

Dear Friends:

December 1995

Chad and I wish you the happiest of holidays and the best in 1996. The pictures are sent so that you can visualize what we're talking about when we refer to our homestead or animals. We're firmly creatures of the country now, right down to mastering the one finger wave off the steering wheel (no, not THAT finger; we've left the city), and the ability to give directions "country" style, as in, "Go 1.2 miles down the dirt road after you pass the Dead End Sign and turn left at the first yucca unless the deer have eaten it...

It has been a very good year with the visits of good friends and family from other states and as far away as South Africa, trips into the hill country, and a spectacular tour of Alaska in July. We flew to Anchorage and then took a train to Fairbanks with an overnight stopover in Denali Park for horseback riding and wildlife viewing. On north for two days on a "motor coach" (a bus with a bathroom) up the gravel Dalton Highway, across the Yukon River, the Arctic Circle and the tundra to Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Ocean. Such beautiful, uninhabited country. Then we flew back to Anchorage and motored down to Seward to experience culture shock when we traded traveling on buses, staying in former construction camps, and dining with mosquitoes, for a life of luxury aboard the SS Rotterdam on a seven-day cruise down the Inland Passage.

Now that is the life I'd like to become used to, with shipboard staff following you around to offer assorted chocolates and drinks so that you won't become faint before your next meal, which is never more than an hour away. On our way down the Passage, we stopped in Valdez, Sitka, Juneau, and Ketchikan--all beautiful coastal towns, with a final stop in Vancouver and a flight back to Austin and reality.

Of reality, i.e., work, Chad has had an interesting year. He was asked to manage the Customer Service section at the Tax Office and helped streamline its operations, then was given the choice of continuing to manage that group or become the department's computer administrator. He selected the latter and has since been embroiled in LANs, ROMs, RAMs, BYTEs, and other mysteries.

Chad is also now responsible for calculating the effective tax rates for 80 taxing jurisdictions both inside and outside the county. This means, as nearly as I can determine, that he spends a month of 14-hour days working horrendously detailed calculations while trying to keep any number of people in the taxing units informed and happy with what he's doing. A fairly impossible job.

My job is not impossible, just strange. I've been through my seventh or eighth reorganization. With each reorganization, my job title gets longer and less expressive. I'm now the Deputy Assistant Director for Child Support, Collections Operations. By the time I've said that, I've forgotten just what it is I do, which is process child support. We handle almost \$2 million per day in incoming child support payments, which means that we mail out to families over a quarter million child support warrants every month. That is the rewarding part of my job, but politics is not my forte.

So...I'm announcing here that I plan to leave State employment in March 1999 to start a home-based business. I'll be vested with the State by that date and able to collect a retirement check some far-off day. I plan to be a farmer and contract business writer--don't laugh--and will fill you in with my progress in our annual Christmas letters. I have my office designed (on paper), my first customers signed up (they don't know it yet), and 17 notebooks of research and information gathered on subjects ranging from how to establish a Subchapter S corporation to the most efficient methods of goat shearing. More to follow...

Our country home and neighbors continue to help make life good here. Chad's now president of the Big Country Neighborhood Association, which keeps him mostly out of trouble. Inter-neighborhood politics and personalities keep it interesting; remind us to tell you about the BULLETIN BOARD WAR when you visit. And we hope you will visit, soon.

Have a wonderful holiday and take care of yourselves.

With our best, Linda and Chad

Photos, from top left, clockwise: Front yard; T.K. & Linda; Solomon ("Sol"); Tejas; Bingo (Paint) and Prescience (Arabian) & carrot holder; us--aboard the SS Rotterdam; winter 'round the stables; Texas wildflowers; T.K. & new addition--Taco; (l-r) Tee Som/J.J./Jameelah; and lastly, ol 'Tex Swedberg'

Dec 95

