

Holiday Greetings

From Our House To Yours

2017



What? Another December already? Here's "the buzz" on what's been happening with the Aiken Wilsons for the last year.

The first notable event this year was our annual late January trip to Hilton Head Island and our deep off-season time-share week. Cleanup from Hurricane Matthew the previous October was still taking place on the island, but we were pleased to find that nearly everything was open and that our condo came through unscathed.

Our first big trip this year was a return to Alaska in late May/early June, with long time friends Mike and Deb Husk. We cruised up the Inside Passage from Vancouver BC to Whittier AK, with stops in Ketchikan, Juneau, and Skagway, and visits to Glacier Bay and College Fjord. This was a repeat of the cruise we took nine years ago with local pals Doug and Kathy Cook, and even took place on the same ship, the *Coral Princess*. After the cruise, the four of us rented an SUV and toured through the Kenai Peninsula and Denali National Park on our own. The weather this time around was wonderful and the wildlife really cooperated, giving us great views of humpback whales, sea otters, harbor seals and sea lions, caribou, Dall's Sheep, Alaskan brown bears (i.e grizzlies in the lower 48), moose, and bald eagles.



Sherry and Deb on ship with sled dog puppies



A beautiful day in Ketchikan



Alaska SeaLife Center, Seward



Humpback whale watching from our cottage in Seward

In July we took a quick trip to Boston with the USC Aiken Pacer Travel Club, taking in many of the normal tourist sites. We were disappointed, though, that the USS Constitution ("Old Ironsides") was in dry dock for refurbishment and we couldn't tour it. One high point of the trip was a fascinating tour of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Art Museum led by USCA Chancellor and art historian Dr. Sandra Jordan. You may recall there was a famous art theft there in 1990 in which works by Rembrandt, Vermeer, and others were cut from their frames and stolen. The works have never been located, and after 27 years the empty frames still hang in place awaiting their return.



Paul Revere statue near Old North Church, Boston



Solar eclipse as seen near Aiken August 21, 2017

In August, we were fortunate that the path of the much publicized 2017 solar eclipse went through Aiken – well, almost. Our house on the south side of town was just outside the totality zone, so we went a few miles NE to a bed-and-breakfast where we had a nice luncheon and enjoyed the eclipse while sipping wine on their lawn.

Our other major trip this year involved a week's visit to a timeshare in Napa CA in late September, a scant couple of weeks before the whole area burst into flames. We had a great time driving up and down the Napa and Sonoma valleys, touring wineries, sampling their wares, and buying much too much wine. We were joined there for a couple of days by our friends from Bakersfield CA, the Leapleys. Gerry has known Sherry since high school and was a groomsman at our wedding, lo those many years ago.

The four of us spent a lot of time together at Purdue playing bridge to all hours when Peg would come up from Indiana U to visit on weekends. After Napa, we visited Carmel and Monterey for a day, taking the fabled 17 Mile Drive at Pebble Beach, then met up in San Francisco to tour the city with our long time cruising buddies Bob and Lynn Russell from Columbus OH. We've been to SF before but this time Sherry got to check off an item from her bucket list: a visit to Alcatraz Island. Then we and the Russells boarded the *Grand Princess* for our second cruise of the year, down the "Mexican Riviera" to visit Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo, Mazatlan, and Cabo San Lucas, and to polish off all that wine we were still carrying around from Napa and Sonoma.



Waiting for the launch to Alcatraz



On the Coral Princess with drinks in hand



Sherry and Lynn going native in Cabo San Lucas

October brought a visit to Aiken from Hurricane Irma, but she had pretty well petered out by the time she got this far north, and had veered west enough to spare us all but a lot of wind and a day of rain.

In November, we were pleased to have the Husks, who had recently returned to Tennessee from their summer home in Connecticut, celebrate Thanksgiving with us, along with our local friend Rita Skelton.

Between trips and guest visits we fill in our lives with our "normal" activities. Sherry is active as a Master Gardener, working at the butterfly garden at the local Audubon Society and coordinating plantings for the Green Gardeners Garden Club at the Aiken Visitors Center and Train Museum, where she also acts as a docent. She again organized lunches for the local Habitat for Humanities Womens Build and managed the volunteers for a Habitat kitchen tour fund raiser. She somehow also manages to fit in running the Book Babes book club, most days reaching her 11k step goal on her Fitbit, and playing some golf.

Unfortunately, Doug's back still brings him discomfort as, even three years after his last surgery, things still have not fused, and he's resumed treatment for his arthritic "original equipment" left knee, both of which limit his activities. But he does remain very active with the Academy for Lifelong Learning where he serves as Secretary, Newsletter Editor, Webmaster (aikenlearning.org), and has been heavily involved in implementing their first ever online registration for this spring, and continues in his perennial position as Administrator of the Timeshare Users Group online bulletin board (www.tugbbs.com).

As another year draws to a close our thoughts return to all our good friends scattered near and far all around the country. If you should find Aiken SC is anywhere near your travel routes, please be sure to pay us a visit. Our guest room is ready and waiting.

Best Wishes for the Holidays and the Coming Year,

Doug & Sherry Wilson

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Enjoying this year's Aiken Christmas Parade