

December, 2009

Happy 2010 to Friends and Family Everywhere,

It is hard to believe that it is now almost five years since we retired. We can now confidently say that we are not going to “flunk retirement.” We remain very busy, but without the stress that accompanied us during our working years. Ruth says that retirement is getting to do whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it. 2009 was full of ups and downs, but life overall is still very good for Ruth & Hal. *Our year's highlights –*

We continue to be very involved in Omnilore, our *Learning-in-Retirement* organization (<http://Omnilore.org>). In addition to doing the common reading and preparing our own required presentations for the classes we take, Ruth has just begun her second (and final) year as President, and Hal continues as Equipment Manager. Since we are part of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at a local college, Cal State Dominguez Hills, Ruth got to attend OLLI's three-day national conference at Park City, Utah in October, all expenses paid at a luxury ski resort. It was interesting learning about what the other 120+ OLLIs are doing, but we think our organization is one of the best! Hal co-leads the Shakespeare group and recently finished a great Lincoln “Team of Rivals” class, and Ruth just finished classes on The Bill of Rights and How We Decide. In the spring, we'll both be discussing movies from the ABA's list of best legal films and finding out why 1959 (not the 1960s) was really the year that changed America.

Hal continued his volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity, but slowed down considerably because of the deterioration of the metal knee he received in November 2002 (*more on that later*). He also played more golf than ever this year – several of his golfing buddies retired from Northrop Grumman this year.

We continued our extensive travel agenda, although most of our trips this year were domestic. In February, we traveled to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, staying in a Bed and Breakfast in the Lower Garden District, only a couple of blocks from the main parade route on St. Charles Avenue and walking distance from the French Quarter. We got totally consumed by the hoopla and, in the five days before Fat Tuesday, watched about 15 parades, collecting over 100 pounds of beads and other trinkets, including two prized coconuts from the Zulu parade. We donated the majority to a worthy cause, but still shipped back 30 pounds of “special” stuff! What surprised us most was how family-oriented the event is, especially if you stay away from the tourist-oriented areas. We met families who had been gathering in the same location for decades.



...Gras (Floats, 1% of the “Throws” we caught)

Egypt (Abu Simbel & Luxor), Jordan (Petra)

In April, we RV'd to Palm Springs to get our taxes done (our tax man now lives in the area) and for a few days R&R (*does that term even apply when you're retired?*). It was the weekend of the Dinah Shore golf tournament and we spent a day watching the women play in howling winds, which were so bad that the first night we thought our RV would blow over. We also spent a day hiking in Joshua Tree National Park.

In July, we traveled to the Carolinas, combining attendance at the wedding in Charlotte of a son of one of Ruth's cousins with a week at the beach near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina (including a day trip to Hilton Head and Savannah). Then in August, we actually used the Polo Towers timeshare we own in Las Vegas (usually we trade it in) to celebrate our 40th anniversary. Since lodging was free, we splurged on three great shows: Cirque de Soleil's Beatles show (“Love”), Penn and Teller, and Bette Midler. We enjoyed it so much that we may make this an annual trip.

Our major trip this year was three weeks in Egypt and Jordan. Egypt was all we expected – highlights included the Pyramids, Aswan, Abu Simbel, Luxor and the Valley of the Kings, and four nights cruising the Nile. The quantity and quality of artifacts that are still in great shape is astounding, although construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1959 has had some unintended consequences. We were particularly enchanted by Jordan, which is relatively modern and does not appear to suffer from the extreme poverty we've seen in other “Third World” countries we have visited (although even in Egypt, the smallest villages had satellite dishes sprouting from almost every rooftop). Highlights were Amman, the Roman city of Jerash, Petra, and the desert area called Wadi Rum, where Lawrence of Arabia lived. We also floated in the Dead Sea – it's too salty for swimming.

Our first adventure in 2010 begins on January 2nd, with a 14-day cruise from Los Angeles down the west coast of Mexico and Central America, through the Panama Canal, touching Colombia, and ending in Miami. Erika and

Alison will fly home at dawn on New Year's Day and will join us. Coincidentally, we will be traveling on the same ship (*the Norwegian Star*) on which the four of us sailed to Alaska in 2004. It is interesting to note that many of our friends are now making the same foreign trips as us (*Greece, Costa Rica, Thailand, Egypt, Panama Canal*), but S. America is effectively still on our bucket list, plus Australia/New Zealand, an African safari, China and the Great Wall (and returns to Europe). *BUT ...*

Further travel plans will be put on hold pending a March 5th 2nd replacement of Hal's left knee by a surgeon who specializes in *revisions* of knee replacements. Seven years of an active lifestyle (*Habitat, walking golf courses, softball, active travel, etc.*) ground down the plastic "cartilage" replacement, and the floating plastic debris apparently erodes bone. Result – femur and tibia deterioration now makes both metal apparatus loose, hence the knee just wobbles all over the place. Fortunately, there is no pain associated with this problem, and a cane and hi-tech brace allow an almost normal walking pace and continued golf. Hopefully rehab will go as well as it did in 2002, allowing us to schedule a slightly less active trip, maybe a European river cruise, later in the year. We plan to fully resume active travel in 2011, but Hal will moderate his overall activities (*no more softball*) so the new knee lasts at least twice as long.



Erika (age 31) and Alison (age 28) are still both living in Providence, Rhode Island, and still looking for work. Alison has been working part-time for Revolution Prep, an SAT tutoring company, since the summer; the hourly pay is good and she enjoys the work but there aren't enough hours. She hopes that as she gets more experience, she'll be able to increase her hours. Erika is learning Microsoft .Net technology paid for by the state of Rhode Island in order to make herself more employable as a software engineer. Unfortunately, the still incomplete state of her house remodel makes relocation difficult at this time. Hal's knee situation puts a dent in his week-a-month *Habitat-for Daughters* trips to Providence.

Ruth's mother, Helen, is 89 and still doing well, although frustrated by the fact that she (like the rest of us) is no longer as agile as she used to be. She and her 96-year-old husband Dave are still living independently in the apartment Ruth grew up in, although it gets more difficult for them each year. There are no good solutions. Ruth visited for 5 days in November, while Hal was in Providence working on Erika's house. He and Erika drove down for a day and Alison took the train down for an overnight visit.

Sadly, but not tragically, we lost another cat this year. Fourteen years ago, we adopted Bullwinkle, who was living in a park at the time, when he was about 2. He was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma of the tongue in May but continued sunning himself outdoors until he decided his time had come. He walked out the cat door 2 days before we were going to have him euthanized (*prior to the Carolinas trip*) and was never seen again, though we searched all around. Meanwhile, we had already agreed to take 2 cats that had been living on the streets in a neighborhood with coyote sightings. Panu (*named after our 2008 tour guide in Thailand*) is a beautiful blue-point Siamese cat whose owner had died and left her homeless. She has integrated into our household well. On the other hand Fluffy, a long-hair tabby who was abandoned or abused before finding a home at our friends' house, has trust issues. She spent 7 months happily living under Alison's bed, emerging only to eat or find the litter box. Recently we decided the only way to make progress was to lock her out of that room. Now she often spends hours upstairs, sitting behind the couch. She is friendly and doesn't run away from us, but apparently feels safe only in confined spaces! Interestingly, both of these formerly outdoor cats seem perfectly content to live indoors – unprecedented in our 35 years owning cats. Our 12-ish year old long-haired Siamese, Boris, rounds out the household. He wants to be an alpha male, but isn't, so having two sisters makes him very happy.

Saturday, **February 13, 2009**, is **St. Harts Day XLII**. Everyone's invited! We still draw close to 100 friends and neighbors for this, our one social hosting of the year. Your **St.??'s Day invitation** is, as always, linked from <http://hart-site.net>, our family website (*check out the addictive video golf game too*). And please send us your **email addresses** and/or url's for any of you with your own websites — by email, of course. *Who knows, we might join the growing trend to e-cards in 2010?*

| Hal, Ruth, Erika, & Alison Hart

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