

Christmas 1996

Dear Family and Friends

So you're wondering how the Bradens are handling things after 29 years in the military. Good, because we're making the transition gently. I keep a duftle bag near the bed in case Florida State University gets a no-notice mobilization order to some obscure place in Africa or the Mid-East. And I'm up to 10 days without a visit to the barber, letting my hair grow out to ½ inch at times. Bonnie is helping to bring me down slowly by cooking S-O-S for breakfast and by putting military creases in my heavily starched button-down shirts. And the kids help spit-shine my loafers.

The people at FSU have also been pretty understanding, though it took me two months to stop calling the Dean "Sir" and starting calling him "Bob" as he desired ... we have to be very collegiate, you know. And I also had to learn that if I want someone to see a note, the thing to do is leave it in their chair, because their desks, tables, shelves and every other flat spot in their offices are filled to overflowing with paper, reports, brochures, files and other miscellaneous "stuff. Must be a requirement in academia.

Goodwill Industries is very happy with the transition as Bonnie cleaned house both at Fort Eustis and here. The only problem was watching over the stuff we were going to donate because it was hard in some cases to differentiate between the pick-up items and our real "treasures." The pick-up crew raved over the military uniforms and accoutrements to the extent that we suspect none of such gear made it back to the store.

Anne's '69 VW is happy to have a new home in Florida. I'm happy it made the 800+ mile trip uneventfully. (Yours truly did the driving, and after each day on the road in the August heat without A/C, had to have intravenous replenishment of liquids at night.)

Anne and Robert are okay. Robert joined the high school marching band, which had 46 straight years of Band Festival "Superiors" so the pressure was on to sustain the record. They practiced more than the Miami Dolphins, and with better results, I'm glad to report.

Anne played Recreation League Girls' Fast Pitch Softball. The biggest challenge was to get the young ladies to forego dates, work, social activities, doing their hair or nails, tanning saloon sessions, makeovers and similar activities - and show up to play. And practice? That would be too much like work so forget it!

Bonnie must be getting settled because she now knows the first names and most of the life history of the grocery store Deli man, the roadside vegetables vendor, the Recycling crew, two of the ladies who work with ComCast Cablevision and most of the services-type people on the North side of the city. Forever the extrovert, Bonnie establishes more enduring personal relationships with strangers than most of us have with family.

Karen continued with Salvation Army, but announced she's quitting just after Christmas, supposedly to get more serious about graduate studies. I can't understand what would motivate her to give up that 20% discount card for the Thrift Store. Maybe all that bell-ringing practice just got too much.

The big event of the year was on November 30th. That's when FSU whipped the University of Florida 24-21 and earned its rightful place as the Number 1 college football team in the nation.

And, oh yes, Sandra and Steve also got married that day, thankfully well after the game ended so we didn't have to bring portable TVs into the pews. A very nice ceremony and reception, with only a few major crises; and now I can vouch for the authenticity of *Father of the Bride*.

Directly related to the above - the wedding, not the ball game - was Tallahassee Kraft Komer's dramatic rise in stock as Bonnie showed this area of Florida who was the new Big Dog in town as regards artsy affairs. For the event, she made ... chocolate lolly pop snacks, table center pieces, rose shaped rice throwers, a "mailbox" for wedding cards, chocolate candy holders, and pew decorations. Plus she hand lettered the invitations and helped with the wedding program. Then there was the four meals she cooked here and took to Tampa so we all could concentrate on last minute catastrophes rather than, "What's for dinner?" Needless to say, the van was about 1,000 pounds lighter heading back here.

One bad thing about Florida has been the weather. We've had two days so far this Winter where the temperature has dipped down into the 60s - but thankfully it was back up into the 70s by early afternoon.

Happy holidays and best wishes for 1997...

Jay, Bonnie, Karen, Sandra & Steve, Anne, Robert and Beau