

1991 Reflections

In January, we went Grey Whale watching with Jerry's mother, while she was out visiting us. It was a cold and windy day when we set forth on a small boat to watch for whales in Monterey bay. But, the sea was calm and we were able to see quite a few whales and got some good pictures of them (or at least their flukes). We all enjoyed ourselves.

February found us on our way to Cairo, shortly after the beginning of the Gulf War. Some medical equipment we had designed for one of our customers was damaged during shipment to Egypt. So, we had to fly over to repair the equipment, and to instruct the buyers in normal maintenance repairs. We had taken a spare unit with us with the intention of exchanging it's good parts for any damaged parts and then bringing the spare back with us. The customs officials did not understand what the unit was (they did not speak very good english) and they couldn't get the box open (they asked us if we had a knife--reality check, we had just got off the plane), one of them even tried to bite through the fiberglass tape. Eventually, they decided to charge us a big (to them) import duty of \$50. Since we had just managed to accidentally import this unit for several thousand dollars less than the duty we should have paid, the medical company decided to purchase this additional unit from us (if we would send them replacement parts). The equipment we were to repair was at Ain Shams Medical University in Cairo. The medical facility is essentially a government supported free clinic for the poor, where the medical students can intern. It was a very old, shambled building, with primitive facilities, cold and sparse. Jerry mentioned the place looked like a bad day in Beirut. The average income in Egypt is \$650 a year. It seemed very strange that they would buy exotic medical equipment (the unit we designed was for sleep studies, something more attuned to a more affluent society) instead of more general supplies such as medicines, along with fixing the roof, and killing the mosquitos. We finished the repairs and training in a couple of days, but we were to stay a week in case they had any more problems with the equipment or any questions about the training. Since this left us with a couple of days partially free; one of the engineers from the Egyptian company acted as our tour guide and drove us around Cairo and Giza. Saddam Hussein had made bomb threats on the tourist areas, so most of these were closed (but, then, there weren't any tourists due to the war). It was very interesting, to be in such a popular tourist area with no tourists. The only Americans, or any other foreigners, we encountered were a few oil men escaping the war in Kuwait. We went to the Saqqara Pyramid (spelling??, everything is written in Arabic, and English is only written as it is pronounced by the individual writer) in Giza and bribed an archeologist to give us a tour (after our Egyptian friend talked his way past the soldiers and explained the bottles of medicine in the car). We were even allowed to enter a

tomb normally closed to the public. We had to climb down a ladder 90 feet to get to the excavated rooms. The archeologist insisted on using our camera to take our pictures, but did not understand time exposures so the picture was blurred. Jerry did get a picture of Sharon laying in the sarcophagus. We could not get close to the Cheops pyramids by car (the road was closed) so we parked and rented horses and a guide and headed out towards the Sphinx and the pyramids. After being turned back by a soldier on horseback with an automatic rifle, we settled with riding around a different route until we had a good view of the pyramids but were far enough away to avoid the soldiers. We then were taken to a group of shops and the guide had someone open up the shops to try to sell us something. One of the items they were selling was the essential oils used to make perfume. These oils are STRONG! We had purchased some papyrus from one of the other shops after being shown the perfume and the shopkeeper wrapped it in a newspaper he had been reading in the perfume shop; from the oils on his fingers, the smell of roses stayed on the newspaper for months! The weather was cold, but mostly nice. Only, once, while we were in Cairo, it got so cold it actually snowed! But, we had a very enjoyable time: the people were wonderful and the food was great.

In March there was an article in Air & Space Magazine about our co-operative rocket ranch. It actually made us sound like we know what we are doing!

We took a long weekend to celebrate our tenth anniversary. We attended the Cousteau Society premier of their latest film in Maui. It was nice to visit with old friends, again. We saw some of them again, when we were later invited to the Lahaina Gallery in San Francisco to assist at another autograph session with Robert Lynn Nelson.

At the end of April, we attended a friend's wedding in New Orleans. We all had a great time at a three day party. The bachelor party (not just for the guys, everyone was invited) was a fantastic crawdad feed. The rehearsal dinner was a cruise on the Mississippi River on a private paddlewheel riverboat. Following that most of the party ended up at a Freddie Fender concert at a local country bar. The wedding and reception were a little more traditional; except that it was held in a Catholic church, the groom was Catholic, the bride Moslem, and the best man Hebrew.

June found us spending a week in Lanzarote, one of the Canary islands. These islands belong to Spain but are located off the coast of Africa near Morocco. The Canaries are a very popular vacation spot for people from Europe (mainly Germany) and the United Kingdom--it's sort of the "Hawaii" of Europe. It was an interesting place to explore, with lots of really neat volcanic oriented architecture. We had a nice relaxing vacation, and even had a lunch that was cooked over a live volcano.

July and August were mostly spent working but with an afternoon or so off spent at a sci-fi convention.

At the end of August, we took our mothers to Kaua`i for a week of general relaxation, being rained on, swatting mosquitos, eating lots of fruit and other good comestibles, and buying a part of the island. Jerry attempted three times to take a picture of a waterfall, and was rained out each time, just as he got to it.

Somewhere in the middle of the summer, we decided we needed to get the leaks in the roof fixed. That project is still going, and going, and going, and ... We hope that it will someday be completed.

Jerry got his membership in the Pyrotechnics Guild International. He got one of his Christmas presents early--a blasting machine. He is now attempting to blow up the universe. He has been asked to help a friend start a local New Year's bonfire, all the proper permits have been obtained (they will only use a couple gallons of propane).

12/6/91: attempted to see Star Trek VI. 12/9/91: finally saw Star Trek VI.

We spent the rest of the year working 24 hours a day to make up for these few moments of frivolity.

Early January, '92, at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. We plan to conquer the world with the "Transfoner". News at 11:00.

Merry Christmas to all, Live Long & Prosper, & above all, Peace!
Love, Jerry, Sharon, & Jo