



*Merry Christmas
and have a happy
new year!*

Woods Tribe Tribune 1993

Howdy folks! This has been a real whirlwind of a year, with both happiness and sadness mixed together. This letter probably reflects some of the ups and downs, please bear with us. We have not kept up with many close friends and family this year due to these difficult times. We hope this newsletter will bring everyone up to date with current events in the Woods Tribe. Many thanks to all the people for their love and support. Your thoughts, cards, calls, and gifts have been very much appreciated. The Woods tribe sends ya'll hugs.

Seriously....

We had three serious illnesses in the family this year. Our three year old Natasha had one tonsil which was much larger than the other; in fact it almost blocked the entire airway. The ENT specialist scheduled a surgery and biopsy for early January at Texas Childrens

Hospital. They removed her tonsils and adenoids. The doctors were concerned and suspected that Natasha might have a Lymphoma (a type of Cancer). Tasha was a very brave three year old. Before the surgery she was given a sedative while Mommy and Daddy held her. Two hours later we joined her in the recovery room. Natasha was covered with wires and IV tubes, and she was in a lot of pain. That evening she would not go to sleep; we imagined her as thinking "look what happened to me last time I fell asleep, no way I am going to do that again!!". After a two day stay in the Hospital, Natasha returned home, only to be rushed back (try 90 MPH) to the hospital that evening for emergency bleeding. After anxiously waiting several days for the final test results; we are happy to report that Natasha does not have Lymphoma.

The second big scare was with Denise's Father (Larry) who had prostate cancer. The month of June was spent taking Larry to biopsies, bone scans and other tests. In August, he had his entire prostate removed. The Doctor's have been amazed at how well he has recovered.

The last and most devastating was the sudden prognosis of Donald's father, Conrad Woods. On August 6th he was diagnosed with a grade 4 glial blastoma (e.g. brain tumor) and might not survive emergency brain surgery. Denise and Donald flew from Houston to Los Angeles that same evening. Thank goodness we had close friends who were able to watch the two girls and Grandpa Colonna on such short notice. During the 11 days we were out there on our first trip we were able to get a second opinion on the tumor. Dr. John Colonna (Grandpa's Grandson) was instrumental in arranging an appointment with one of the top brain tumor specialist in the country, Dr. Keith Black at UCLA.. Both Dr Black and the attending physician gave Conrad 10 - 14 weeks to live. After 11 days we returned to Houston.

Donald arranged a temporary job assignment in Huntington Beach California. The entire Woods tribe piled into the Toyota and headed west. We rented a motel for 3 months on the Pacific Coast highway and visited Conrad and family every weekend. Donald's Mom and Sister Kerala took care of Conrad 24 hours a day with little or no relief. In late October even with the best of care, just as the Doctor's predicted he passed away at home, 12 weeks after the initial diagnosis. We were fortunate in having the assistance of the Hospice organization during these difficult times. Father Ned (one of Conrad's tennis playing co-horts) performed a beautiful memorial service. In lieu of flowers people were asked to donate to the UCLA Brain Tumor Institute. "The Big Pirate" (As the children called him) will be dearly missed by all.

L Fall L

In November we had an adventurous 3 day car ride back to Houston. The most excitement occurred right before we left. First the alternator went out, then the wire to the alternator, then the brakes, and finally the "fusible relay" melted! Thank goodness one of our Friends in Huntington Beach, the Turners, were able to help fix up the Toyota. Apparently the Toyota was having some sort of allergic reaction to California, since it has never given us any trouble in the past 7 years. Next, we had two flat tires out in the middle of West Texas in the middle of the night; unfortunately one of them was the spare. After hobbling into Balmorhea, we put up for the night. The next morning we purchased one new and one used tire, and continued onward. Of course all three children were wondering "Are we home yet???", those who have made car trips with small children recently, can imagine how much fun this was.

Denise returned to a position she had interviewed for prior to leaving for California. The director was gracious enough to keep her position until her return. Bryce and Natasha go to a private pre-school at Denise's new campus. The pre-school program is top notch and the children look forward to their school days. Alessandra had started Kindergarten prior to the sojourn to California (where Mom home schooled her). She has adjusted well to the return to her class. It is now December and things are slowly returning to a normal schedule (editorial note: except for today's trip to the emergency room). After three months absence it takes a while to get into the swing of things. During this same time period, Dad's company laid off about 800 people from the Space Station Program; however he has survived thus far. Seeing so many friends get laid off has been difficult; we hope that Aero-space takes a turn for the better soon. As for the rest of the year - read on.



Denise's Whirlwind

As usual Denise keeps the Children and Grandpa very busy with lots of activities in Houston, Friendswood and Galveston. She took them on tours of Space Center Houston, the Zoo, the Children's Museum, "Barney" and Mickey Mouse shows, puppet shows, a production of "Sleeping Beauty"....I guess you get the idea.

San Antonio Antics

In February the Woods Tribe went to San Antonio with Denise's friend Kim Hernandez. We visited Sea World and the girls got to visit with Dolly dolphin and see "Shamu". Alessandra, the future Marine Biologist, had lots of questions as we went through the aquariums, and particularly enjoyed the Dolphin ("Flipper") show. Tasha thought the beluga's were funny looking. The next day the children got to feed the birds and hug some, as Bryce calls them, "Bambis" (e.g. deer).

1 Spring Break 1

In March we took the infamous VW pop up van (code name Swe-pea) to Florida for spring break and sunshine; however on the way we were snowed in by the "storm of the century". Our afternoon visits with friends in Mississippi turned out to be an overnight slumber party. We can't thank Rick and Dedra Miller enough. Next we visited Denise's Godparents near St. Petersburg Florida. That was a very special visit. Afterwards we traveled through the Everglades national park on "Alligator Alley" to the Florida keys. There we visited Denise's sister Lisa, and the children were able to visit with their cousin Blake. The Key's were beautiful with crystal blue water and breath taking skys. The children got to help row out to Denise's father boat; we all went for a sail and the children helped

trim the sails. Grandpa got a chance to go rowing as well; and seemed to enjoy it. We also visited Parrot Jungle in Miami and saw lots of birds, Donald was singled out for a scorpion demonstration. He hasn't been the same since! The children also got to pet a nurse shark, a seal, and Alessandra got to pet a dolphin (which is her favorite animal). On the return trip we stopped at the famous "Weeki Wachi" and saw a live underwater mermaid production. Included with the price of admission was a boat tour of the Cypress Agua Springs and a "birds of prey" show. Bryce and Grandpa Colonna enjoyed the petting zoo most of all.



Grandpa's Mexican Fiesta

In April for Grandpa's 92nd Birthday we took him and 30 of his friends and children to his favorite Mexican restaurant. We were thrilled to have such a turn out, including his daughter Colleen Wagner from Virginia, and his nephew Johnny Mitchell. The Mariachi band had Grandpa singing (or maybe it was the margaritas). A great time was had by all.



Tasha's Chuck E. Cheese Classic

In May Tasha decided she had to have her party at "Chuck E. Cheese". Tasha, classmates, friends and the whole Woods tribe rode the rides, played the games, and ate lots of Pizza. Tasha still loves Minnie and Mickey Mouse and she was lucky to have Grandma Colleen Wagner in attendance. Tasha has a real eye for finding fallen tokens and tickets. Denise deserves a gold medal for keeping track of 25 three and four year olds at this gathering. The best part of this party was no mess to clean up at home.



Merry Mermaids

Alessandra's fifth birthday party was at Palm Beach on Galveston Island (a man made beach and water park) in June. Several of Alessandra's mermaid friends attended. Her two preschool teachers also came for the festivities. Our "Little Mermaid" had a great time. While no drownings were reported there were many water logged, red-eyed sea creatures seen vacating the premises. The children had no trouble taking naps that afternoon.

† Bryce's Birthday Bash

In honor of Bryce's third birthday we invited all the pirates from Galveston bay to come over. All of Bryce's friends showed up in pirate costumes. Among their favorite activities were the sword fights (with stale French bread), the pinata bashing, and a treasure hunt. The theme music was "A Pirates life for me", anyone within earshot could hear many small pirates belting out the refrain "Yo, ho, yo, ho, a pirates life for me...".

LChristmas L

The children picked a large blue spruce tree and helped to decorate it. Denise's father painted new yard figures: Peter Pan, Tinkerbell, the Crocodile and Bryce's favorite "Captain Hook". They now stand along side Alessandra's Little Mermaid, and Natasha's Mickey and Minnie Mouse. We attended the lighting of the old Oak tree in Alvin, the Sail boat parade and "Dickens on the strand". As usual Dad spent many happy hours putting together the yard lights. If you have seen "Christmas Vacation" with Chevy Chase you have a pretty good idea of what this entails. The entire Woods tribe is getting excited as Christmas approaches.

We wish you a merry Christmas. We hope you are very healthy and have a fun new year. (Alex and Tasha's exact wording)