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Hey We're Back!

Gee I guess it has been awhile since you heard from us. The last newsletter we produced was the May 2000 issue of *The Marsh Creek Gazette*. The long absence wasn't because we weren't traveling nor because we lost interest in publishing, we just got busy doing other things.

Learning to hang glide took up a lot of time, we've been hiking at least one day a week, I spent a lot of time learning to use video editing tools, I entered my first stereo slide competition and suddenly found myself taking photography very seriously, and, finally, I've started writing an SF novel. Oh did I mention we sold our house in Atlanta, doubled the size of our place in Ellijay and moved there full time? Even when you're retired, there are still only so many days in a week.

Of course none of these other things we're doing has in any way reduced my fascination with desktop publishing or Suzanne's interest in photography and travel. In fact we've been to some wonderful places and I've acquired some neat publishing toys since the last issue of *The Marsh Creek Gazette*.

Why a new zine title? Well, Marsh Creek ran across our back yard in Atlanta and the title came from my writing stories set in the imaginary town of Marsh Creek. We liked the title and kept it for our "keep in touch" zine. This publication is dedicated to our travels and we felt that *Travelers Tales* was a more honest description of it's content. Especially since this zine may contain more then just reports of our trips. We do have a little catching up to do and intend to do so by covering both recent trips, like Aruba, and past trips in the same issue until we get current.

Speaking of publishing, I started publishing science fiction "fan zines" about 30 years ago and found that I really enjoyed the process of putting a zine together. That led to a series of zines on various topics. Then, some time ago at this point, Suzanne and I started doing *The Marsh Creek Gazette* as a way



Bear Bear cools down with a frozen drink at Iguana Joe's

to keep in touch with people. It worked well and we had a lot of fun with it. Then life got busy and we stopped adding people to the distribution list and eventually stopped producing the zine altogether. This new zine will be sent to a lot more people then old one. Which brings up the question of what to do if you don't want to receive it.

Please send us a note at the address on the back or an email to steve@shughes.com if you don't want the zine and we will promptly stop sending it. In fact please let us know if you don't want it. I would really hate to contribute to anyone's junk mail load. On the other hand if you definitely **do** want to receive it, let us know and we'll put you on the list of people who get every issue of *Travelers Tales* and maybe a few other odds and ends.

In this issue we are covering a January 23,2001 trip to Disney World and a trip to Aruba January 30,2002.



Imagine – A World Without Figment!

One of my favorite places in Epcot has always been the Journey into Your Imagination ride presented by Kodak. There was just something so wonderfully fun about the implementation of Figment.

I'm not sure whether it was because of the way he was created from the materials of our imagination, or just his whole attitude as he led us through the realm of our imagination, but he embodied the idea of creating something fun and whimsical. Every time I go to Disney World, I always seem to take the time to take this ride, and I always enjoy it.

When I was at Epcot last, I remember thinking that this ride was looking a little worn. The colors were no longer bright and the technology was no longer new. Well, Kodak has redone the Journey into Your Imagination ride and I'm not sure they focused on the right part.

Since it is our imagination that allows us to enter our personal world of nightmares, a section of the ride was dedicated to the darker parts of our imagination. In their own way, Kodak has elaborated on this nightmare section. Imagine a world with no Figment, for that is what the Journey into Your Imagination ride now is.

If there is no Figment, can there really be things that are just figments of your imagination? Figment embodies childlike spontaneity. He used a rainbow as his paint set to create a fantasy landscape. He posed in a film reel and was transformed into various people including an astronaut, an athlete, an actor and a scientist. Figment helped us to believe that we could be creative and as the ride ended, instead of being in a gift shop, we were in a play area where we could be creative through music, art and science.

But if there is no Figment, where does that leave us? This ride seems like it is missing something. Yes, there are some interesting effects, everything is bright and shiny, but you get to the end of it, and there is no longer that awe that used to be present. I don't want to imagine a world without Figment, and apparently I am not the only one that feels this way. The employees in the Kodak pavilion say that the ride is going to be revamped once more and Figment is coming back! Hooray for Figment!



A lot of people think the Disney "character breakfasts" are events for little kids. They're only partly right. While young kids do enjoy the events, though the characters sometimes scare them, it's the oldest "kids" who enjoy them the most. I suspect adults need to believe there's fantasy in life even more than little kids do.

Heffalumps and Woozles!

Two and a half years ago when I was at Disney, I had the opportunity to ride on Mr. Toads Wild Ride for the last time. This ride, being one of the original rides at the Magic Kingdom was being closed down in a week so Disney could put in a Winnie the Pooh ride. I guess they decided that not enough people knew who Mr. Toad was and that Pooh bear would draw more people.

Well they were right, there was no line to ride Mr. Toads ride in August, but there was a 40 minute line to ride Winnie the Pooh in January when the park was much less crowded. I am actually a fan of Winnie the Pooh and even have a stuffed Tigger from the very first time I visited the Magic Kingdom in 1976. Like most rides, this one ends in a store where you can buy all kinds of Pooh related things. After a careful search of the store, yup, I found them. They actually do have Heffalumps and Woozles for sale, but being Gund animals, I don't see what can be so scary about them!

Fast Pass

Do you hate waiting in lines? When you go to any amusement park, it always seems that the best attractions have the longest lines. You hurry to attraction X, wait in line for 2 hours, get a 3 minute action packed thrill, quickly walk through a shop, and hurry to the line for the next attraction a mere 30 second walk away. Then it starts all over again.

Disney, the leader in many amusement park discoveries, has found a way to help you spend less time in lines, thereby freeing you up to spend more money. It's called FASTPASS. Several of the most popular rides in each of their theme parks (and each year, more rides are added) have kiosks where you insert your park pass and get a ticket to an attraction with a time range to show up at the attraction. At the allotted time (it's probably a 30-45 minute range) you show up at the attraction and have a separate line to wait in. This separate line bypasses most of the zig zag line that non FASTPASS holders use thereby cutting your wait time to something closer to 10-15 minutes.

So what do you do with all that spare time? Well, you can ride more attractions, but that involves walking around the park more and having to kill time waiting for the appropriate time to come. So you wander pass more food and souvenir kiosks, and you spend more time in the shops. The more time you're doing that, the more likely you are to spend more money. Isn't that the Disney way!



Bear Bear posing with someone closer to his own size.

Why I Keep Going Back by Steve Hughes

It's funny how I keep going back to Disney World. I think my fascination with the place actually started in the mid fifties when my family was living in Augusta GA and things were, to say the least, pretty difficult. Nice way of saying we were down to one meal a day, on good days. I used to go next door and watch TV at a friend's house. He was only allowed to watch a few shows and The Mickey Mouse Club was on the list. There I saw a glimpse of a very different world full of happy people where everybody smiled. I also watched them building Disney Land and it seemed, to a seven year old, the most wonderful place on Earth. At the time, I never dreamed I would ever be able to visit there myself. One might as well have tried to go to the Moon.

Things got better for my family and we moved back to the mountains of North Georgia but I never forgot my first image of Disney Land. It stayed fixed in my mind as a fantasy place where one could escape from a, mostly, unpleasant reality. Guess what, I still think of it that way.

I don't remember when I first visited Disney World, it was some time in the Seventies, but I've gone back there many times and have always enjoyed the visit. For a few hours I can wonder in a place where nothing bad ever happens. Where the streets are clean and safe, there is no sign of poverty or hate and everyone is having a good time. It always cheers me up and improves my outlook on life in general. I'm perfectly aware it's all an illusion but that in no way lessens it's effect on me. And, yes, I do know the reality behind the illusion.

It is dreadfully commercial and if you look behind the façade, I got a good look when I designed a system to handle their credit cards, you see an army of people, not all of whom are happy about the working conditions, putting forth an incredible effort to create a very specific illusion while absolutely maximizing profits for the corporation.

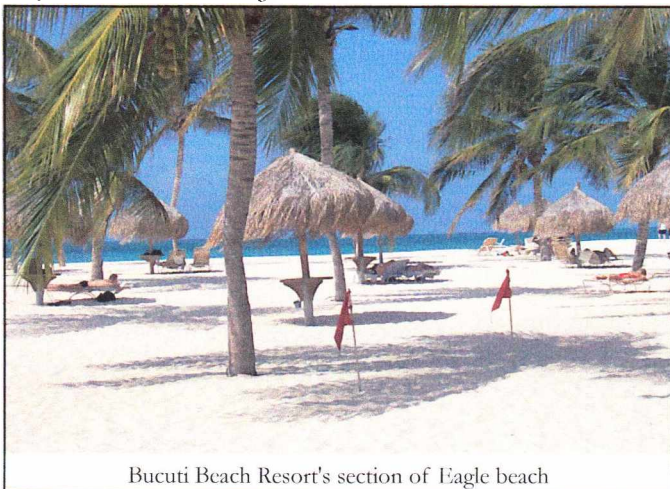
The point is that the illusion is maintained, whatever the effort, and has the designed effect on the people who visit the *Magic Kingdom*: it adds a little magic to life.

Finding Eagle Beach

It was definitely time for the beach so once again I found myself trying to find a hotel with an ocean front room on an exotic island that I knew little about. To make matters worse, all my research materials were in a box on the bottom back row in my climate controlled, off-site, storage so I had to do all the research and planning using the Internet. Usually, I like to check at least half a dozen sources to be sure one review is not just biased for or against a particular establishment. Even with a DSL link to the Internet, it can get hard to pull up information in a way you can easily work with it and compare options. You definitely cannot curl up on the couch with a highlighter and post-it flags to easily eliminate contenders. So my research techniques had to be refined and I thought I would share with you how I arrived at the Bucuti Beach Resort on Eagle Beach in Aruba.

My first stop was at www.Orbitz.com to try to find someplace where someone flies direct from Atlanta. With the air mess after 9/11, I really didn't want to have to change airplanes and possibly need to re-screen at an airport on the way. Aruba seemed to fit the bill nicely. While there, I looked at what package deals they had, or more to the point, the hotel descriptions. Something about Bucuti Beach Resort caught my eye. I don't know whether it was 'a tranquil oasis of powdery white beaches and azure waters', the 14-acre beach for only 63 guest rooms, the four star rating, or just the picture, but I was sold. I then checked out www.Aruba.com and www.Bucuti.com but, due to time constraints, if I could get the room I wanted that ended my research.

The property map on Bucuti's web site showed that I was only interested if I could get a deluxe room that faced the ocean.



Bucuti Beach Resort's section of Eagle beach



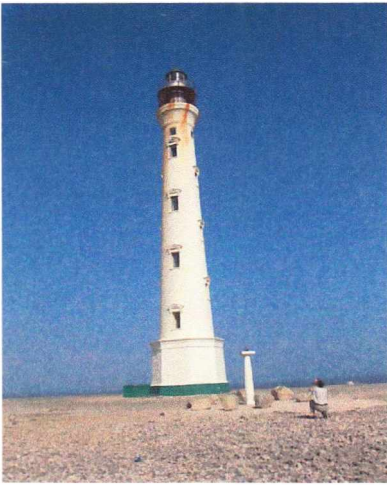
Eagle beach as seen from our balcony

Long distance isn't that much these days, so I called the property directly and worked out what days I needed to be there to get a corner ocean view room. I then went to www.delta.com to book the flight directly since you get an extra 1000 bonus SkyMiles for booking on their website. With the flight booked, I used the resort's website to actually book the reservation.

I was not disappointed. The Bucuti Beach Resort is located about halfway between downtown Oranjestad (the city) and Palm Beach (high rise hotels) on Eagle Beach. This makes the cab ride run about \$7 to most places you want to go to. The beach itself was beautiful. When we sailed along the southern coast, we realized this was one of the few beaches that had a wide sandy beach beyond the area that was covered with hotel beach chairs. Our balcony was in the shade most of the day, so it made a wonderful place to watch the ocean and the people without needing to be drenched in suntan lotion.

The other wonderful thing about the resort was the activities desk. Most hotels of any size have an activities desk, but some don't have enough people to accommodate the needs of their guests, and others don't have enough contacts on the island to actually be able to book many things. Chantal at the activities desk at the Bucuti was wonderful. With Chantal's help, we had a wonderful catamaran ride to the coast of Venezuela, a full day jeep tour with stops at several of the natural wonders on the north side of the island, and a full day boat ride on the *Tranquilo* where we were treated to some wonderful deep water snorkeling.

Fortunately on the day we had to leave it was raining, so it made it a little easier to say good-bye.



Aruba's Geography

It's nice to have time to travel and stay at a location more than two days. Before we retired trips consisted of sneaking away to the beach for a long weekend. At most there was time to spend one day on the water, preferably getting some snorkeling in and one day getting to 'town' for a few hours with the remainder of the day spent being a vegetable under a palm tree. Then it was time to go home. Now we try to stay a minimum of four nights at any given place and have added an island tour to the mix of things we do.

In Aruba, we took a 'jeep' safari with ABC Adventures. This was an eight-hour tour that did a full circumference of the island. There were eleven people on the tour plus the guide. Six of us were in a Land Rover that could easily have held 12 people, with the remaining 5 in two separate jeeps that they had to drive themselves. Steve and I were in the main truck driven by the guide so we could actually see the countryside.

The tour included pick-up from your hotel. Since we were the first ones picked up, we began with a tour of several of the hotels along Eagle and Palm Beaches. Eagle Beach is a wide sandy beach with mostly low-rise hotels. Palm Beach has the larger high-rises and more luxurious hotels. Several of the piers from which the boat tours leave are located at Palm Beach.

As you head west towards the north tip, the beach gets rockier and when you get to the California Lighthouse at the tip, the inland part was old lava. This end of the island is very flat so you can see a great distance in all directions. Three sides provide a view of the water while the fourth side overlooks a golf course.

Once you round the tip, you're actually on the northern side of the island. This is the side that is open water to the Caribbean Sea. It is desolate without any cities, towns or even homes there. What is there is a photographers' paradise. I found myself wishing I had my notebook with me so I could dump my digital pictures and have unlimited shooting power. This was a desert with numerous rocks and waves and spray. One section of the beach had thousands of small stacks of rocks. Local legend has it that if you make a wish and stack some rocks, your wish will come true. It looked like a lot of people believed the legend.

One of the natural wonders of Aruba is the Natural Bridge. This is about in the middle of the northern part of the island, and every tourist who wants to see Aruba must see it. Therefore it is very crowded. But the advantage of having a native tour guide is that they take you to the other natural bridges. We saw three of them. My favorite was actually a double bridge. The rock formations were marvelous. This was further east closer to Dos Playa and only accessible by a four-wheel drive vehicle.

In the Arikok National Park, we visited the Fontein Cave. As part of a group, we were only allowed in about 100 feet but in talking to the cave guide, there is a whole strip of wonderful caves to explore on the eastern part of the park.

At the eastern end of the island once you round the tip, the waters become calm again. We stopped for some snorkeling at Rodgers Beach. The snorkeling was great if you like shallow waters. The interesting thing at this beach was that across the bay there was an oil refinery. Not the usual sight for a pretty beach but the waters were very clear on the side of the bay we were at.

Off the southern side of the island there are several boats that have been sunk to create some dive areas that would have been fun to visit. Unfortunately, we were in a jeep not a boat, so we ran up the main highway past the fishing village of San Nicolas, the water desalination plant, the dump, the airport and back to town.



Eating Out In Aruba

Whenever I go to an island, I expect to be eating a lot of fish. Aruba was no exception, I expected to eat a lot of fish and I did. The exceptional thing was that I found a lot of good steak houses. No, I did not see any cows but the close proximity to South America, Aruba is just off the coast of Venezuela, lent it to having some wonderful steaks. The nice thing about going in season is that everything is open regular hours. Due to the tensions in the world, people really mustn't be traveling as much as usual. Every restaurant we went to had plenty of available seats even the places that normally are fully booked and require reservations in advance. The only place we were unable to get to was a dinner cruise which is sponsored by Le Dome, one of the top rated restaurants on the island. That was because it is only done one night a week, the night we got there, and it was sold out by the time we got to the hotel.

My favorite restaurant was definitely L'Escale. As in most resort places, this was a restaurant in a hotel, the Aruba Sonesta Beach Resort in downtown Oranjestad. We went on Super Bowl Sunday and had the restaurant almost to ourselves. Needless to say service was wonderful. For appetizers we enjoyed the Shrimp Cocktail and the Aruban Vol-Au-Vent, (sautéed chicken in a puff pastry). The main course was the Seafood Mignon and the Caribbean Snapper followed by a couple of soufflés.

The best steak we found was at the French Steakhouse at Manchebo Beach Resort. This resort was adjacent to our hotel, so after a 3-minute walk we were wined and dined with one of the best Chateaubriands I've ever had.

The Buccaneer was a mediocre fish restaurant with two dining rooms. The main dining room has a big 7500-gallon salt-water aquarium, which can be seen from every table in the room. We sat in the other dining room which has the outside walls lined with separate aquariums for each booth. Since the booths have low walls, you could easily see the ones across the room. It produced a very convincing illusion of being in a sunken ship looking out through the portholes. It was fun.

As usual, the only place we repeated was the hotel restaurant. At the hotel, the restaurant was a replica of a beached pirates ship, hence the name: The Pirates' Nest. Their shrimp cocktail appetizer was the best we had on the island, and one of us tried it every night wherever we were eating. They are big on theme nights, Tuesday night is Italian night and Wednesday night they have a Caribbean Beach party. My cherries flambé desert was wonderful, even if they couldn't set it aflame since we were eating outside and there were very strong trade winds that night.

Lastly, every town with a major port of call has to have a colorful local bar and grill. In Oranjestad, that would be Iguana Joe's. Here, from their second floor location, you can sip on your frozen drink and watch the people coming and going from the cruise ships or shopping down the promenade.

And of course, there was a McDonalds!

L'Escale
RESTAURANT
at Aruba Sonesta Beach Resort



Buccaneer
Restaurant



The Pirates' Nest
restaurant



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