

Christmas 2004

I mentioned in last year's Christmas letter that I was doing a bit of *virtual traveling* through an email list hosted by an Oregon couple who were sailing the South Pacific in their 42' sailboat (www.svsequoia.com). What I didn't mention was that I had made a promise to myself that if Craig and Barbara offered a sailing segment to the email list, I would not procrastinate, and would offer to crew for them. In early March, that is exactly what happened, and to make a long story short, I ended up traveling to Auckland, New Zealand in late April and joined SV *Sequoia* on its journey to Fiji. I returned by air to New Zealand and Victoria in late May, while *Sequoia* made her way across the rest of the South Pacific to Brisbane, Australia.



As most of you know, I have no sailing experience, however I did own and operate a power cruiser in past years, and also have my pilot's license. So I felt I had some skills to offer Craig & Barbara (navigation, boat handling, radio skills, and weather knowledge), but otherwise I was a greenhorn on a sailboat. Despite this, Craig and Barbara were willing to take me on as crew. On my side of things, I was willing to travel to New Zealand on short notice at my expense, and help them crew an offshore passage. In the end, we all agreed things worked out pretty well.



I thoroughly enjoyed myself, and the challenge of sailing offshore was certainly good for me to experience. I had a few days to tour around part of the North Island of New Zealand and visit with my cousin Cindy and her family (who live near Auckland). In Fiji, I managed to track down old family friends - a native Fijian family I originally visited in 1975! I took lots of photos, and kept a journal, so if you are interested in the details of this trip, please browse my travel website www.JoeTourist.ca/NewZealand

I have built some solid skills taking astrophotos this year. Along the way, I have acquired some new photo equipment, which has enhanced my abilities to take very much improved photos of celestial objects in the night sky. If you browse my personal website www.JoeCarr.ca/Astro you will see the results of my work covering this year.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of my year for astronomy was the October 27th Lunar Eclipse. I had planned for this event ahead of time, and setup in an ideal location to observe the already eclipsed Moon as it rose in the east that evening. The poor weather cleared that day, and we had ideal conditions for observing. Just to add to my luck, not only did all the equipment work well, giving me excellent photos



of this eclipse, a Dash 8 aircraft flying from Seattle to Vancouver flew in front of the eclipsed Moon. I saw it coming and squeezed off a perfectly framed shot!

On the personal front, Kirk and I are both well...just a year older and starting to feel it! We continue to get out walking with Tucker (our Jack Russell Terrier) every day. On weekends we all go for longer hikes in the excellent regional parks located within an hour's drive. Tucker is a healthy and happy seven year old *puppy*. On the other hand, the cats haven't fared so well this year. Sheba (our black longhair 3 year old cat) was close to death earlier this year. Our veterinary diagnosed liver shutdown, and after several tries finally prescribed prednisone, which helped her liver reactivate. She has since regained all her weight, and appears happy and healthy again – to our great relief!



Sylvester (our white Manx 7 year old cat) has had a terrible year, medically speaking. It actually started in November 2003 when he was diagnosed with Cryptococcus, a fungal disease that cats and dogs on southern Vancouver Island seem to be highly susceptible to through environmental exposure to tree fungus growing in our area. Cryptococcus is not contagious, however it is extremely tough to treat, and requires long term and expensive medication, which we are still giving to Sylvester. As if that wasn't enough, just a couple of months ago he was also diagnosed with Diabetes. So now we are giving him insulin injections twice a day. The vet also suspects Sylvester has Cushings disease – another exotic condition, so the vets now refer to Sylvester as their *problem child*! Currently his health is fragile, but he is a stubborn cat, and seems to have a will to survive, so are hopeful and take it day-by-day.

My Mum continues to live at Hecate Lodge. I think she finally considers it *home*. She likes the meals, enjoys the companionship of the other residents, and is happy to ask the staff for help when she needs it. I try to visit Mum every second Sunday, and take her to church. It is a great relief to me to see her in stable health, and to know she is cared for.

My work at the BC Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management has evolved into new responsibilities yet again. My old job as Manager of Web Services is no more, and the duties left from that position now only occupy about half my time. I am now involved in online web mapping, which I consider an exciting and challenging career change. If you have an Internet connection, browse <http://maps.gov.bc.ca/> and click on "Provincial Basemap" to see what I'm now involved with.



Kirk has already setup a Christmas tree in the living room, the house is decorated, and I've put up the outside lights. I will bring Mum down to Victoria for a few days over Christmas, so once again our little family will be together over the holidays.

We hope you and your family have a wonderful Holiday Season!

Kirk & Joe - Tucker, Sylvester and Sheba