

Final Blog Entry – Luggage Arrives – Farewell – 11 December 2011:

This will be our final blog entry for the Holland America 2011 Grand Asia and Australia Voyage on the ms Amsterdam. We have enjoyed the cruise immensely and we hope that the blog not only provides us with a journal but was of some enjoyment and use by others. If readers have any questions or comments we can be reached by email at [orlinbarbara at bellsouth.net](mailto:orlinbarbara@bellsouth.net) (we show “at” here to avoid spam triggered by using @ in an email address on the Internet).

The didgeridoo we had bought in Sydney was 4.5 feet long with a 4 inch maximum diameter. We thought it was too unwieldy to include with the other luggage we planned to ship home by Federal Express. The equipment for ship-to-shore transfer of passenger baggage from a cruise ship is designed around standard shaped luggage and such an odd shaped piece may be subject to damage if not handled gently. Consequently, while we were in Honolulu on November 29 we put the didgeridoo in a shipping tube and shipped it home by Federal Express. We were concerned that it might arrive in Oak Ridge before we got home so we had FedEx ship it to Steve’s place.

The didgeridoo arrived at Steve’s home on December 5 (six days from Honolulu) and he brought it over the next day. When we took it out of the shipping tube we were relieved to see that it was not damaged in shipment. In the picture on the right Orlin proudly shows his didgeridoo safely home in Tennessee.

One of the most amazing events after our return was the dreaded reading of the bathroom scales during our first day home. It defies reason but Barbara lost 3 pounds and Orlin lost 4 pounds on this cruise. That’s not to say that we aren’t overweight, just that we didn’t make the situation any worse. The culinary offerings on the Amsterdam were sensational and we indulged ourselves occasionally but moderation was our watchword in the dining arena. The frantic pace of most of the shore excursions probably helped a bit also in trimming the fat. Anyway, that news competed with our luggage arrival as the most important event of the day.



About noon on Friday, 9 December the Federal Express truck backed down our driveway and the bags were delivered, as shown on the right. The luggage was taken inside as shown below, and after a close inspection they appeared to be in great shape. The three baggage straps we had put on the bags even survived the trip. Other people have reported that the luggage straps tend to open and get lost during shipment.



We had packed the luggage tightly and even had to sit on a couple bags to get them closed. Seeing that the suitcases hadn't sprung open during shipment was a great relief.

The next step in the process was to open up the luggage and see if the delicate souvenirs survived the trip undamaged. Barbara eagerly unpacked every bag and it was like an early Christmas as each item was revealed. We had lost all track of which bag contained individual pieces

of our precious stuff. When the unpacking was over we found that nothing was damaged and as far as we could tell everything we sent home made it safely. The arrival of the

luggage shipment completed the critical steps of the cruise and this part went perfectly, just like the rest of the cruise.

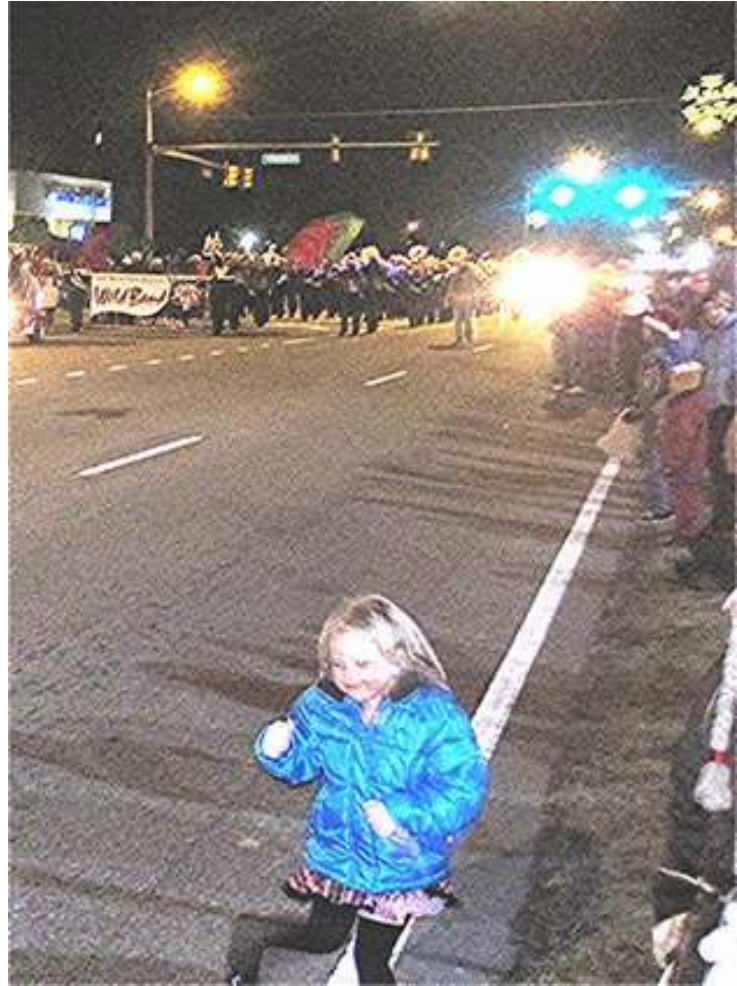
Before signing off with this final blog entry we wanted to share a little of our hometown ambience that helped us settle back to the home front routine. On December 10th the City of Oak Ridge held the annual Christmas parade. The parade is a classical small town USA event and it is a “must” on our annual check-off list. This year it was more of a “must” than normal because our grandson, Andrew, was playing cymbals in the high school marching band that would be in the parade. At 6pm we bundled up against the 37°F temperature and joined the crowd gathered to watch the parade pass by. The following are a few pictures from the parade.

Here are Steve, Becky, Barbara and Emily “chilling out” while waiting for the parade.



It was dark by the time the parade started at 6pm but we were able to get a picture of the military men proudly leading the parade with the American flag.

The High School mascot is the Wildcat so the Marching Band is called "The Wild Band". In this picture on the right the band is approaching and their banner proclaiming the "Wild Band" was carried in front. We included the picture mainly because of the little girl in the blue jacket dancing with an East Tennessee step to the music as the band approached. She was having a grand time that was a joy to watch.



The band moved along and Andrew passed by us in the marching formation. He was playing the cymbals tonight but in this picture below we caught him in the midst of a lull in the cymbal action.



As doting grandparents we are proud of both grandkids and count our blessings that we can live to enjoy this time with them.

We went home from the parade and attempted to warm up with a cup of hot chocolate in front of the fireplace. We took a picture of this happy scene that also included our Christmas tree that was decorated today. We have just returned from a marvelous cruise with old friends and many new friends. Since this is the Christmas Season we want to offer this picture of a very thankful couple as our Christmas card to those friends and others who may read the blog.



Farewell, and as Captain Eversen of the Amsterdam would say, “tot ziens”, which is the Dutch way of saying “until we meet again”.