

Woods Tribe Tribune 2004

Happy New Year and Valentine Edition

Another exciting year has passed with many blessings which make us all very thankful. Denise won the teacher of the year award in Houston. We vacationed in Australia! We visited Cousin Quincy for his first birthday, both Grandmas visited, and we visited Aunt Nancy!

Big Birthday for a little fella

We visited Donald's sister Kerala, and husband Michael for their son's Quincy's first birthday. Quincy is one tough little cookie having already gone through more operations than most of us will go through in a lifetime. Through all this he has a cheery disposition and ready smile. It was nice to reconnect with family albeit too shortly.



Woods Tribe in Phoenix for Quincy's 1st Birthday!

Super Teacher

Denise was honored as one of the top teachers in the Houston Area by receiving the "Crystal Award" sponsored by the Houston Chronicle Newspaper. This gala affair was held at a 5 star hotel in Houston near the Galleria. Parents, students, and administrators designed and submitted a portfolio along with 1600 nominees'. The parents and students were able to keep this entire project secret until the award winners were announced. Denise thought they were pulling her leg. The portfolio for her nomination was heartwarming, and reinforces what a big difference a teacher can make in both children and an entire family's life! Many of our friends attended Denise's Black tie night which made the evening extra special!

Kids on the loose:

Bryce our eighth grader had a great year! He ran cross-country, started taking karate classes, won the school district tennis doubles championship and got straight A's He also ditched the Harry Potter glasses and is now sporting contact lens. Bryce loves art, and has taken up skateboarding. He is

also getting taller, and passed his mom up this year! I guess we know who the shrimp of the family is!

Meanwhile Natasha started High School, and along with Alex has helped to keep the band winning statewide acclaim, after their 2nd place showing at the Texas State Marching competition. Natasha also has her own Oboe! Natasha continues to be a serious student making the National Honor Society again, and was nominated as an All-American Scholar for the second year. Natasha has shifted her interest from Dentistry to Biology.

Alex our 16 yr. old continues to be a sunny delightful person, despite her hectic schedules. She loves music and studies vigorously on her flute. She was also invited to attend the international Leadership Conference held in Washington D.C., and was nominated as an All American Scholar this year. Her High School band elected her as section leader of the flute section. Alex continues to be our child that doesn't know a stranger! She hopes to squeeze in the time to get back into soccer this year.

Much of our family time is spent supporting the kiddos and their musical interests. It is heartwarming to see what these young folks can accomplish as they all work together in these orchestras or bands. Both girls played in the Houston Youth Symphony, and earned principal parts in Dvorak's "New World Symphony". Both Grandmas were able to attend this concert held at Rice Univ. Stude Concert Hall.

Australia!

After a year of planning, we started off our big adventure by flying into Auckland New Zealand, and going up the coast to the Bay of Islands area. Natasha planned all our activities on the North Island, so we were moving around quickly and efficiently ("sleep? Sorry didn't have time in the schedule for that."). New Zealand is green and beautiful, and has seemingly no pollution; probably because it was the last major land mass to be invaded by humans. The Cormandal peninsula was next on the "schedule", where we visited Cathedral cove, and went for a (cold) swim. We took the Lord of The Rings (LOTR) tour in Hobbiton. It was fun to hear the story of the making of the films from a local viewpoint. We danced under the party tree, and visited the hobbit holes. Later that day, Alex went (virtual) skydiving! In Wellington we visited the New Zealand National museum and saw one of Ernest Shackelton's actual boats from his Antarctic adventure.

In 1964 the Beatles invaded Australia, 40 years later the Woods Tribe invaded Australia. Alex's 16th Birthday was the occasion! A two country day for Dad's Birthday!

We arrived in Perth, Western Australia, in time for Denise's birthday, and the hunt for the ultimate Opal. After finding it in Fremantle, we had a great seafood dinner on the Indian Ocean.

We dipped our feet in that ocean for the first time ever! Next day for Alex's birthday we drove up the coast to Monkey Mia. This area is famous for the friendly wild dolphins. Alex and Mom fed the dolphins. We had Alex's birthday party in a restaurant made entirely of shells.

In 1954 it was thought that Stromatolites, a small fungus that produced the oxygen on this planet, were all fossilized. Then two geologists were wandering through Western Australia and they found live Stromatolites in Shark's Bay! 50 years later the Woods Tribe saw them as well. This is one of only a few places in the world where they can be found in a live state. In this same area we saw one of NASA's satellite dishes from the Mercury program and one of the repeater telegraph stations that was used. Western Australia is fantastic! We were also in Australia for the Transit of Venus on Alex's birthday, just as Captain Cook had been some 200 years ago. Next we went snorkeling on Ningaloo reef. We then visited Kalbari, which is best described as the Grand Canyon moved to the Oceanside. The red/orange colors were spectacular.



Western Australia Coast!

The next segment of the trip was planned and coordinated by Bryce. We flew to the Red Centre and visited Alice Springs. The kids completed their university degrees in didgeridoo playing. A didgeridoo is the long trunk looking thing the Aboriginals play. Bryce seemed to have a particular talent for this instrument. We visited a living desert museum, and saw eagles, kangaroos, and emus. From there we drove to Ayers Rock, now known as Uluru. We were amazed to see wild herds of camels on this drive. We did a base walk with an aboriginal guide. Surprisingly the big red rock had lots of striations, waterfalls, and a pitted appearance. We hiked the "wind walk" in the nearby Olga's. One of the highlights of this part of our trip was the evening sky tour given by astronomer Ian at the Ayers Rock Observatory. The Milky Way and Southern Hemisphere were spectacular from the clear skies of the outback. The 17th of June was the ultimate Australian day, we started it with a camel ride around Uluru and finished it at the Sydney Opera House!



Sunny Day at Ayers Rock (Uluru)!

The concert at the Sydney Opera house was the "Lord of the Rings" Australian premier, and it was conducted by the composer, Howard Shore! We were able to meet him the next day. Alex and Tasha were in heaven at the concert. Dad surprised everyone by making up for all the camping in the outback by staying in a 5 star hotel downtown in Sydney, the Shangri-La! As we left Sydney we went up to the Blue Mountains, and hiked. We then started driving down the coast to Melbourne to see the world's smallest penguins come to shore.

Alex planned the next segment of our trip, making sure Bryce had the opportunity to go on a "Yellow Submarine" ride! Cairns on the great Barrier reef was a load of fun. The first day we took the world's longest gondola ride up the Kuranda Rain Forrest. The rain forests in the region are the oldest on the planet, descending from the time when all the continents were together in Gwanda. Some of the ferns in this area have been around for 110 million years. We took what is considered one of the worlds most scenic train rides back down town. That evening we went to Reef School, where we learned and laughed a lot from Irish marine biologist Paddy. The next day we headed out to Green Island on the reef, where we actually went scuba diving. It was what is called a resort dive, meaning you have certified divers watching us like hawks. This was a hit with the entire Woods tribe! We were able to hold giant sea clams and other sea treasures in our hands.

The last day we took a tour up the Cape Tribulation, where Captain Cook ran aground on the reef. This area is where the "Rain Forrest meets the Reef". We went on a river tour and saw some crocodiles, visited a kangaroo rehabilitation center and drank Billy bush tea. We also had the best ice cream ever made from local fruits. The next day we flew down to Brisbane, and visited the Koala sanctuary. The entire Woods Tribe wanted to take Koalas back to the States with them. We had our last meal in Australia at a fantastic Chinese restaurant, or so we thought. Australia was great and we certainly hoped to visit again.

Teenage Drivers

When we returned to the Houston area, the girls completed their driving permits, so you may want to stay off the roads in Texas for a while. They went through band camp and then dropped out of School. Not be out done Bryce dropped out as well, then Denise quit her job! Now you might be asking yourself what has happened to the Woods Tribe, have they lost their senses or flipped out? Are they hopping mad? Well...

Australia Round 2

With work visa in hand the Woods Tribe re-invaded Australia at the end of September. Dad had been offered a surprise job to relocate to Australia for one year! Our friends helped us get the Friendswood house packed up and stored. We would have been hard pressed to do this without them with such short notice. The highlight of this project from the children's viewpoint was the major garage sale which our friend Lisa Newell and Cindy Griffiths helped orchestrate. Also, special thanks to Grandma Kay who is watching our two dogs while we are down under! So we set up shop in Brisbane. This area is beautiful with a mixture of mountains, rainforest, and ocean coastline. We have a condominium overlooking the river, riverwalk, and bridge. The kids have all enrolled in non co-ed schools complete with uniforms! The kids and Mom have made several new Friends. We hope to visit Tasmania with Mabbs (a new friend) early next year. The girls made the Queensland Youth Orchestra, and Bryce has a nice Saxophone tutor. We've gone to Cricket matches and are becoming proficient at park BBQs. The Australian people are friendly and hilarious.



Sydney Harbor and Opera House!

Top Secret Visitor

Early one Sunday morning, Donald said he had to go pick up something. He came back home with Alex and Tasha's buddy (from Texas) Sylene! She was our first visitor from the states! During Thanksgiving week we showed her sights of Brisbane,

took her to several teahouses, saw Koalas and Lorikeets. We had a "small" Thanksgiving bash for 40 people! After that we took Sylene to Moreton Island, where we went sand tobogganing, and snorkeled on the shipwrecks. Moreton is like a little slice of the Caribbean only 1 hour from Brisbane by Ferry. We were all sad to see Sylene go!

Southern Christmas

No we didn't go to Mississippi for the Holidays. We went to New Zealand's South Island! We took a very rough ferry ride from Wellington to Picton. Marlborough sound was spectacular, majestic, beautiful. The next day we drove down the coast and saw seals out in various bays. We had to stop for the obligatory winery visit, Denise came home with her rewards. Christchurch had beautiful weeping willows along the river. We took a tour on a "Jet Boat" which goes very fast and with very little draft, so its able to go up rivers to places most boats can't, and oh did I mention they go really fast, think "roller coaster"! The kids had blast while holding on for their lives. After that we went on a 4WD tour of the surrounding countryside and mountains, and finished it off by taking a train across the interior of New Zealand.

We visited most of the Lord Of The Ring (LOTR) sites in New Zealand, but hats off to Alex for recommending we take a tour of Edoras. This little mountain outcrop surrounded by Mountains was spectacular. The picnic we had there will probably be one of the memories that stays for a long time!

In Dunedin we took a tour of the Otago peninsula where we saw the Royal Albatross (huge!), the endangered yellow eyed penguin, baby seal pups, and the only Castle in New Zealand. And perhaps even more importantly we visited the Cadbury Chocolate factory. Just wondering has anyone seen Bryce (Mr. Sweet Tooth) lately?

Milford sound is without a doubt one of the most majestic places in the world. The waterfalls cascading into the green water was just amazing. The glow worm cave was also neat in a different way. We spent a quiet Christmas in Arrowtown, an old gold mining town near Queenstown. We even saw some raindeer complete with horns on XMAS eve following our Gondola dinner overlooking Queenstown. The lake view was spectacular (I'm really running out of adjectives!). Of course the big news was snow back in Houston! We received a lot of neat photos from our friends back home, since they knew we wouldn't believe them.

Exiting New Zealand, we drove the Great Ocean road of Australia to the 12 Apostles! The 12 apostles are these limestone formations which jut out of the ocean along the spectacular coastline.

We visited a reconstructed gold town Sovereign Hill (site of the Southern Cross uprising), we panned for gold but to no avail.

We drove inland through “Ned Kelly” land, and saw “The Dish” (check out the movie if you get a chance). We had our last dinner of the trip at a Texas Steak house!



Hanging out at the 12 Apostles!

Anyway there was a lot more to this trip, and the others, but we don't want to bore you. If you drop us an email we can send you links to our on-line photo albums.

All's well that ends well

As the New Year gets started, the children are getting ready for school, and we are trying to get caught up on things like this newsletter. Its hard to slow down and actually write down some of this when the sunny beaches are calling here in the middle of Summer down under. We miss ya'll, and we hope to see some of you “down under” this coming year before we head back. Until then watch out for the Kangaroos!



We'd love to hear from you, so email or write us when you have a chance:

WoodsTribe@hotmail.com

146/501 Queen Street
Brisbane, QLD 4000 Australia

<http://woodstribetripod.com>