

Woods Tribe Tribune 1994

This is by far one of the hardest newsletters we have ever had to write. This is due to the loss of two very special people that have had a tremendous positive influence on our lives. At the same time we have had the chance to be part of many wonderful events. It is at times like this that Grandpa Colonna's saying come to mind "Tough times make tough people, so let it be tough".

A True Gentleman...

[While we realize many of people reading this newsletter are well aware of Grandpa's passing; as of this writing, many cards from his Friends around the world have arrived, and many people were not yet aware of his passing.]

Grandpa John O. Colonna who has been an integral part of our lives for the past 15 years passed away in June of this year. Two services were held in his honor: one in Houston and the other at Arlington National Cemetery.

Approximately 75 people attended the service held in Houston (the same Church where Grandpa helped Denise with her pre-school class). In honor of Grandpa, the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) flag was displayed along side a United States Flag which had been flown on the Space Shuttle. The VMI "Spirit" song was performed during the service, and the service was ended with a song we know Grandpa would have approved of: "America the Beautiful". It is amazing how many people he had made an impression on during the years that he lived here with us. Everyone from the Postman, Pharmacists, school bus drivers, and Librarians knew him and remember him fondly.

The full military burial at Arlington National Cemetery can barely be described in words; but "deeply moving" is close. Many family members from the Eastern shore were in attendance. He was laid to rest beside his wife "Happy". His headstone faces our

Nation's capitol and the Washington Monument. This seems suiting since the Washington area is where he had grown up so many years ago.

In our eyes Grandpa was a true "unsung American hero." He was in charge of the construction and operation of the airfields in Africa during World War II. This involved coordinating not just United States forces, but those of all the allied forces. His efforts were even recognized by the British Government. After WW II he was in charge of Friendship Airport just north of Washington D.C.; now known as Baltimore Washington International (BWI). He was a true patriot who cared deeply about his country and was truly concerned about what condition it would be in when it was passed down to the next generation.

If as Grandpa used to say "you live on in the thoughts that you pass down to the next generation."; then he is still very much with us. We find ourselves constantly quoting him and singing his little "ditties". Even the "son and heir", Bryce, has been caught singing "He who has no peanuts...". We know a part of him will live on forever in many people's hearts. As you can tell we all miss him tremendously; even his midnight raids on the "ice-box" in search of ice-cream. As Grandpa used to explain to us lesser mortals "yes I'm full, but I always have room for the ice cream since it melts and fills in the cracks." People all around the world will miss him; in his own way he made it a better place for all of us. Many thanks to everyone for their love and support. Your thoughts, cards, calls, and gifts have been very much appreciated.

And a Beautiful Grandma

Early this year Denise's Grandma Skinnel had a stroke. She was apparently recovering quite well. When Denise spoke with her she said she "didn't feel like eating much". However, when Denise offered to send her some home-made chocolate; she said she

might consider it. Grandma was always spunky.

Unfortunately a few days later she had another stroke which was much more massive and within a week she passed away. Denise flew back to Roanoke to spend the last few days with her. Denise along with many other family members and friends were there around the clock comforting, singing, and keeping Grandma company. Many visitors, never less than ten a day, would come to visit with her, and relive happy memories.

Near the end Denise's sister Lisa, flew in from Florida. Then early one morning she passed away peacefully in Denise and Lisa's arms. She had touched many people in her lifetime; and this was definitely reflected in the attendance at her funeral. We will miss her but we know she has gone onto a heavenly place.

Everytime Denise looks in our daughter Alessandra's eyes it is like seeing a reflection of Grandma's blue eyed twinkle. While her spirit and spunk lives on in Natasha. To us she epitomized four things: Class, Strength, Honesty, and Warmth.

25th Anniversary?

No we haven't been married that long (yet), but 25 years ago, the "eagle landed" heralding "one small step for a man, that's one giant leap for mankind". We attended the 25th anniversary celebration of the "Moon Landing" at Space Center Houston with Donald's mother and sister from California in tow. There was a complete audio/visual/laser presentation and astronauts giving lectures and signing autographs

Donald hopes that soon we will be able to look up in wonder as the Space Station flies overhead in the near future. He and many other colleagues here and around the world are working long hours to make this dream a reality. Donald wrote a chapter in a technical book entitled "Advances in Teleoperations and Robotics" which was published this year.

Hurricanes Hit Houston

Alex's Soccer team was called the "Hurricanes", which is also indicative of the speed at which Denise gets around town.

Alessandra and Natasha both played soccer for the first time this Spring and continued in the Fall season. The girls had a great time in Soccer, got plenty of exercise and even slept better. Dad and Mom almost fainted when Alessandra said she was too tired to get up from the couch to go to the Dinner table after Soccer practice one evening, that alone was worth the price of admission into the Soccer league. Alex was a very aggressive goalie; much to her parent's concern ("you mean she doesn't get a helmet?!"). She is now playing in a basketball league but will be starting Soccer again in the Spring. Alex has also joined the Brownies this year and seems to enjoy Troop activities. Natasha has been very busy in her first year of Kindergarten (hopefully her last year as well). She is largely responsible for the delays in production of this newsletter, since she has become quite the computer hacker and wouldn't let us get on the computer any sooner. Bryce is still a "swashbuckling pirate", and makes us recite the password before coming into his house. It should be interesting to see how he does on his first Soccer team this Spring.

Utopia Found!!!

We went to Louisiana in February for a fun time at some of the small town Mardi Gras celebrations. We camped out in the infamous green VW van "Swepea", and met some new friends along the way. We went dancing family style at a Cajun restaurant, visited Jefferson Island (home of the famous actor who portrayed "Rip Van Winkle" early in this century), and Avery Island where "Tabasco" is made.

One of our last trips with Grandpa was to San Antonio. We camped out, visited the riverwalk, saw the historic homes in the "King George" district, visited the Missions, and circus museum. Grandpa particularly

enjoyed the San Antonio Zoo, and the Japanese sunken gardens which are located inside an old "Rock Quarry".

We saw the 4th of July fireworks and laser show over Clear Lake, but without our favorite patriot.

On the way to the wedding we visited Mavis Wright, a close family friend, in Virginia Beach. The children especially like seeing dolphins playing in the bay. We also visited Carl and Kim Colonna and their new baby Morgan at their beautiful new house in Newport News. On the way to Roanoke we stopped at "Natural Bridge". This huge rock formation over a gorge with a river running through it is quite a sight. Thomas Jefferson once owned it and considered it one of the most beautiful spots in the world. George Washington surveyed it when he was a young man, and his carved initial can still be seen on one of the far walls. The children enjoyed the hike to the "Ribbon Falls" and the race back.

This Fall we visited "Lost Maples" near Utopia; I know everyone has been wondering where Utopia is, well now you know, It's deep in the heart of Texas! This secluded region hidden away in a canyon in the Hill country is famous for its Fall leaves; and is one of the few spots in Texas where one can see the change of seasons in Fall colors. We also visited Stonehenge on the same trip. Now you are probably getting concerned about our geography skills, but let us explain. A replica of "Stonehenge" was built west of San Antonio in the Hill country; in a rare show of Texan modesty, it was smaller than the original.

Older and Wiser

Tasha & Alex both celebrated their parties bouncing around with their friends on a "Moon Walk" in our backyard. Donald's cousin Robert Drew was down from Colorado, so he came over to join in the Festivities. He brought the children a load of gifts; including the now infamous "Gack"! The children still think he's Santa Claus's

son. Bryce's party was celebrated at home as well, but this time a clown came over and entertained the children. The young pirate boy had a great time. All of the children are healthy and growing at a phenomenal rate.

Houston Suburb Invaded

This Halloween Natasha was an Angel, Bryce was a Pirate, and Alex was a unicorn. They searched the neighborhood for candy and treats. Their mission was successful and we are still finding small packets of treasure buried in their rooms.

Angie's Wedding

The Woods Tribe arrived in Roanoke in plenty of time for the wedding of Denise's cousin Angie Huffman. Dad and Mom particularly enjoyed the rehearsal Dinner, since it allowed them a break from the children after a week of travelling in the car. We were honored to have our two daughters asked to be Flower Girls. The wedding took place at the family Church (the beautiful granite Christ Lutheran Church). The William and Mary Choir, of which Angie was once a member, provided a beautiful musical accompaniment to the service, along with a large Church pipe organ and a trumpeter.

Angie wore her mothers 1951 wedding gown and Grandma Skinnel's pearl ring. The flower girls' dresses were made of a ivory cotton batiste with white organza pinafores. Our two girls behaved fantastically; their parents suspect this is due to the 8 months of pep talks on how important it was to behave during the ceremony. There were at least 300 people in attendance. Following the wedding their was a lavish reception in the elegant ball room of the Patrick Henry Hotel. Natasha, who we refer to as our "bean counter", was particularly impressed "Dad look at all this food, and its free!!!". This was the wedding of the century!!

Tennis Troubles

This Fall for a change of pace from her old routine (which included Grandpa), Denise took up tennis again. She joined a Houston area team tennis league. They had a great time running around town and playing other teams. Denise and her partner Maria Gaido sent many a spectator scurrying for cover. Over Halloween weekend Denise and Kathy (the team captain) won a local club "Member Guest" tournament. Donald came out of retirement and played in the same tournament; but he and his partner Pat Rogers (Kathy's Husband) were defeated in the Finals. The women have still not let the men live that one down.

Seasons Greetings

As we "wind down" this year and try to "relax" a bit, we realize we aren't! So far this month we have gone to the "Sailboat Parade", "Dickens on the Strand" (we actually met Charles Dicken's Great-Grandson), and ran the children around to Soccer and basketball practices and Soccer parties. We have even got to go out and see the Christmas lights with the children, of course we consider our yard to be the best with Captain Hook and Peter Pan jousting about our sail boat. The Little Mermaid, Mickey and Minnie mouse are watching their theatrics.

While this year has been tough we have many things to be thankful for, and realize perhaps now more than ever how important family and friends are in one's life. All the members of the Woods Tribe hope you have a jolly Christmas and a fantastic new year!

Things to Ponder in 1995 (just for fun!)

- Have you ever imagined a world with no hypothetical situations?
- Why are there flotation devices under plane seats instead of parachutes?
- Why isn't phonetic spelled the way it sounds?
- How does the guy who drives the snowplow get to work in the mornings?
- If convenience stores are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, why are there locks on the doors?
- Why do they put Braille dots on the keypad of the drive-up ATM?
- Why do we drive on parkways and park on driveways?
- You know that little indestructible black box that is used on planes? Why can't they make the whole plane out of the same substance?
- Why is it that when you transport something by car, it's called a shipment, but when you transport something by ship, it's called cargo?