

CALIFORNIA LLORENTES' 2006 CHRISTMAS BLOG

*'Twas two weeks before Christmas
and all through the house
no one was helping,
not even my spouse.*

*The Christmas tree stood
twelve feet in the air,
but all of its branches
remained quite bare.*

*The kids were all busy
watching TV,
while I sat composing
at my PC*

Greetings from the *California Llorentes*, as we've been unofficially dubbed by the *Florida Llorentes* (my brother's family).

For those of you who expressed concern over the fact that I didn't send out a Christmas card with a verbose rundown of our lives last year, please be assured we're still here...same station, same channel...

What happened last year is that I got called for jury duty in August, 2005 during the first week of classes, and I requested a special deferment available to faculty to postpone service until the semester ended. I received notice to report again one day after my

classes ended in December. I had assumed that since I was an attorney, I would not actually be empanelled, but to my chagrin, that was not the case. Of the first 18 potential jurors called for a criminal trial, there were 4 attorneys, including myself. (*Obviously, there are two many lawyers in California!!!*). In short, I spent a portion of my Christmas vacation from the college helping convict a young lady who drove a BMW and ripped off Mexican day workers at knife point (*I know, only in California*). I got further behind at my law office, and had a couple of days to get all the Christmas stuff done. Something, had to give...the missing, embarrassing Christmas letter, much to Ariel's relief...

For the most part, I've gotten a little bit older and probably not much wiser. In general, I continue to tread in a constant state of being overwhelmed. My attempts to change things have been futile.

However, life is treating me well, and I really can't complain.

Evelyne is doing well with her practice, and again, no major changes in the last couple years. The kids are growing up much too fast for my taste. Ariel started high school in 2005, and is now a Sophomore. She is doing well in school; her grades improved dramatically the last two years, and I am thrilled that she has become more devoted to academics. However, she is still a social butterfly with a large circle of friends. She also made the Frosh/Soph volleyball team during the last two years, and won her team's "Coaches Award" last Spring in swim, and in Volleyball this Fall.

Adrian is a good-natured, rambunctious, ten year old who spends way too much time exercising his manual dexterity in front of video games. I'm not helping things much by getting up before dawn last month and standing in line for a Nintendo Wii (*I was successful*). I think he's hoping Santa scores a PS3 on Ebay.

I coached Adrian's soccer team rather unsuccessfully in 2005; we went 0-9 in the regular season, but had a "Cinderella" post season,

when as the last place team, we beat the first place team in the first playoff round, then tied two more games, before “choking” at the end. I found I’m too lenient to control a dozen of 9 to 10 year boys.

The College’s board limited the amount of hours we could “bank” (*the policy where we can bank the overtime hours we teach instead of getting paid, and latter take a semester off with pay*). Since, I already had a large balance, I elected to take the Spring semester off in 2006; this allowed me to take a couple of trips with the kids when they had school breaks:

Some notable trips and events in 2005-2006:

March, 2005 – My brother, Oscar visited with Gerard, and we went to Las Vegas, where Ariel had her first “Spa” experience. Hopefully, it doesn’t become a habit.

July, 2005 – We visited Evelyne’s mom, Lucie and Don in Texas. They bought a big house on Lake Livingston, and fixed it up really nice. We had such a great time at the lake, and were so impressed with the relatively “reasonable” property prices that a couple months later we purchased a vacation home on the lake near theirs. Ariel discovered the Houston Galleria.

August, 2005 – Took a family vacation to Alberta, Canada. Probably the best family vacation place we’ve been...Gorgeous national parks; glaciers; elk; white water rafting; historic railroads; dinosaur museums; and the world’s largest mall which had shopping for Ariel, a water park and ice rink for Adrian, a Vietnamese supermarket for Evelyne, and a casino for me.

Thanksgiving, 2005 – Went back to Texas, Evelyne’s brother, Luc and his family met us there, as did Oscar, Gerard and my mom. We closed on our lake house.

Christmas, 2005 / New Years’s 2006 – Went skiing at Mt. Tremblant, Quebec after Christmas. Met my brother, Carlos and his family there. Beautiful place, but they had a strike at the ski mountain, which put a damper on our vacation.. Took the Adirondack train from Montreal to New York City, and spent New Year’s Eve in NYC.

February, 2006 – Visited Harper’s Ferry, WV, Washington D.C., Annapolis, Dover, DE, Philadelphia and Atlantic City, during the kid’s winter break. First major museum trip of the year. I also got closer to my “geek” goal of visiting all 50 states by my 50th birthday; I’m currently 6 states shy, with 3 years to go. The kid’s watched “Elizabethtown” at the hotel in Atlantic City, and borrowing from the movie, with some variation, they’ve decided that when I die they’re going to cremate me and go around the country scattering some of my ashes in every state capital.

April, 2006 – Another museum trip during Spring break. We stayed in San Diego and visited the Balboa Park Museums. Also went down to Tijuana for the first time in 10 years (*I used to go down almost every couple of weeks when I first moved to California.*) I was surprised how little things had changed.

May, 2006 – Yet another museum trip; this time to Chicago. This was my first time staying in Chicago: impressive museums, beautiful architecture, shopping, and we got to see “Spamalot” (Hilarious play!!). I really liked the city, and we had a great time.

June / July, 2006 – Went to Las Vegas for Luc & Beth’s wedding. They had a beautiful sunset ceremony at sunset in the Valley of Fire (about 90 miles east of Las Vegas). Jean-Luc and Chelsea drove back to California with us while, Luc and Beth enjoyed a brief honeymoon. I drove them back to Vegas on July 5th, leaving home

at 5:30 a.m. and arriving at 9:00 a.m. (3.5 hours); this matches a personal record I set for myself back in 1985. In recent years, due to congestion, drives to Vegas have generally taken between 5 and 9 hours. From Vegas the kids and I flew to London, where we were met by my mom, uncle Felo and his wife, Oscar, Gerard and, three days later, Evelyne.

July, 2006 – Llorente European Vacation – A great three week trip; we visited London, Venice, Florence, Rome, Paris, Versailles and Brussels, however I did suffer a “series of unfortunate events”:

(1) First, I got “*pickpocketed*” in Rome. We decided to take the subway back from the Coliseum to our hotel, and entered a crowded car with a Karaoke singing gypsy whose wife or girlfriend was walking through the crowd asking for donations while carrying what looked like a two day old baby. The scene appeared “surreal” and I sensed something was wrong; a second later as the train made its first stop, I felt a tug in my shorts, and realized my wallet was gone. I immediately screamed out “someone took my wallet”, ran out of the car, but I couldn’t figure out who took it. Unfortunately, I had a relatively large amount of cash (\$1,800); I had made the mistake of not purchasing traveler’s checks before I left. Also, since had I left from Vegas, I had a lot more cash on me than I usually carry. Fortunately, this happened on the 10th day of our trip, and since things in London and Venice had been so expensive, I had spent most of my cash by the time I got to Rome.

(2) Next, while driving from Paris to Brussels, I Stopped for gas, and failed to notice that the VW I had rented was a diesel. I filled it up with unleaded. The car stalled before I left the service plaza. Then I got to experience French bureaucracy: even though I was at a gas station, I was required to call a gendarme, who then called an “authorized service station” to help me. After 45 minutes a service tow truck loaded up my car and took us 35 kilometers through

desolate country roads lined with countless English WWI cemeteries, into a small village that appeared completely deserted except for a 1950s style service station. The gas could not be siphoned directly from the gas tank; it took three and a half hours to siphon out the full tank of \$7 per gallon gas through the narrow fuel injector hose.

(3) Finally, when we finally arrived in Brussels, I found parking right on the side of the hotel, so I decided to park the car myself. In Paris, the Westin had parked my car on the street while charging me \$45 a day for the valet; so when I got Brussels, I figured I could do the same thing myself, and save the valet fee at the Meridien, which didn’t have an onsite parking lot anyway. Big Mistake !!! The next day our car was missing; in a row of a dozen parked cars, ours had been hit in the rear late at night by a drunk driver, then and towed 15 miles out of town by the police.

Despite these events we had a great time visiting more museums and historical places (well at least I did). We also enjoyed visiting with Evelyne’s cousins in France.

Finally, we got to take the “chunnel train” from Paris to London on the way back.

August, 2006 – Took a brief trip to Florida to complete a real estate transaction, and went boating with Moly and his family.

September, 2006 – Two days after Ariel had completed her on-the road driving class, I let her drive home from school. As we approached she driveway, she was going too fast and I screamed “Stop”!. Instead of hitting the brake, she floored it and completely knocked a support column between two of our garage doors from its base. The damage looked bad, but in the end, it didn’t set me back as much as I initially thought. Ariel blames me for making her nervous. However, her learning to drive has me in a constant state of near panic nowadays

October, 2006 – Oscar and Gerard visited; drove to in Palm Springs for a day.

November, 2006 – Went back to Texas to inspect progress on some remodeling to our lake house. When done, we're probably going to rent it out.

Thanksgiving, 2006 – We spent Thanksgiving in San Francisco. Ariel and I got up before dawn for the “Black Friday” sales. Ariel also got her first chance to drive on California freeways. However, I still haven't gotten the nerve to let her brave local L.A. – O.C. freeway traffic.

We'll be spending Christmas at home this year, and then we are going to fly out to Colorado, to meet up with friends and family.

Well there it is, a whole lot more information than you ever wanted to know..... I have a new personal website with lots of pictures, if anyone is interested. This one is not searchable from Google or other search engines. Thus, you must enter the address below:

<http://web.mac.com/alexllorente>

*** We hope you all have the best Christmas ever... and a great 2007 ! ***

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