Seasons Greetings 2013

Now In Its 20th Year!

Bringing you *all the news* ***that fits!*** The year in review… Serving you since 1993

Welcome Back Ir*Ma*!

Moving back after a 20 year "vacation" in Roswell, New Mexico, my very dear "other mother", **Irma O'Gara**, moved back to Iowa in mid-December 2012 (after last year's missive was published).

Although some may be questioning her sanity for leaving the relatively tolerable climes of the southwest U.S.A., it all becomes clear when you realize she is back near two of her children (three if you count me… and I think we will!) Welcome back to I-Oh-Way, Ma! Hope the winters are bearable.

BTW – we also had the opportunity of celebrating her 80th b-day back in August, with ALL the kids AND grandkids in attendance.

Thanks go to **Peg & Jim Stone** for hosting the weekend long activities at their home up in Clinton.

… And on a Coincidental Note

My brother **Bob** and his wife **Sharon**, who it seems just moved to Indiana not long ago (because they did) from Virginia, decided they do not like Midwest weather, and after some research and a "site-seeing" trip decided to *move to* ***New Mexico***, specifically, Alamogordo, NM.

They were fortunate after prepping their Brownsburg, IN, home for sale, and were quickly rewarded with an offer and by August they were "New Mexicans!" They are getting settled into life in the SW high desert, where rainfall is scarce… well, except when Bob moves there! It rained the first five days they were there and they had snow there before we did here in Iowa! Go figure.

What is Fun and Charitable, Alex?

The answer… Another March evening participating in Dick's parents' church's *Trivia Night Fundraiser* in Cedar Rapids, IA. This year's charity was an organization which goes to under-developed countries and drills wells so communities previously without fresh water will have…? Fresh water!

I wish the answers that night had been that simple. After our dominating performance during the 2012 Trivia Night, we didn't do as well this time around. **Alice** arranged everything and **Jim**, who was out with a cold last year, was there this year to field all the sports questions! Fun was had by all!

On The Home Front

As time has passed, most of the *major work* is done around the ol' homestead… thankfully! But that doesn't mean ALL the work is done. Early this year we had our front bedroom made over. Where before we had a "patio door" in the bedroom leading out on to the roof of the front porch (which by the way, IS a ***roof***, NOT a deck) we now have a more appropriate double hung window replicating what was there when the house was built little more than 120 or so years ago!

The floor has been refinished and the plaster walls & ceiling patched and painted, looking like new again. For those of you keeping track (and I know you're out there!) the only floor yet to be touched is my bedroom, and the only room still needing a re-do is my little office (formerly the maid's room in days of yore.)

Oh, and we also have had about half of the house insulated/re-insulated with blow-in fiberglass and guess what? You can sure tell the difference! Whereas the heat used to run very nearly constantly when the mercury dropped below 10 degrees Fahrenheit, it now cycles on and off, just like a normal system. WOW! Now that's an improvement that will pay for itself!

Above – Old patio door (and the previous owner's furniture… sorry, it's the only picture I could find!) Note the original window casing above the door!

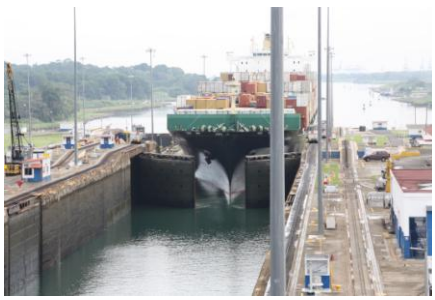
Below – How the proper window looks today, (with its Holiday Window Candles)

Travelogue 2013

Bienvenido a Perú (Welcome

The Big Trip for 2013 occurred at the end of May, with us traveling to the southern hemisphere, via Central America. The ultimate destination was Machu Picchu in the Andes of Peru, with a stopover in Panama on the way there. It almost seemed like another one of those cases of, "You can't get there from here," trips! Characters in this year's "play" included most of our Traveling Troupe (sans Fred & Larry of L.A. – missed you guys!) In attendance were **Doug** & **Richard** of Topeka, KS, **Daryl** & **David** of Leawood (nee Kansas City), KS, and **Dr. Dave** & **Alan** of Plattsburg, NY. It was a package tour and our little clique constituted half of the group! But before we met up with the group, Dick & I had a stop to make in Panama. See if you can keep up….

Day one - We flew from Chicago to Panama City where we spent a little more than 24 hours on the ground. But did you know that with a rental car, a lousy rental car map and a little patience you can see the Panama Canal, including ALL 3 sets of locks & Gatun Lake, and drive ***northwest*** from Panama City on the Pacific coast through the interior of Panama and arrive on the Caribbean coast! Don't believe me? Look at a map! And we still had time for meals, a full night's rest and returned to the airport to catch our connecting flight to Lima, Peru. Whew!



The evening of day two we had landed on the coast of Peru at Lima. Lima, the capitol, is a very large city of some 7.6 million people (as of 2007, the most recent numbers available per Google). And as such, well… let's just say they have all the accoutrements that come with that… traffic jams, air pollution, and if one is in the wrong parts of the city, their fair share of crime (we stayed OUT of those parts!) Day three was spent in Lima on a city tour, which was… eh, about enough.

Early (too early if you ask some…) we arose on day four at o'dark – thirty to get to el aeroporto for our flight to Cuzco, elevation approximately 11,200 feet above sea level. Yeah, that's about TWO miles up in the air, and you can tell! Thankfully, upon arriving, we boarded a bus and headed down valley to a mere 7,000+ foot elevation to spend our first day in the Andes. After a (welcome) night's rest, we spent days five & six touring the "Sacred Valley". This included a white water rafting excursion on the Urubamba River and our first exposure to Incan ruins and the very friendly & colorful locals of the

valley. But enough of that, what about Machu Picchu you say?

On the morning of day seven we are up at 7am to checkout, get to the train, and travel to the town formerly known as Agua Caliente, now called Machu Picchu City. I prefer Agua Caliente, Hot Springs in English, but whatever.

It's been a half day of travel via bus and train, and we are finally nearly there, Machu Picchu, but first another bus ride, up the mountain side! The good news is, that when you get off that bus you are literally 50 yards to the entrance to the ruins of Machu Picchu, but first lunch! Finally, we are there…

This place is absolutely incredible!!! Well worth the **7** days we spent getting to this point. We have a guided tour of the site, and then back down the mountainside via the switchback road. Supper and to bed, for yes, the next day is going to arrive early. The goal is to catch one of the first buses in the morning of day 8, to get back up the mountain to experience sunrise at the citadel which is Machu Picchu. The group split up at this point, about half (including me!) made the climb up Huayna Picchu, that mountain peak you see towering over the ruins of the Machu Picchu citadel. It was NOT rock climbing, but also not for the faint of heart as the trail was narrow, steep and accompanied by shear drop-offs. That said, if you have no fear of heights, do it! About one third of the troupe (including Dick) took a different hike, to the Sun Gate, which while higher up in altitude than Huayna Picchu, the trail was wider and paved with Incan stone. We leave Machu Picchu before lunch and return to Agua Caliente, shop, eat and relax waiting for the evening train/bus ride ahead which will find us back in Cuzco late that night.

Above – Dick at the Sun Gate, high above Machu Picchu: meanwhile Mark was on the peak, center left edge of this photo (by the little **star**)

Travelogue (Cont'd)

Day nine was kind of a blur, as the hike the day before was not overly friendly to my not-as-young-as -it-used-to-be body. Add to that, the fact we are back at 11,200 feet. We were both ready to return home. The trip home began at 6am on 6/1 with our departure from the hotel in Cuzco, culminating with arriving home at something like 2am the next day! Aside from a short layover in Lima & Panama on the return, we spent 20 hours straight in travel mode. As I said, "you can't get there from here… not easily, anyway!"

Late Summer Visits &/or Short Trips

The second weekend of August found us busy-busy-busy! Saturday AM we drove into Chicago, spent the day in the city bopping around, including seeing The Tall Ships which were on tour in the Great Lakes and had weighed anchor at Navy Pier in Chicago. These are authentic masted sailing ships from the *previous* TWO CENTURIES! That evening, we drove to Evanston, just north of Chicago, for (what turned out to be) a "surprise" 50th Birthday for my friend **G. David**. *He was surprised* because he didn't know I was coming, and *we were surprised* because the restaurant where it was scheduled to be held was under renovation and not OPEN. And since he didn't know I was coming, I didn't get word of the change of venue. After a couple phone calls, we got the wires uncrossed, arrived at **David** & **Tomas**' apartment and were able to enjoy an evening chatting and reconnecting after too many years. We returned home that night, for on Sunday we were on the road again! This time headed to Cedar Rapids, IA, to meet up with Dick's sister **Dee Ann and her family** up from Memphis for the weekend. In route, we made a stop in Anamosa, IA, to visit the Iowa State Penitentiary. No! We don't know anyone there! But there is a little three room museum there (OUTSIDE the walls, but on the premises.) Quite interesting, seriously. An hour or less is all you need, but it is worth the time. After a visit with Dick's family (his parents & the VanHoeck's of Memphis**)**, we had dinner at the Ox Yoke Inn in the Amana Colonies, a family favorite and frequent locale for birthday dinners.

Sunday of Labor Day weekend, Dick & I drove down to Mt. Pleasant, IA, home of the famous Midwest Settlers & Old Thresher's Reunion. Outside of eastern Iowa you probably never heard of it, but they have been doing it for over 60 years. As the name implies, it started as a way for the old traveling farm threshers to get together and reconnect as mechanized farming had made their group services all but obsolete. Today it is a weekend festival celebrating the hard work of rural America and the steam powered machines which led to farming as we know it today. Having seen all there was to see at the Old Threshers Reunion we attempted an impromptu visit to see an old ISU dorm mate of mine who lives with his family in Mt. Pleasant. But alas, it wasn't meant to be, as **Dynque** & **Deb** were in Ames that weekend having attended a Cyclone's home football game… *dang!* On the way home, we took the long way home via Burlington, IA, where I saw (for the first time) Snake Alley, debatably the crooked-est street in America. Sorry Burlington, but I think Lombard St, in San Fran, is crooked-er!

Then late in September we were back in Chicago for a weekend meeting up with Doug & Richard (of Topeka.) Richard had a work related conference, so Dick & I tagged along for short visit which included taking in a show, **"Book of Mormon"** (very funny!) And since this is the midwest, a delicious dinner at *Lawry's* Restaurant, famous for seasoning salt & BEEF.… Mmmm "roast beast!" **;)**

Wedding Announcement

Bossler-Sears

(Jeff & Aaron)

On the evening of February 9, 2013, we were delighted to be in attendance of the "knot-tying" betwixt our long time friend, **Dr. Aaron Bossler** , and our new friend **Jeff Sears**. They had a lovely ceremony with parents, family and friends as witness. They live in Tipton, IA, with their "kids" Topher & Jack (beagle doggies!) Wishing them all the best!

In Closing…

Fast(?) forward to the end of the year… Thanksgiving this year found us breaking bread at my **Mom**'s house in Clinton, with my brother **Doug**. As one might be able to guess, *I was in charge of dessert*! Although there were only four of us there I made **2 pies**… just in case! One pie was ***the*** traditional pumpkin pie, and the other was a ***traditional pumpkin*** pie. HUH-What you say?! This year I bought a "pie pumpkin" at the grocery store, cleaned it, roasted it, pureed it and made a pie with the resultant "goop." Aside from the pumpkin, the recipes were identical. And the result? *Eh.* Stick with the canned pumpkin (15 seconds to open the can vs. an hour of prep time & roasting just to prepare the "goop"). We had a nice visit… and plenty of pie!

The ***Holidazed*** season is upon us, most (but not all) decorations are up, but there's still time! ***And we want to wish everyone, family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, et al, the happiest of holidays and a bright and prosperous New Year!***