

Bisonalities, Again



A quarterly Newsletter dedicated to the Alumni of Waterford & Fort LeBoeuf High Schools

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Editor: Bob Catlin - Class of 1956

Welcome to the winter issue of the **Newsletter** dedicated to the alumni (students, teachers, and administrators) of Waterford High and Fort LeBoeuf High Schools. This newsletter will be distributed quarterly. New issues will be posted for viewing on the Web on, or about, January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1.

The **Bisonalities, Again** Web site may be viewed by going to the following URL:
<http://www.geocities.com/candoer1>

The success of this newsletter depends on you. I need contributors. Do you have an interesting article, a nostalgia item, a real life story, or a picture you would like to share with others? Do you have a snail-mail or an e-mail address of one of your former classmates? If you do, send it to me at the following e-mail address:
catlinb.candoer@verizon.net
or to my snail-mail address:



Cat's Corner

Well, I survived another year. Winter is here in all its bad ways. The time of the year I hate the most.

Nancy had surgery on her right Achilles tendon and it went very well. She was in a cast and on crutches for two weeks. She is now able to use the ankle almost as well as she did before the problems started. In

November, she had surgery on the tendons in her right wrist. She is on her way to recovery from that surgery. She has a removable cast on it and goes to therapy twice a week. She will have this removable cast on it for approximately four months.

Tit-for-Tat

By Bob Catlin - Class of 1956

During my 36 plus years working for the Federal Government I worked several different jobs, all but one (three years in the Army) with the same division, the Office of Communications, at the Department of State. After two or three years in a specific job I would apply for something else, usually to receive a promotion, but occasionally just because I was bored.

One of the many jobs I had was traveling world-wide with Secretary of State Kissinger as a telecommunications specialist/advisor.

It was rare that I knew more than a couple days in advance, because of security concerns, where and when I would travel. In some instances, the notice would be as short as a couple of hours.

One particular trip, in November/December of 1975, known well in advance, was a scheduled trip for the President and the secretary of state to travel to Beijing (then known as Peking), Peoples Republic of China. My responsibility was to travel to Beijing ahead of the President and secretary of state and set up telecommunications and have it operational when they arrived.

Instead of commercial aircraft this trip was by government aircraft from Andrews AFB, just outside Washington, DC, to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, to Yokota AFB, Japan, where we did an overnight, and then on to Beijing. The reason for traveling by government aircraft was because we were taking several thousand pounds of telecommunications equipment with us to not only support the secretary of state, but also President Ford.

The purpose of the trip was to

formally recognize and establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, a process that had been started by President Nixon, but not completed before he resigned.

The first leg of the trip went smoothly. We arrived in at Elmendorf AFB about 11 in the morning on November 25th. The sun was just starting to light up the sky. It was 35 degrees below zero, bone-chilling cold.

After a three-hour refuel lay-over in Alaska we departed for Yokota AFB. Again, we had a smooth uneventful trip.

We arrived at Yokota AFB about 11:00 p.m. for an overnight stay before flying on to Beijing.

The flight into Beijing, if you were allowed to fly directly from Tokyo to Beijing, is fairly short. But, because of "restricted over fly areas," the flight took over five hours. The minute our aircraft entered Chinese air space, we were met and escorted for the rest of the flight by two Chinese Air Force jets.

Upon arrival at the Beijing airport, customs/immigration officials boarded the aircraft and collected everyone's passports and shot records. We were not to get them back until we departed the country. We were all required to stay on the aircraft until they verified that everyone had the proper visa, our shot records were up-to-date, and that we had official permission from the Foreign Ministry to be in their country.

After waiting for several hours, a bus and several trucks arrived at planeside. The trucks were escorted by personnel from the Department of State's U.S. Office --- because we had not yet established formal diplomatic relations with China, we had a U.S. Office in China, not a U.S. Embassy.

The people were headed to the Beijing Hotel by bus. The equipment was headed to the U.S. Office by truck.

The Beijing Hotel was located about a mile from Tiananmen Square and over an hour's ride from the airport. It was located on the main street that led to Tiananmen Square. The whole hotel had been set aside for the more than 200 Americans who were arriving over the next several days to support the President and the secretary of

state. The 200 Americans included the official government support staff and the American press corps.

The hotel was a five story building, one of the few buildings in Beijing at that time that was more than four stories high. It was completely surrounded by a six foot tall chain link fence with three strands of barbed wire around the top. We were never sure if this was to keep us in, or keep Chinese citizens out. Probably both!

There were 25 of us in this first group to arrive. Upon arrival at the hotel we were taken to a large day room on the fifth floor for an orientation by a Chinese Foreign Ministry official and the Administrative Officer from the U.S. Office.

We were informed by the Chinese that we were each to receive a separate room and were given our room number and door key. There would be a concierge on every floor. A driver, an interpreter, and a car would be assigned for every two people and that this service would be available 24-hours a day, though the concierge.

The U.S. official asked, after the Chinese official finished his orientation, that we go to our rooms, unpack, and wash up if we wished. In 30-minutes we were to be taken by bus to the U.S. Office for a formal security briefing.

At the U.S. Office we were told that everyone's room would have listening devices in it and that under NO CONDITION were we to discuss any aspect of the trip and/or our duties and assignments. If we did not want the Chinese to know our personal business, we should be careful about anything else we talked about because it would be heard and probably recorded for later analysis by Chinese intelligence personnel.

The hotel would probably be rated as a two star hotel in the U.S. It was old, not very clean, not well maintained, but the service was outstanding. As you entered your room, on the wall near the door, there were three buttons. The red button brought you tea. The white button brought you someone to pick up your laundry. The black button brought the concierge to see what

you wanted.

The room price, 10 U.S. dollars a day, included a full breakfast. The dining room was on the first floor. Breakfast was served from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. every morning. Breakfast included dry cereal, all the fresh fruit you could eat, apple pie (yes, apple pie every morning for breakfast) and an omelet. It never varied and neither did the omelet. The omelet always had peas, carrots and cut up meat in it (it tasted like bologna, and I did not ask what it was).

Every night before going to bed you could put your dirty laundry, your shoes, and your suit outside your door. The next morning when you awoke, your laundry was clean, ironed, and folded neatly, your shoes were shined to a high gloss, and your suit was clean and pressed. Along side your personal items would be a pot of hot tea and a bowl of fresh fruit.

Each evening, after work, when you returned to your room, in the room there would be a new bowl of fresh fruit, a bowl of candy, and a tea pot with enough hot water to make two cups of tea.

We were not allowed to go any place on our own, outside the hotel itself. There was a large day room on the fifth floor, with a TV, pool tables, ping pong tables, a barber shop, and an exercise room. And on the roof there was a jogging track. If we wanted to leave the hotel, we had to travel with our interpreter and our car and driver. They put no restrictions on where we could go, we just could not do it on our own.

Even with these restrictions, I got to visit the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the Ming Tombs, several stores in downtown Peking, and even visited a commune to see how the Chinese people lived. I had lunch with them and got to talk with them about their way of life, all of course, through the interpreter.

Beijing is a very large city, with a population of approximately 12 million people. It was very clean, but the air was seriously polluted.

At that time, citizens could not own a motorized vehicle. All the vehicles were owned by the government. The citizens got

around by bicycle or on foot.

Every morning you would see thousands of people riding their bicycles to work. The street in front of the hotel was ten car lanes wide. All ten lanes would be filled curb-to-curb with bicycles, and an occasional government car. The intersections were all controlled by policemen, not traffic lights.

The people heated their homes with soft coal. During the day the air was fairly clear and clean, but at night, as people returned from their jobs and started cooking and heating, the air started to fill up with smoke. By the time I went to bed every night, from my room on the fourth floor, I could not see the street lights in front of the hotel, the smoke was so thick.

Much like Washington, every evening the wind quit blowing and the air became very still. The smoke would rise about 20 feet above the houses and hang there in a thick cloud. If you went out at night, you saw most of the Chinese people wearing a white mask that covered their mouth and nose.

My first few days, until the secretary of state and the President arrived, were filled with setting up the telecommunications equipment and getting it hooked up to telecommunications circuits back to the White House and the Department of State.

The President and the secretary of state finally arrived. That evening a dinner, hosted by the Chinese, was held in the Great Hall of the People. I was fortunate enough to be invited to attend the cocktail party and the dinner. And what a dinner it was. They served a multiple course dinner of Peking duck. You haven't eaten duck until you have eaten Peking duck, cooked in China. What a delightful meal. The meal consisted of duck bone and duck tongue soup, sweet rolls, baked-stuffed duck gizzards (I didn't ask what the stuffing was, I didn't want to know), crapes, roasted duck, plum sauce, and scallions and for desert, apple pie and a fresh bunch of seedless grapes. It was a truly outstanding and delicious meal. I ate until I thought they were going to have to carry me away from the table.

The Peking duck was served on a large platter. It still had the head on it. The eyes were propped open and the duck was placed in such a way that it looked like it was sitting on the platter, resting.

In the orientation at the U.S. Office, we were told that the eye of the duck was considered a delicacy and that we were each expected to eat an eye and then offer the other eye to our host counterpart. To eat the eye was considered to be an honor and we would show them our respect by offering them the other eye. We were told that if we thought we could not eat the eye without getting sick, then we should not go to the dinner. I chose to go. I ate one eye. I did not get sick.

At the head table sat Vice-Premier Deng Xiao Ping, his wife, President Ford, his daughter, Susan (his wife Betty was in the hospital), Secretary Kissinger and his wife Nancy, his Chinese counterpart and his wife, and the man who was later to become President of the United States, Ambassador George H. W. Bush. His wife, Barbara, was in the U.S. at the time of this luncheon.

Before the meal was served there were several toasts. During the entire meal and throughout the toasts, Nancy Kissinger never drank or ate a thing. She sat with her hands folded in her lap and looked neither to the right nor the left. Her actions were an insult of the worse kind to the Chinese.

The next morning, at the request of the Chinese, Kissinger sent his wife home, on the first flight out of the country.

When the visit ended it was our turn to host the Chinese at an American style dinner. It was again held at the Great Hall of the People. This time the meal was prepared by American cooks. All the food was flown in from Washington and prepared on site. We had vegetable beef soup, fresh rolls, prime rib (cooked to perfection), baked potato, snow peas, fresh fruit and strawberry mousse (made with fresh strawberries). The toasts before the meal were all done with American wines and spirits.

Again, I was invited to attend the dinner and the cocktail party before.

At the head table, were all the same

people, minus Nancy Kissinger and Vice-Premier's Ping's wife. Instead of Ping's wife, there was a young Chinese lady, in military style uniform, who sat through the entire meal, including the toasts, with her hands folded neatly in her lap, looking neither to the right nor the left. She ate nothing and she drank nothing. *You got it, tit-for-tat.*

The Chinese had a band that performed music during both dinners. One of the songs they played was Hail to the Chief and by mistake, at the first dinner, they played the Michigan State fight song (President Ford attended the University of Michigan, not Michigan State University). The second dinner, hosted by us, they played the correct college fight song for the President.

After the trip was completed, I packed up all the telecommunications equipment and was about ready to head to the airport when I received a call from Ambassador Bush. Ambassador Bush was to leave for Washington in a few days to take over as Director of the CIA. He asked if I would accept an official courier letter from him and escort his personal papers back to CIA headquarters along with my telecommunications equipment. I was going to say, no? Of course, I accepted.

As a memento, I still have that official courier letter with George Bush's signature on it and a letter from President Ford thanking me for my support during his historical travel to China.

After Katrina

By Joyce Marsh Pialet - Class of 1957

Three years ago my husband and I retired and moved to a small community on the Mississippi Gulf Coast called Pass Christian. We kept our house in Erie and came back during the hot summer months. On August 29, 2005 our area was hit by the biggest natural disaster in our country's history, Hurricane Katrina. Fortunately, we were in Erie at the time it hit.

Gus and I watched the news carefully

for word of our little town. Unfortunately, the majority of media attention was focused on the theater of New Orleans; Gang members firing on rescuers and images of wholesale looting make for riveting viewing, while a community where people are quietly working together lacks hand-wringing drama. The truth is this: we on the Coast took the full force of Katrina's wrath and conditions are still years away from anything approaching "normal". Part of the delay in media coverage can be blamed on the storm itself. The destruction was so complete no one was able to get into the area. Trees down, streets torn up, bridges totally gone, houses and boats in the middle of the street like children's abandoned toys made access to the coast area virtually impossible.

I've heard rescue workers from around the world say that they have never seen anything comparable to the devastation there. The "real world" doesn't understand that we were hit by a tsunami. A 35-40 foot wall of black water rushed in from the Gulf like a gigantic bulldozer. Structures that had seen dozens of severe storms (including Camille), buildings that had been standing solid for over centuries are simply GONE.

Residents on the coast have lost their residences, their businesses, their jobs. Some are living in tents, the lucky ones in FEMA trailers. Some have temporarily evacuated, some left for good. The ones that remain sift through the remains of their lives hoping to find something, even something as small as their mother's teacup. Neighbors would pick through the rubble from houses of friends and salvage the few items they could find. They would set these items up at the edge of the property, or on the slab where once stood a house. One could drive down the street and pass crystal vases, family portraits, pottery, silver candlesticks, all sitting at the curb neatly arranged, awaiting the owners who had evacuated.

We returned to Mississippi two weeks after the storm to work with the Red Cross. We hauled a little camp trailer down to live in and parked it in the back yard of another LeBoeuf graduate, Barry Burdick. Barry

allowed us to hook into his electric and water and we did most of our cooking in his kitchen. Barry lives about 15 miles north of the coast, but still received a lot of roof damage. He is now living with a "Blue Roof". While we were there, Barry's home was also a refuge for other friends that had lost their homes. In his living room were bedrolls of volunteer emergency workers from his nephew's church in Alabama, their bedrolls on the floor so they could sleep in air conditioning.

Gus and I are luckier than most. Even though our home in Mississippi is now nothing more than a broken concrete slab, and our belongings are somewhere in a 20 foot pile of rubbish up the block, we have our home in Erie, stores to shop in, and water we can drink.

Of all the lessons I have learned since the storm upturned this idyllic coast, the most important is probably this: a sense of community is the most undervalued asset in this country today. Despite the incredible losses that every person experienced, friends and neighbors supported each other. Our time spent with the Red Cross was spent working with people from all over the country, people that have given up their vacation time, and are willing to live in dismal conditions, just to help those devastated by this disaster. People there are stressed beyond comprehension, yet they continue to give. I witnessed so many acts of kindness that my faith in the goodness of most humans was restored. Neighbors took care of neighbors, friends helped friends.

It will take years to clean up the debris and replace the infrastructure, but the people of the coast will rebuild, and yes, Gus and I will return to our beloved coast. What makes this community so special are its spirit and its heart. Katrina couldn't destroy that, it only strengthened it.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that great need still exists. People in Mississippi are still doing without many of the necessities of life, and certainly without the comforts. Having worked with the Red Cross, we know first hand the good they

have done for thousands of people. If you wish to help with a donation, I can think of no better way then to donate to the Red Cross. And no, the Red Cross didn't ask me to write this, my heart did.

Happy New Year!