

SEASON'S GREETING FROM BEN AND NANCY DUGGAR

We celebrated Christmas 2006 in Texas with our son, Jim, his wife, Jacqueline, and our grandchildren, Nicholas and Kendall. In mid-January we flew to St. Petersburg where we had left our boat, Dream Catcher, in November. We loaded the boat with provisions for a three month cruise in the Bahamas, checked out all of the equipment, and then headed south along the Florida west coast. This was to be our last winter aboard Dream Catcher as we planned to sail her up to Annapolis in April and put her on the market. We bought her new in 1995, spent two years getting her ready, then sailed her to Florida in November 1997. In February 1998 we moved aboard and sailed down to the Florida Keys, up to St. Petersburg, then back to the Keys. We then sailed to Maine and back before crossing to the Bahamas in the fall. It was a nostalgic time for us, but age and other interests now make it difficult for us to sail off over the horizon for years at a time and the boat needs more use and attention than we can give it in the coming years.

When we reached the southern most part of Florida we opted to stop for a week in the Dry Tortugas National Park, a lovely spot which we always try to visit when in the Florida Keys. While beach combing on Loggerhead Key we greeted 18 young men fleeing Cuba who washed up on the beach in a crude open fishing boat. They had drifted for 5 days since the engine had only lasted long enough to take them about 10 miles off the Cuban coast. The boat had no cabin and the men had ripped up most of the floor boards to make paddles. They used a large canvas tarp to protect some of them from the sun, with about one third paddling, one third trying to get some rest, and one third bailing (there were strong winds and waves for much of their trip). The men were hungry, thirsty, tired, glad to be alive, and oh so happy to be on US soil! We directed them to the lighthouse keeper's house where the keeper radioed Park Headquarters to notify the immigration folks. Two immigration officers arrived by boat in less than an hour from Garden Key where the Park service is headquartered. This is a frequent event in those dangerous waters and we marveled at the courage of these young men, and the conditions in Cuba which would drive them to take such risks.

We next sailed to Key West to observe the final days of Race Week, then sailed east to Marathon Key for a final day of shopping in a US supermarket. We had an uneventful overnight crossing from Marathon to East Riding Rock in the Bahamas, crossed the banks and went into Nassau. In Nassau we had sailing friends, the Molnars, from the Chesapeake join us for 10 days of sailing to Eluthera and the northern Exuma islands. It was especially great to see them as we had both sailed our boats to the Bahamas in the fall of 1998 when we began our multiyear sailing travels. More nostalgia. After the Molnars departed we greeted our daughter, Karen, her two children (Miles and Macy), and our eldest grandson, Kiel, who all flew in from cold New England to sail with us for a week. After they departed we had a leisurely sail down the Exuma chain and into Georgetown. The weather was colder and windier than in previous years, so we learned to tuck in and wait out the cold fronts as they blew through. However, we did get in some chilly snorkeling and hiking. Then we had the Palmers, also sailing friends from the Chesapeake, fly in to join us for a week. The weather continued brisk and the night before they left we had 55-knot winds.

In early April we set sail back to Nassau, then to the Berry Islands, then to Grand Bahama Island to wait for a weather window to cross back to Florida. The wind gods were good to us and shortly we were underway, sailing directly up to St. Augustine inlet in a day and a half. We could not tarry in Florida, as Nancy had to be in Rhode Island by the middle of April to help tend the grandchildren while Karen traveled to Myanmar for a Mercy Corps meeting. It takes two people to make a quick trip up the ICW from Florida to Annapolis, so we could not put Nancy on a plane from Florida. As we approached the Chesapeake a mid-April cold front moved in and the temperature dropped to freezing. Mighty chilly out there, although we did have an electric blanket to keep us from freezing at night. We arrived in Annapolis, and with the help of the Molnars and the Palmers got Nancy on her plane to Rhode Island. Ben stayed behind and with our friends' help, prepared Dream Catcher for sale. She was hauled out at Jabin's Yacht Yard and we contracted with Annapolis Yacht Sales to find us a buyer. The weather stayed terribly cold until the work was done and Ben flew back to Texas.

In May we flew to Massachusetts for Nancy's 50th Smith College reunion. It was a nostalgic time, but lots of fun. In June we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. We gathered all of our children, grandchildren, and Nancy's brother at the Massanutten Resort in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. We spent a week together and had a great time. The children all brought pictures from their childhood up to the present and prepared a magnificent album for us, sort of "This was your life" book. More nostalgia! The grandchildren had plenty of time to get to know one another, this being the first time they had all been together since Macy was born. From Massanutten we drove up to Rhode Island where we had rented a house for 10 weeks just a few hundred yards from Karen, Michael, Miles and Macy's

house. Kiel spent three weeks with us and we also had visits from a number of New England friends. We played tennis and we kayaked, did a little swimming (that water is cold) and did some serious bike riding. We also visited the Harpers in Plymouth and spent a few days with Dick Smith in Boothbay Harbor. As the summer drifted into September we drove up to Bethel, Maine for a visit with the O'Briens where we did some excellent rock hounding and enjoyed driving their vintage automobile fleet.

In mid-September we headed south, stopping for a visit with our former neighbors in Columbia, MD, and with the Palmers in Fallston. We also had a serious talk with the Yacht broker in Annapolis who had not brought us any offers in the 4 months the boat had been there. We told the broker that if he didn't sell the boat by November 13 we would sail it back to Florida and prepare to spend another winter aboard in the Bahamas. Yes, we were already missing the sailing life, and we did want one more voyage to the Bahamas. We then drove down to Jacksonville, Florida, to spend time with Ben's brothers Bruce and Jan, and wives Lillian and Mary Helen. On Sept. 20 we all drove down to St. Petersburg to help Rolfe and Jean Duggar celebrate Jean's major milestone birthday. Nice party, Rolfe and Jean. Then it was back to Texas for us. The summer would have been perfect except that on Labor Day Jan's eldest granddaughter, Allie, who is an excellent horsewoman, had an accident with her horse, fell, and struck her head. She was in a coma for six weeks. She finally woke, but has a long rehabilitation ahead of her. We are now convinced of the power of prayer.

October was a tough month in that our dear friend, Gordon Palmer, lost his life in a mountain bicycling accident. We were fortunate to have spent quality time with Gordon and his wife, Jo Ann, in the Bahamas in March and during our visits to Baltimore in April, June, and September. Gordon had also helped Ben and John Molnar sail our boat from Texas to Florida in November 2006.

In late October we flew to La Paz, Mexico, in the southern end of the Baja peninsula. We had visited La Paz a number of times while sailing the Sea of Cortez in 2002-3. Although it is the capital of the State of Baja California Sur, it still has a small town atmosphere and is a delightful place. We spent a week in La Paz, then booked a cabin on the overnight ferry that crosses from La Paz to Mazatlan on the mainland side of the Sea of Cortez. In Mazatlan we met up with Ben's brothers Bruce and Jan with their wives for a week at the Mayan Sea Gardens resort. Lots of lounging around and in the pools, early morning walks on the beach, some touring, and lots of good company. Bruce surprised everyone with a couple of very good Elvis songs at Karaoke night around the pool, and Ben won a prize for his skills chug-a-lugging tequila shooters on Mexican fiesta night. While we were in Mexico we were also communicating with the Yacht broker in Annapolis who had finally found a likely buyer for our boat. Since we already had bought plane tickets to fly from Texas to Annapolis on Nov. 13, it was with mixed emotions that we negotiated the sale. On Nov. 27 the sale of our boat was completed. More nostalgia! That same day we flew to Jacksonville to celebrate brother Bruce's 70th birthday. All of Bens' brothers and their spouses attended a big bash at the University Club. Lovely party, Bruce and Lillian.

We have just finished staying a week with Jim and Jacqueline's children, Nicholas (age 9) and Kendall (age 6), while the parents attended a wedding in Orlando. They live about 15 minutes from us, but we stayed at their house in order to keep the children to their regular routine and to get them off to school on time each day. The grandchildren and we survived the week and even had a great time!

We find much to fill our days and often are just too busy. Ben continues with the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services as a certified ombudsman who advocates for long-term care residents in local nursing homes. Nancy has been busy in the garden and in her sewing room making quilts, window curtains, grandchildren clothes, etc. We regularly attend lectures and seminars at the U. of Houston, Clear Lake Campus, have joined a Gem and Mineral club, are considering being trained as "master naturalists" and volunteering with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., and are gradually integrating our lives into the community. With the boat now gone, we have new travel opportunities, but will surely miss the cruising life. We will continue to make annual trips to Mexico, but also want to explore parts of the US that we have not seen, and then there is South America. We also still want to do canal boat trips in Europe but may wait a bit to see if the dollar will appreciate against the Euro.

We wish you all good health, good friends, the joy of family, and peace in this season of good cheer. Hope to also see you in the coming year. Other than July and August the weather in the Galveston area is quite agreeable and there are so many sights to see in Texas.