

Christmas 2006

As I mentioned in last year's letter, Mum was living in *transitional care* at Dufferin Place at Nanaimo Hospital after her fall. By February of this year, a placement became available at Aberdeen Hospital, here in Victoria. This care facility was my first choice for two reasons: I had heard good things about the staff, and it is only a few blocks from where we live. Mum has now lived at Aberdeen Hospital most of a year, and has settled in very well. She gets out occasionally on field trips in the bus – they usually go for a drive and stop for lunch at a restaurant before returning in mid-afternoon.

Mum appreciates us visiting with her several times each week. She has a bedside telephone, however she doesn't always pick it up when it rings, so sometimes when I'm visiting with her I try to make calls out to her relatives and friends so they can have a chat. I accompany Mum on the Handidart bus when she has to see specialists. The Handidart is a new experience for both of us, but only costs a bus fare, and they give excellent door-to-door service for folks in wheelchairs. The Aberdeen Hospital clerk makes all the arrangements...I just have to show up and accompany her. Mum just celebrated her 94th birthday on Dec 6th!

Victoria had quite a dump of snow in late November. I always find it funny to watch the antics drivers in Victoria get up to when there is snow on the streets. As I write this in early December, the snow is gone, and we are all happy to see the last of it!

Tucker, our Jack Russell Terrier is now nine years old – an *old dawg* – but he still tears around the parks and trails like a much younger dog. He is a great snuggler, and is particularly happy when either Kirk or I decide to take a nap in bed. He is right there under the covers, and once he gets settled we often hear a moan of contentment. Sheba has decided sleeping on the bed near Kirk's feet is pretty nice, but sometimes she gets run over by Tucker as he leaps onto the bed without checking things out first. The usual hissing and snarling ensues until they sort things out.



Kirk's favorite holiday is Christmas, and true to form, the Christmas tree went up about a week after Halloween! He has been adding inside decorations a little at a time ever since, so it now looks very *Christmassy* in the living room. I put up the outside lights the first week of December, so I think we are ready for the holiday. It will be a welcome relief to not have to travel to and from Nanaimo on Christmas Day this year. We will simply drive five minutes to visit Mum – a real treat for me, since I dislike driving.

The trip to Libya to see the Total Solar Eclipse in the Sahara Desert in March was a wonderful experience. It was a long flight to Tripoli and back home to Victoria, but

Alitalia is a well-run airline, and the service was very good. Our visit to Libya was certainly the highlight of the trip. There is so much to see in this rarely-visited country, and everyone in our group found the people very friendly and helpful. After a week in Libya, our group traveled to Rome, where we had a special tour of the Vatican Observatory, as well as seeing all the usual sites in Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan. Unfortunately, I don't have much space to fully describe the trip in this letter, so please visit my JoeTourist® website and click on "Libya" and "Italy" to read all about my experiences and to view lots of photos, movies and maps. <http://joetourist.ca>



The group left Milan for Toronto, however I had another week to travel to Athens, Greece. This solo portion of the trip was very worthwhile, since I had some time to just kick back and relax, however I also covered a great deal of ground in Athens and on the mainland of Greece. I'm still working on the photos and travelogue for Greece as I write this letter, so keep checking the JoeTourist® website for this portion of the trip to appear within the next few weeks! In the mean time, please check out my JoeTourist® blog at <http://joetourist.blogspot.com> where you will find pretty good coverage of the Greece portion of the trip.

This year, I was elected President of Victoria Centre, Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. I'm also a life member of RASC, and firmly believe that being involved in these type of groups only enhances one's experience – whether it is a hobby or professional. Victoria Centre has some talented amateur astronomers. Some take astrophotographs (one of my interests), while others sketch, do science, or build scopes. Sharing knowledge as a group is fun, especially when the public attend special events.

I purchased a new telescope this year to replace my trusty Meade LX-90 which I've used extensively since becoming interested in amateur astronomy. My new scope is also a Meade, an LX200R which gives me a more stable platform from which to take astrophotos. I also upgraded my Canon Digital Rebel dSLR with a new Canon 30D model, which offers some important enhancements for astrophotography. I'm just getting used to this new gear, however if you check out the astrophotos on my personal website, you will see I'm achieving a good measure of success already – despite our poor weather this fall and winter. <http://joecarr.ca/astro/>

I'm still planning to retire in mid-2007, but I've run out of space in this letter, so that subject will have to wait until next year!

We hope you and your family are well and happy, and may the New Year bring you joy...Kirk and Joe, Sheba and Tucker