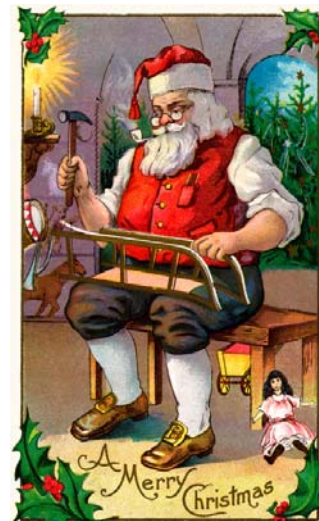


Christmas 2011

First of all, I have to apologize to those of you who have sent me holiday cards. As you will read below, I have been away on an extended cruise, only returning home on December 21st, so I regret that holiday wishes I send through the postal system will arrive late this year. My online greetings (this Christmas Letter and an e-card on my personal website) will arrive on time to your email boxes.



OK, so let's get the bad news dealt with first. As most of you know, **my mother died** on December 18th, 2010, just a few days after her 98th birthday (Dec 6th). This sad event occurred just after I sent out last year's Christmas Letter, which is why I'm including this news here. I had a new double grave marker installed in the Cedar Valley Cemetery, where Mum & Dad are both buried side by side. Thanks go to everyone who sent good thoughts during a very sad Christmas last year.



Another bit of bad news is that we had to have **Tucker**, our dear Jack Russell Terrier euthanized this December (2011). He was 14 years old and was the spark in our lives for so long. It is hard to say goodbye to such a dear friend and companion, however old age had caught up with him. So we are going through another sad time at Christmas this year, but let's hope 2012 will treat us a bit more gently.

On a more positive note, we took the motor home up to Parksville in early June to take advantage of the good Island weather. Tucker and I really enjoyed our time on the wonderful beach. I made a couple of visits to my cousin Cheryl in Vancouver this year. It is always nice to visit Vancouver, and her dear little dog Henry and I are best buddies. On the way back home on one trip, I dropped into the *Ikea* store in Richmond to get some kitchen renovation ideas...which leads into the big news for this year.

During July and August we had our **bathroom renovated**. It took about four weeks to do a complete renovation starting right back to the studs. We had to put up with lots of noise, dirt, and strange people invading our space every day, but it was worth it. We now have a deluxe bathroom, with the old tub being replaced with a wonderful big cultured marble shower with all the latest fittings.

Since the bathroom renovation went so well, we plunged directly into **renovating the kitchen** starting in September. This was another ambitious job, which lasted until late October. We went *high end*, replacing the appliances with the latest and greatest, and also had some superb cabinets and a granite counter installed. As the cook in the family, I'm very pleased with the result. It is a treat to have such an efficient and beautiful kitchen to work in!

On the **astronomy** front, I accomplished a great deal this year. I observed and photographed lots of spectacular solar prominences; observed Comet Garradd over the summer; had a great time camping at my local astronomy group's RASCals Star Party in July; and the Island Star Party held in August in the Cowichan Valley was a stand-out event. I camped in the motor home for both star parties, which is always a wonderful getaway for me.

Our two cats Sheba and Percival are both in great shape, and continue to test each other's nerves with daily cat fights that sound so serious, but seem to never result in any injuries. An uneasy truce, for sure.



I have just returned from a 30 day **Incan Empires cruise**. We departed from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, sailing to Peru and Ecuador through the Caribbean and Panama Canal, and then sailing back up the Pacific Coast of South and Central America to end in San Diego, California. The Holland America flagship *Rotterdam* was our choice this year. I traveled with my friends, who I went on the cruise to New Zealand with last year. We had fun along

the way, and managed to see Mach Picchu while the ship was docked in Peru for a few days. Seeing Machu Picchu is one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences which is hard to describe in words!

We hope you and your family have a Happy Holiday, and a prosperous New Year.

Joe and Kirk, Sheba and Percival

