon arrival in CA was the traffic. It was HORRENDOUS!!! I would be going the speed limit and people would pass me so fast that my car would shake. People cut in front of you and blow their horns. It was worse than my (admittedly limited) experience of driving in Atlanta. And that was not really a picnic, either.

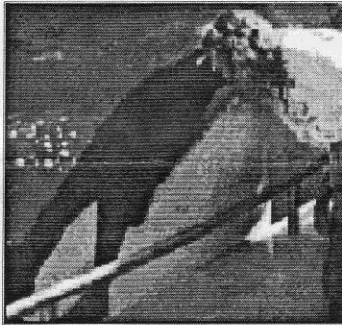
I decided that on my first weekend there, I should do something I knew I'd enjoy. I'd found out that Marine World/Africa/USA was about an hour away and, knowing how much I love animals, I thought I'd check it out. This animal park is unlike any other that I've ever been to or heard of. The guests are allowed to get SO CLOSE to the animals, it's UNREAL!! I got to pet a tiger cub, ride an elephant, feed a giraffe, pet an iguana, llama, orangutan, and see great shows with intelligent animals. I think the highlight was being able to pet Vigma, the Orca (killer whale) and get a kiss from Yaka (the other Orca). This was really exciting for me! (See pictures, next page.)



Scenes from Marine World Africa USA. I got to pet the tiger cub, the orangutan, and the Orca pictured here!



The Sea Lion show was really entertaining. These little fellows are born performers/clowns. What was really unusual was the fact that the show included two Pacific Harbor seals. These little animals are shy by nature and rarely appear in shows. In fact, MW has the only harbor seal that does a back flip for an audience! (The back flip here is performed by Artemus, a sea lion. Peabody has the ball to the nose, and Gunther takes a bow!)



Of course, the Killer Whale and Dolphin Show was one of my favorites. I saw the show 7 times and finally got picked to pet the Orca and receive a kiss. It's really amazing how high they can jump and how intelligent they are! They also tell you a lot of interesting facts about dolphins and Orca's. Did you know that an adult dolphin can leap 20 feet out of the water? Or that an Orca can leap as high as their body is long? Not to shabby for 6000 lb Vigga and 10,000 lb Yaka, huh?





The Bird Show allowed you to see not only the macaws and parrots that you'd expect, but also hawks, owls, and a bald eagle. Caesar, the Hyacinth macaw to the left was one of 4 macaw's to come flying down from above the audience to land on stage with his trainer. The macaw's played horseshoes, the parrots talked and sang, and the birds of prey were just impressive. There was even a little conure that would take you money if you gave him the chance!



Biff, the Binturong  
 <-- Dennis, the Spider Monkey  
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Mara, the Cheetah  
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During the Wildlife Show, the audience got to meet many animals from Africa, South America, and the good ol' USA. They included everything from opossums, porcupines, and cougars to binturongs, spider monkeys, and cheetahs. They also had a little fruit bat and a really cute kit fox.



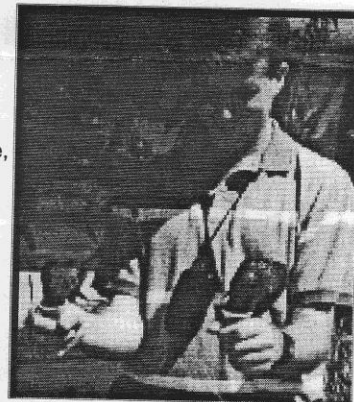
As the attractions go, the giraffe dock was really cool. For \$0.50, you got to feed the giraffes as many apples as you could get them to take. It was part of the Gentle Jungle, where you could go to pet many of the more gentle animals as well as the parks other animals (like elephants, porcupines, baby tigers, and miniature burros) walking through the park.



The giraffe doing the solo there was named Francis. That's me feeding him up top and Lee feeding a second giraffe (I forget all the names) bottom left.



The Walkabout was really neat -- you walked through kangaroos and wallaby's as they decided whether or not they want you to pet them. You could feed the lorikeets; in fact, you became a living perch to them as they landed all over you to try to get that special nectar that they eat (See Lee, to the right for an example!). There was also a koala station, however, because the koala's bite, guests weren't allowed near them. The Shark Encounter was really neat, too -- you went under the aquarium and the sharks were swimming all around you. (The first MW paragraph had a photo from there!) Another cool place was Butterfly World, a building with hundreds of butterfly's!

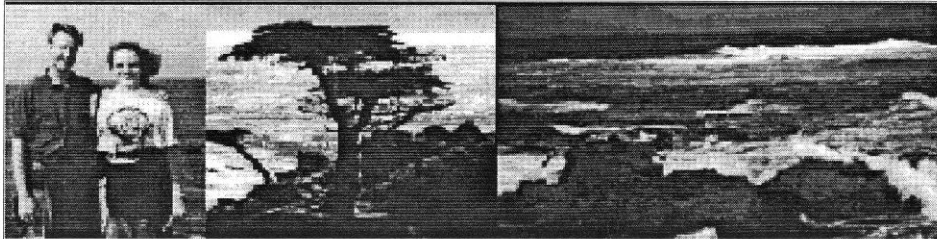


Marine World was a really cool place to visit. I got a membership on my first visit, as I knew that I'd be going back there again. I went back about 6 times.

Another place I visited while in CA was the Monterey peninsula. This was about 2 hours South of where I lived. I went there a few times. I shopped on Cannery Row, the same one that Steinbeck wrote about. There I saw the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. (see below) Oh, boy. In what used to be the largest cannery on Cannery Row is the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Here they have lots of neat stuff. They have built a kelp forest with everything in it from sharks to sardines. In another exhibit, called the Outer Bay, there is the largest piece of glass I've ever seen. Here you can see many interesting fish, including sunfish (tall, flat fish pictured below) and sea turtles. There is also a "jelly's" exhibit and the aquarium was featuring an exhibit of "deadly beauties." The cutest part of the aquarium to me was the sea otter exhibit. There were 2 females and a male in this exhibit. Rosco, the male, was really cute. He'd wait by the door when it was close to feeding time, and when he heard the worker coming, he'd run for the water. You see, sea otters always eat in the water on their backs.

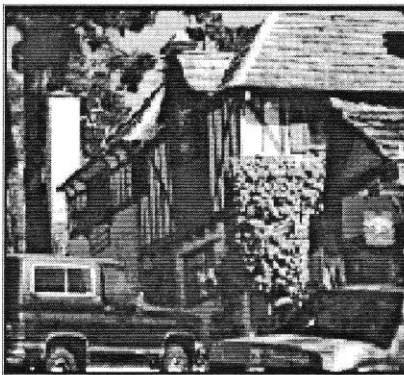


Near Monterey was Pacific Grove, known as "Butterfly Town, USA." This is because between Oct. and Nov., the Monarch butterfly migrates here. I saw a few my last weekend in CA (I went back to the area), but in pictures, the butterflies literally cover the trees, so that they look like colored leaves. Also in Pacific Grove are beautiful Victorian homes and the Point Pinos Lighthouse. The black tailed deer here just walk through people's yards and across the streets.

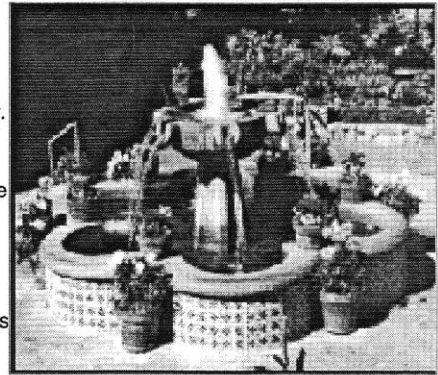


The Monterey Peninsula was a beautiful place to visit. I'd encourage anyone going to the area to try to spend a weekend or so there. You get great shots of the ocean and can soak in the atmosphere.

Between Pacific Grove and Carmel, I followed the "longest route" called 17-mile drive. Along this drive are breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean (above right), Monterey Bay (above left), and Carmel Bay. Along the drive is the "Lone Cypress," the most photographed tree in the US (center, above). There are lots of wildlife along the drive, including deer, sea otters, sea lions, pelicans, sea gulls, terns, voles, etc. Also along this drive is the famous Pebble Beach and the Pebble Beach Golf Course.



Leaving 17-mile drive, I entered Carmel, a quaint little town founded at the turn of the century as an artists' and writers' colony and remains so for many residents today. In the late 1980's, Clint Eastwood became the mayor. He kept the sand dollar as the symbol of this town and the strict rules against neon signs and billboards. This is where Ansel Adams, the photographer, lives. This little town is FULL of shops. In fact, there are over 150 shops, 90 art galleries, and 60 restaurants. The shops are tucked away among shade trees and is very rural looking. There are many trees thanks to a city ordinance in 1916 banning the cutting of trees. (Shops, left. Fountain in shops, right)

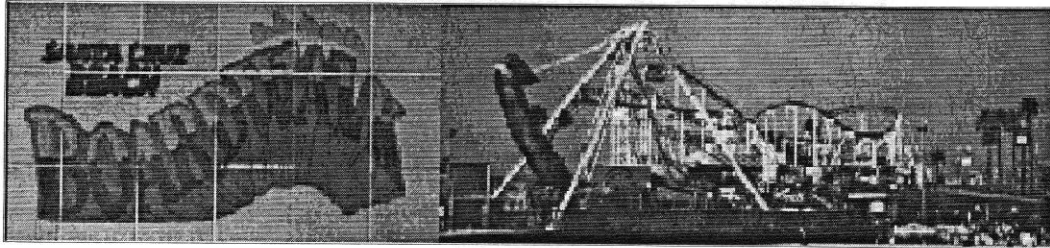


Well, you can't go to CA and not visit wine country. I went to Sonoma Valley. This is a very historic, picturesque town where the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846 took place. This is when about 30 American Frontiersmen rode into town and declared an independent Bear Flag Republic, while raising a hand made "Bear Flag" which is CA's state flag today. It's also the site of the northernmost of CA's 21 missions. The Mexican government built it in hopes that it would prevent the Russians from expanding south into Mexican territory. I also visited the Sebastiani Winery and went on a tour which ended in the tasting room. It was really neat to see how the wine is made. They had HUGE barrels to hold the wine as it fermented. These were made of redwood and each had a carving on it that had been done by a family friend. The winery is still owned and operated by the original family. Also in Sonoma was the Sonoma Cheese Factory, complete with free samples --- Mmmmmm! Finally, some of you Falcon Crest fans might be interested to know -- Sonoma's City Hall was the City Hall used in the series.



Bear flag statue  
Mission  
Sebastiani, outside  
Sebastiani, inside  
City Hall

Another interesting location was Santa Cruz. I mainly went to the Boardwalk and the Wharf areas there. The Boardwalk is an amusement park which reminds me of the Pavilion at Myrtle Beach. There are lots of rides, including a carousel from 1907 and a roller coaster from 1927. There are also other rides and arcade games -- even Pac Man. (That's one I haven't seen in awhile!)



Another interesting place to visit in the area was the Winchester Mystery House. This was built by the heir to the Winchester fortune. Some say that she built it to keep angry souls at bay, who had been killed by the Winchester rifle. Others say she was just interested in architecture as a hobby and had no real talent for it. You see, this house has stair cases that lead to ceilings, windows in floors, and fire places that extend up 4 floors only to stop just below the ceiling, making the fire places that it connected to useless. She was fascinated by the numbers 13, 7, and 11 and loved daisies and spider web patterns. Her steps in the house were mainly an inch and a half tall, called easy risers. Some say this was also to confuse ghosts; others say it was because she had arthritis and it helped her to climb the stairs! Mrs. Winchester's home was also a working farm and her gardens were GORGEOUS! The gardens contain plants representing 110 different countries. I saw trees from Japan, Australia, England, etc. as well as the familiar crepe (sp?) myrtle tree (where Myrtle Beach's name came from!). There were also museums on the grounds containing the history of the Winchester rifle as well as many of the other products that the company produced after the war was over and rifle business went down. These products included flashlights and fishing equipment!

I have to tell you about San Francisco itself. I was living just South of this huge city. San Francisco is a beautiful and well rounded city. Though it took me awhile to get to know my way around, I really enjoyed visiting this city. I did get lost the first 3 times I visited. However, I did see many different things this way. The first place I saw there was the beautiful Golden Gate Park. I mainly visited Stow Lake while there and got some beautiful pictures of the lake and waterfall there. I also visited the Presidio where you have a wonderful view of the Golden Gate Bridge. There is also a factory there that allows you to make your OWN teddy bear. As much as I love stuffed animals, this was a wonderful treat for me! You also shouldn't go to San Francisco without visiting Pier 39. It's the 3rd biggest tourist attraction in the country, following Disney World and Disney Land. At Pier 39 there is a wonderful gallery of Wyland's art -- you may have seen some of his murals in Myrtle Beach or Atlanta. He also does sculpture and I really loved one of the coffee tables there -- a dolphin coming through the glass top! I also took a bay cruise and saw the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges up close. We also circled Alcatraz and viewed San

Francisco from the Bay. It was very beautiful. Though I didn't see him, while I was in CA, a humpback whale wandered into the Bay and spent the day there, being watched by awe struck people by boat and helicopter. I also got to ride the famous cable cars, visit Union Square, China Town (the largest Chinese settlement outside of China), and see Nob Hill and Lombard Street (the crookedest street in the world!). I also went by Embarcadero Center, Ghiradelli Square, the Cannery, Coit Tower, and the Financial District. One thing that really strikes you about San Francisco is the STEEP HILLS!! It was really heart stopping on some of the tours I went on. It's hard to believe in your brakes that much!



Pier 39  
"my coffee table"  
China Town  
Lombard St.  
A STEEP hill  
Cable car ride  
Cable Car



I also saw some of the famous Redwoods. The forest with the redwoods that you can drive through were too far of a trip, but there was a forest only about an hour away near the coast. Mrs. Betty Dudek and I (a friend of mine) went on a walking tour. There was a pamphlet which told us what to expect as we walked along. I learned a lot about these trees. First of all, they are HUGE - some were over 200 feet tall and between 40 and 50 feet around. The roots of the trees are very shallow to allow them to get as much water as possible. These trees also have 2 forms of reproduction -- a cone (their seed) and through burls (a knot in the tree that, when the tree is dead, releases hormones through the tree and grows into another redwood. Redwood bark is very resistant to fire. If they are burnt and some part of the tree remains alive, the tree will heal itself and continue to grow. Redwoods often grow in circles around the root structures of dead trees.

Morgan also had an adventure while in CA. In Lodi, CA (near Sacramento), there was a ranch there called the Oxford Ranch, where you could take your dog for a herding instinct test. Morgan went into the ring with the sheep, and while at first he was a little intimidated by them (they ARE 3 times his size), once he figured out he could make them move, he was SO HAPPY. He had such a good time. Even better -- with no training, my little angel kept these sheep right with me. When one broke away, Morgan went and got it and brought it back! I also got a video of his first time, so anyone who's interested.... We went back for a lesson, so Morgan got to go twice. It was really cool!



Lee was really sweet and came out to see me over Labor day weekend. I took him all over, including Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Monterey, Marine World, and San Francisco, all in 4 days. Poor Lee. I think I wore him out. You can see his pictures throughout the trip above!

And finally, the best news of all... two weeks after I returned from California, Lee proposed. We had gone to Furman for a picnic. We'd picked up the food from Word of Mouth, a local sandwich shop, and ate out by the lake. There was a crow who tried to join us. He landed nearby and begged/demanded food. He finally left and we ate in peace, enjoying the view. After we ate, Lee got down on one knee and said he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me. After asking for our parent's blessing, we started sharing the news with everyone else. The date is Sept. 27th and the wedding will be at First Baptist Church in Camden, SC. I hope you can all attend!

The Crow



The view from where Lee proposed to me. The bell tower is behind the rightmost pine tree on the left of the picture. It was a beautiful day!



Well, that's my year in a nutshell. So much has happened since last year that it's hard to imagine that it's only been a year. God has given me many opportunities and many caring friends and family. Take care and be sure to keep in touch.

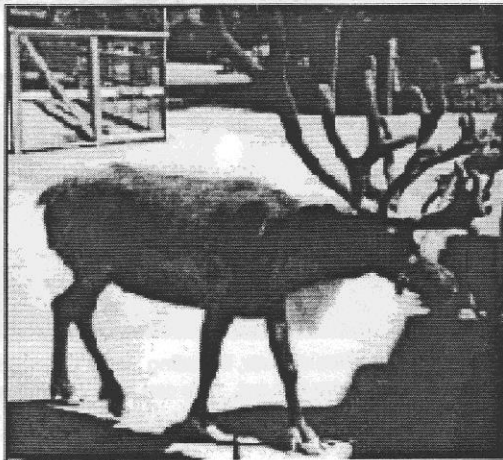
Love,

*Paige, Morgan, and PC*

Paige, Morgan, and PC



Thought I'd leave you with a view of San Francisco. That's the Golden Gate Bridge in the foreground.



I had to include him -- I small child asked his trainer if he was one of Santa's!! What do YOU think?