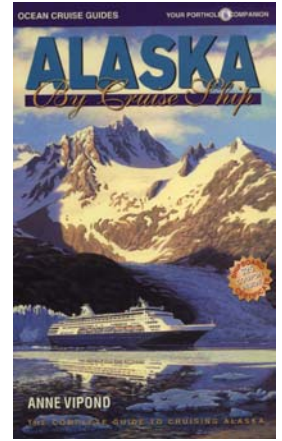


The Hazle Journal 2004

The Alaska Cruise



Um, didn't I
just get one of
these?



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- ♦ *T.F.B.M.T.W.T.I., T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I and other acronyms you'll never need.*
- ♦ *Don't put it off!*

The Editor's Desk

A little surprised when you opened your mailbox? Well, I'm almost as surprised as you are. My fingers are still burning from typing up my last opus. As Mary Ellen and I planned on taking this cruise, I was intending to go "journal-free" on this one, but I did get enough friends saying they were anxious to read my next journal, that it made me reconsider.



Wayne on the promenade of the Coral Princess

Also four years ago I went to the see the Iditarod race in Alaska and I

neglected to write a journal for that trip and I have always regretted it. How on earth could I see the beauty of Alaska twice and not write a word about it? So during that final week as I started to pack, I bought a notebook and resolved to write the next issue of the Hazle Journal with a few key goals in mind: take two pages to write about my 2000 trip to the Iditarod, write the whole journal in about a week (just consider spelling or grammar errors as part of the charm), and finally,

complete the entire journal in about half the pages of the Andean Adventure. This was both for my own sanity and under threat of death from a few readers of the last one. (*"Don't you be sending me no thirty page letter!"*)

Don't worry, the next one will go back to be Magna Carta length!

So get ready to set sail with me, Mary Ellen and quite a few others as we go on another fantastic journey!

The Plan

Even as I wandered the ruins of Machu Picchu, I was thinking, "What's next?" Mary Ellen and I had talked about the idea of a cruise. Neither of us had ever been on one.



To be honest, the thought of a cruise never much appealed to me. India really represented my ultimate trip, wandering around through dusty temples and ruins driving from hotel to hotel in city after city. Sitting on a boat, cruising through the Bahamas while drinking margaritas, might be relaxing for a day or two, but ultimately sounds a little boring to me. (And yes, I know every person reading this thinks I must be NUTS.)

However, friends of ours went on a cruise to Alaska and said the scenery was simply breathtaking. After some quick research, Mary Ellen and I agreed to do the Princess Alaska

cruise that would run from Anchorage, Alaska to Vancouver, Canada. The trip would be May 15th – 22nd, one week after our second anniversary.

We decided to make it a family affair. My parents and Mary Ellen's parents have the same anniversary date, June 4th.

They were going to join us on the cruise. Also attending, would be my sisters Elaine and Sara and a longtime family friend Eulalie "Lolly" Davis.

Preparations were a tad easier this time, no special vaccinations

"Sitting on a boat...drinking margaritas...sounds a little boring to me."

needed. Instead of the Lonely Planet guide, I bought the book, "Alaska by Cruise Ship" by Anne M. Vipond, which my sister Elaine had already purchased. I was currently reading

the "Winter of the Wolf Moon", an Alex McNight mystery, written by Steven Hamilton. I also picked up "A Tale of Two Cities", yes the Charles Dickens novel. I thought it would be fun to read some classic literature.

For this trip I would leave my trusty fedora at home and instead pack a winter hat that I bought in Alaska at the 2000 Iditarod. You can see a tiny glimpse of it on the cover.

There was strong fear that the trip wouldn't happen at all. Mary Ellen's grandmother, Martha's Mom, took **seriously** ill a few weeks before we were set to leave. She spent weeks in the hospital. It was touch and go, to put it mildly. But the week before we left, she came home. We held our breaths and packed our bags.

Early on the morning Saturday the 15th, Mary Ellen and I, along with Gary and Martha Pugh, boarded a plane for Anchorage, Alaska.

Day 1—Setting Sail

I looked down as the plane coasted over the snow covered mountains. I held my breath in awe of their beauty. Alaska is fittingly called “The Last Frontier” because most of it is still unsettled land. In 1867, US Secretary of State William H. Steward agreed to buy this

territory from the Russians for 2 cents an acre, about \$7.2 million. Many ridiculed him. They called it Seward’s Folly. But in 1880, all the ridicule stopped with one word: GOLD. When Joseph Juneau and Richard Harris found gold and founded the city of Juneau, the rush began. In reading through my book on Alaska, it seemed like every major section of Alaska owed its initial growth to the gold rush and then to fishing. Then in 1968, oil was discovered in Alaska.

Alaska is not only one of the richest states in material resources; it is an environmental treasure of wealth far greater than oil. Alaskan wildlife includes the bald eagle various types of whales (humpback, beluga, orca), bears (polar, grizzly, and brown), porpoises, sea lions, otters, dolphins, salmon, halibut, king crab, wolves, mountain goats, caribou and moose.

We touched down in Anchorage. Lolly Davis had already landed and was waiting for us. Unfortunately, one of my suitcases was on another plane, coming in 2 hours later. So Gary, Martha, Mary Ellen, Lolly and I waited. Eventually we were told the bag would get delivered to my room on the ship and that we should just go there. I sure hope it made it,



because that bag had all my clothing in it. We got on the bus that would take us to Whittier, the port where our ship awaited. By the way, I must mention that our bus driver was a young girl/lady that seemed like she couldn’t weigh more than 50 pounds and she said that she just started driving a bus. *Oh OK, as long as there’s no cause for concern...*

We arrived at the port and *there she was*, the Coral Princess sitting at the dock. As we moved through the customs line I looked up and there were my parents and sisters already checked through and getting onto the boat. Within 15 minutes we were checked through and walking up the plank. Then we entered the ship.

We stepped into the central area of the ship, the promenade of the 5th floor. **Aaaaaah!** It was breathtaking! Plush carpeting covered the floors and spiral staircases. Shiny new wood



Inside of the ship

and (faux) marble trimmings were everywhere. Glass and crystal reflected in so many places the effect was almost blinding.

About every two feet stood another Princess employee saying “**Welcome Aboard!**” It was a rich, luxurious feeling. I nearly blurted out “*Hey, this is just like that scene in Titanic where...*” then it dawned on me, I am sure the

last thing on earth anyone running the ship wants to here is “*This is just like in Titanic!*” I would have to watch my tongue for the rest of the trip to make sure I didn’t use {T-word}.

We made it up to our room and our steward “Benny” was there waiting and brought our bags in. My clothing bag still hadn’t arrived. I was surprised at how nice the room was. It wasn’t terribly large, but it was cozy and comfy. There was a nice balcony with a table and two chairs. This was going to be good! We went down to the next level and caught up with our families who were similarly pleased with their rooms. I think my sisters

went off to see the ship. But for the rest of us, who were worn out from packing all night and flying all day, it was naptime. Later on we would meet at Horizon Food Court, the all-you-can-eat buffet. If we could have just moved our beds there, the vacation would have been perfect. All that walking back and forth from your bedroom to the buffet line to eat and back gets a little tiring. ©

If you are running short on time and need a quick summary of the rest of the trip, here it is: eat-sleep-eat-sleep {repeat for 7 days}.

We dove into the dinner buffet and then dashed back downstairs for the first day’s required fire drill. By then my suitcase, with all my clothing had been delivered to my room.

It was now late evening and with our stomachs full, Mary Ellen and I decided to catch a quick nap and maybe get back up later, for a late night walk around the ship.

QUICK FACTS: ALASKA

- 49th state to join the Union in 1959
- State flower: Forget-me-not.
- State bird: Willow ptarmigan.
- State tree: Sitka spruce.
- Population: 626,932 (3rd least in US. Only Wyoming and Vermont have less)
- The largest state in the US in terms of land area. Land area = 1/5th the size of mainland US.

Day 2—College Fjord

“Brrrrrrr!”

I woke up in the dark, completely dis-oriented **and freezing**. Maybe I was dreaming that I fell asleep in a freezer. Then I realized we fell asleep with the door to our deck open and ice cold Artic air was making a nice little wind tunnel out of our room. Mary Ellen got up to close the door but called me over to look.



From our deck

What a beautiful sight! The ship charged through the icy Alaskan waters as shooting stars jumped across the sky! I felt a tiny bit of queasiness from the movement. I decided to take one of the anti-motion sickness pills I bought. We also bought these patches that you put on your neck for 3 days that fights sea-sickness. I wasn't ready for that yet. We took another glance at the stars and faded out.

A few hours later it was morning we looked outside and saw majestic glaciers passing us by. The huge snow-capped mountains were awe-inspiring with the blue sky in the background. Endless ocean lay in front of us. The boat that we considered so gigantic, was just a speck of dust on Jehovah God's waters. It reminds me of the scripture in Psalms 29:3

“The voice of Jehovah is over the waters; The glorious God himself has thundered. Jehovah is over many waters.”

The ship crunched its way through chunks of icy water. *“Hey I hope the captain is looking out for large icebergs like in {T-word}!”*

We slowly got up and made our way to a massive buffet breakfast. We then walked around the ship, lounged

and generally made much ado about nothing. We read the Princess Patter, which is the daily ship newsletter that shows the myriad activities going on around the boat. There were movies, shows, and

classes in aerobics, culinary skills, ceramics, and computers. There was a seminar that explained College Fjord, the glacier area that we were passing through. It would have been a good idea to go but... YAWN!

But what sounded the best to me was sitting out on the enclosed deck, by the pool and reading for a while. I finished “The Winter of the Wolf Moon” and was ready for lunch and then a nap. The fact that I had accomplished and learned absolutely nothing didn't even give me a tinge of guilt. It felt great!



A section of the enclosed pool

In the afternoon we took classes in nutrition and reflexology. Mary Ellen signed me up for a facial, haircut and scalp massage at the spa. She signed up for some amenities herself. Now that I had lounged all day, eaten a huge lunch and gotten spiffed up it was time to catch another nap before the 8 PM formal dinner. ☺☺

We came down to the Provenca dining room. Everyone in our group was dressed immaculately. It was one of the two formal nights. We met our waiter Constantin, whom we would have for the rest of the trip. He is from Romania and like most of the employees would be on the ship for about eight months working about 6 days a week, morning till night. WHOA!

“What a beautiful sight... shooting stars jumped across the sky!”

Dinner was spectacular! Our party dined on everything from juicy steaks to chicken kiev to crab bisque. Constantin swore that everything that everyone ordered was his favorite.

Me: “Oh I'll have the steak!”
Constantin: “Oh that's my favorite!”
Mary Ellen: “I'll have the salmon.”
Constantin: “Oh that's my favorite!”

I ASSumed this was just the joke for the night and that we would not hear it again the next night.

Constantin was also quite the trickster. For the rest of the cruise he would regale us with puzzles and various mind tricks, encouraging us to “think out of the box” for the solution. One of the puzzles is included on page eight.



The whole gang at dinner

Elain and Sara were going to roam the ship some more. But all this laying around and eating, had really tired me out for the day.

QUICK FACTS: COLLEGE FJORD

A section of Prince William Sound with over a dozen glaciers. Named in 1899 by a group of scientists for the colleges they graduated from.

Includes Harvard, Yale, Bryn Mawr, Smith, Wellesley glaciers.

Day 3—Glacier Bay

The next morning, while Mary Ellen went off to get a massage, I slowly got up. I prepared to go to the laundry room and iron all my clothing that got wrinkled in my bag. But one of my very favorite movies, WHALE RIDER was on the tube; I watched and cried.

“What do you mean which one?” {If you’ve seen it, you know the scene.} Then I did my ironing.

Mary Ellen and I ate and then went to a discussion of Glacier Bay, which would explain to us everything we would be seeing today as the ship moved along.

Before lunch, I wanted to sit out on deck and read some more. I pulled out **“A Tale of Two Cities”** and sat in a comfy chair by the pool. *“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”* It was so exciting to be finally reading those words and knowing that

“The text wasn’t exactly jumping out at me like a Grisham novel.”

I was delving into one of the great literature classics. My mind tingled as I continued. Then I hit the second sentence: SNOOOOOOZZZZZZEEEEEE!
Uh oh.

The text wasn’t exactly jumping out at me like a Grisham novel. I continued trying to plow my way through the dense prose. *What is everyone talking about here?!?* I guess this is why books like this are better read in school (with Cliff Notes close by). But I kept going for a while before napping, waking for lunch and then deciding to nap again.

Later that evening, Sara, Elaine, Mary Ellen and I, skipped going to the Food Court and the Provenca formal dining and went to the Bayou Café. This was a wonderful New Orleans themed restaurant that had live jazz music and singing. We had spicy Cajun food and then walked around the ship a bit.



Dining at the Bayou Cafe

Tomorrow was our first off ship day. We were docking in Skagway and then we would get off the ship to go out to Haines to the Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve, the largest Eagle Preserve in the country. (So you will get to read about more than just my sleeping and eating.)

QUICK FACTS: GLACIER BAY

Discovered by John Muir in 1879. Excellent viewing for humpback whales, harbor seals and bears. Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve is over 3.2 millions acres. Contains 16 active tidewater glaciers.

DAY 4—Skagway

We were up bright and early for breakfast and off to the ferry. For me, the entire vacation came down to this one event: seeing tons of bald eagles in the wild. The Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve is a 48,000 acre section of the Chilkat River Valley that was established as a protected nature reserve in 1982 for the thousands of bald eagles that nest here during the fall and feed on salmon during the winter. Even though it was the off season, I looked forward to seeing these majestic birds swooping through the sky. At \$172, per person (\$350 for the two of us) the excursion was a little pricey, but it



At the Chilkat Reserve

sure was going to be worth it!

We caught a small ferry from our port in Skagway and docked in Haines about ½ hour away. The Eagle Preserve was another ½ hour drive by bus from the Haines dock. Lo and behold, we had another waif bus driver! I swear she told us she got her license to drive a bus last week. Our waif got us to the preserve quite smoothly. We put on life jackets and soon were on the 20 person jet boats going deep into the heart of the preserve.

We glided gently along the wa-



An eagle’s nest

ters. There wasn’t another human anywhere outside of our group. We didn’t even see a plane fly overhead. It was just the sweet peace of nature. The air was crisp and clean. My Los Angeles lungs were probably confused

(Continued on page 6)

Day 4 Skagway—(Continued)

(Continued from page 5)

on how to handle all that fresh oxygen. Our guide gave us little quick facts on the wildlife, when suddenly a brown bear dashed across the water and came out on the shore. We just got a peek, but we were thrilled! As time went on, we saw families of moose everywhere. No doubt they were even more watchful for bears than we were. It was beautiful.

Hmmm. Haven't seen many eagles yet though...

Our guide told us that towards the end of the trek is where we would see several eagle's nests along the banks of the rivers. Sure enough, we hit a spot and there they were, massive constructions of twigs as high up in the trees as possible.

All of the nests were empty. We went to the last one before heading back. It was huge. An eagle's nest can be five to eight feet in diameter and two to ten feet in depth. Eagles mate for life and each year return to the same nest to hatch and raise their young. They continually add to and renovate the nest, so they can grow to extreme sizes. A nest that once tipped over its supporting tree, measured at over 2000 pounds! Just as our guide was going onto his next set of facts, a male eagle swooped in majestically and landed on a branch right across from the nest. It was picture perfect. He almost seemed to be posing for us as he looked over his kingdom. We watched him for several minutes before we coasted back to the camp site. It was a climactic pitch perfect ending.



Male bald eagle

We roasted hotdogs back at the camp site. I smiled as I ate. But something nawed at me: *Did I just pay \$350 to see **one** eagle?* Yes, I know it was the off season and having been on safari before, I know that the animals in the wild don't come out and pose for you on your cue... *but still...*

QUICK FACTS: SKAGWAY
Population: 750, with 300,000 visitors a year.
Founded on the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897 - 98

When we got back to the Princess, I saw my sisters and told them about our day. Elaine told me she saw three eagles circling in front of the boat while she has having lunch. With a smile she mentioned never having to pay a dime for that. *Grrrrrrr.*

I went to an aerobics class and did lunges until my thighs burned. My legs literally quivered as I walked back to my room. We had a relaxed dinner at Horizon's. As I made my way to a seat, an older couple said to me "*Hey, did you see those eagles off the side of the boat earlier?*"

Oh shut up!

Tomorrow would be an excursion that the whole group would go on. We were docking in Juneau, Alaska's capital city. We were going to see the Mendenhall Glacier and then go to a salmon bake.

The Formal Dinner



Mary Ellen and Me



Elaine and Sara being served by Constantin



My Parents



Mary Ellen's Parents

Day 5 Juneau

At around 6 AM on Wednesday May 19th, our boat docked in Juneau, Alaska's capital.

Mary Ellen and I got in an early morning workout and then a nice healthy breakfast.

By 10AM our entire group of nine was off to the Mendenhall Glacier. We are sitting in front of it on the cover. So what on earth is a glacier anyway? OK, here is a little geology:

A glacier is literally a river of ice and it is always in movement. They are fed by layers of compacted snow.

When less snow accumulates or melting increases, a glacier is retreating (shrinking). An advancing (or expanding) glacier can move anywhere from a few inches to 300 feet per day. As a glacier moves, the incredible friction from the sides and the bottom can carve valleys through mountains.



A waterfall by the salmon bake

About 5/6th of any visible iceberg is usually submerged. So imagine how much water there is up in all that Arctic Ice! By the time I finish this journal, the movie **The Day After Tomorrow** will have been out for a while. It is supposed to deal with the effects of global warming and polar ice caps, etc. I hear that the dialogue in this movie isn't as good as the dialogue in

the movie **Independence Day**. Now that is truly frightening...

I could 'go all Jacques Cousteau on you' and go on for pages and pages about the ocean, glaciers, sea life, etc, but for those interested I will let you go do your research. But I will leave with you with one more thought. *Why are icebergs blue?*

QUICK FACTS: MENDENHALL GLACIER

- The most visited glacier in Alaska.
- Has been retreating 25 to 30 feet per year since 1750.
- Over 1 1/2 miles wide and 12 miles long

Answer: Icebergs are blue because the compressed ice absorbs light's short wave colors (red) and reflects the long wave colors (blues).

QUICK FACTS: JUNEAU

- State Capital
- Population: 30,000
- Founded on the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897 - 98

After the glacier, we went to the Gastineau Salmon Hatchery and learned about salmon spawning. All this salmon talk of course made us hungry, so we went to the all-you-can-eat salmon bake. There is nothing like eating fresh salmon, grilled right in front of your eyes. It was cool having both of our families eating together and enjoying the trip.

Earlier that morning, I read that Libby Riddles, the first woman to win the Iditarod was going to be speaking on board our ship and presenting a slideshow. I was anxious to get back to see her. Four years earlier, I met her in McGrath when I went out to see the Iditarod. I knew she wouldn't remember me, but I wanted to see her again anyway. I wanted to proudly show her my Iditarod hat, almost like it was proof I was there.

We took the bus back to the ship. I was a few minutes late for the start of Libby's presentation. Mary Ellen was going to head back to the room, I turned to dash to the theater where Libby-- *Hey where is...* I checked my pockets. **The hat was gone!** I must have left it back at the salmon bake or on the bus. I went to the customer



A chunk of ice in front of the glacier

service deck on the ship and told them my dilemma. They said they would call the bus driver and the people at the salmon bake, to see if it turned up.

I was crushed. It was so ironic. For four years I've managed to keep that hat and worn it many places. Now I manage to lose it back in Alaska, rushing to meet someone who I first met when wearing the hat! Yes, I know life has bigger ironies, but this is what I've got, so bear with me. There was something almost poetic about it. Like the salmon returning up stream to die, my hat came back to... **oh who am I kidding**, I was just careless.

I caught the rest of Libby Riddle's slideshow and shook her hand afterwards. I didn't bother to tell her about my hat fiasco.

For dinner we went back to the Provenca and it was lobster night! Constantin regaled us with more tricks. Several times dinner was interrupted by the sight of another whale off the side of the ship. To top it off somehow a couple of bottles of wine and Pisco sours from Chile managed to sneak their way to our table! ☺ ☺

Finally, there was the parade of the baked Alaskas. You just had to see it. I won't explain. Tomorrow was going to be a simple day. We would get off the ship at the Ketchikan port and walk around.

(Continued on page 8)

Day 5 (Continued) Juneau

(Continued from page 7)

Before the ship left Juneau, I checked with the hospitality desk to see if the hat had turned up. There was no sign of it. Back in my room I stood on the deck and looked out over the port of Juneau. "Goodbye Frederick, thou hast served me well." At least I think that hat was a Frederick...



Libby Riddles talking about the Iditarod



A baked Alaska



Lobster anyone?

Day 6 Ketchikan

The next morning, we docked in Ketchikan. Today was a leisurely day. "Wait, aren't they all leisurely days?" you ask. Well, today we weren't going on one of the excursions, Gary, Martha, Mary Ellen and I were just going to get off the boat and walk around the port and do the shopping thing.

My parents and sisters went to an excursion that took them around Ketchikan by boat.


We caught the lifeboat out to the port of Ketchikan and walked around. We did the standard tourist shopping, picking up t-shirts, mugs and other knick-knacks and then headed back.

I napped and then sat in the hot tub for a while. What a wonderful peaceful feeling. The vacation was winding down. I hacked my way through another couple pages in "A Tale of Two Cities". I was going to be enlightened even if it killed me!

I ate an early "pre-dinner" at Horizon, just to get myself warmed up for the 8 PM formal dinner a bit later. ☺ As I sat at Horizon's overlooking the beautiful water, I saw three eagles circling around. For free. Grrrrrr...

Let it go Wayne...

Everyone was dressed immaculately at the formal dinner. Lots of people had on tuxes. Afterwards, we



Constantin's Trick:

Moving only 2 toothpicks, get the olive out of the martini glass and keep it shaped like a martini glass!

Solution at: www.waynehazle.com/alaska/puzzle/

QUICK FACTS: KETCHIKAN

Population: 14,000.

"The salmon capital of the world." (according to them)

A notorious town of drinking & other vices in the early 1900s.

took lots of formal photos and walked around the ship. The ship rocked back and forth, as it got into choppy waters.

Tomorrow would be spent entirely at sea and then Friday we would dock in Vancouver and catch our flight home.



At the port of Ketchikan



Pretty cool lifeboats



A seaplane lands in front of our ship

Day 7—The Voyage Home

I woke up in the middle of the night the boat was swaying back and forth pretty heavily. It's funny but I never thought even for a moment there was danger. I downed more motion sickness pills and went back to sleep.

In the morning, we got up and went on a tour of the kitchen. It was incredible! The kitchen areas are huge, which of course they HAVE to be to serve non-stop food 24 hours a day.

For the rest of the day we casually perused and enjoyed the ship's amenities, more sitting on the deck, more hot tubbing, and more working out, using the computer lab to check email, reading in the library, sitting at

various lounges listening to music and watching people go by. We saw a presentation on Vancouver and caught a movie.

We needed to have our bags that we were going to check on the plane, packed and outside our door at 8PM, meaning that whatever clothes we wore tonight at dinner were the clothes we were going to wear tomorrow for our flight home... not including a few... well, you figure that out. (And yes, I know that we could keep a whole outfit in our carry-ons, blah blah, but we wanted to carry as little as possible onto the plane.)

So by 7:45 we had our big bags packed and outside our rooms, keeping only the minimal essentials for tomorrow. I just had to make sure I ate carefully, so I didn't get a big

gravy stain on my shirt.



With Constantin after dinner

The final dinner was again wonderful. I won't even go on with listing the menu for you, except at the end I remember getting some sort've mousse. As I sat there licking my spoon, I looked around

at our table. A satisfied feeling came over me. This was a good vacation and it wasn't because of anything great that happened. It was because we were there with family. That is what this trip was about, not glaciers, water, seafood or eagles.

For some time Mary Ellen and I had talked about taking a trip with our parents. It was one of those things, "Yeah we should..." Then in December, Mary Ellen's biological father in New

Jersey died, barely 60 years old. We never got the chance to make the relationship what it could have been. We kept putting things off. "One day I'll have to write him..." **Life is what happens while you're making plans.**

So once things settled, early in 2004, we made plans for this trip, a triple anniversary celebration. We didn't want to be sitting around years later saying to ourselves "Hey, I wish we had taken that trip before..."

I sat at the table, scraping every last bit of mousse out of that dish. I looked at my family. My sister Elain had just hit the big 3-0 (*yes Elain, I know you're reading this*) yet, I remember the day she came home from the hospital. Sara, the last Hazle bundle of joy, was finishing up her sophomore year at Spelman College

and would be interning at NASA for the summer. For some strange reason she was very very anxious to turn 21! And there were my parents, enjoying the golden years of their lives. When you're a kid, you think they're immortal, and then you grow older and wiser and find out that isn't the case.

How much more time would we have for moments like these? **How much more time would we have for anything?** Life is so fleeting and unpredictable. You make your plans and set your goals and but then... a random criminal act, a sudden swerve in traffic, a freak incident and of course illnesses whether sudden or long-standing. We never know when we may get that horrific phone call from family that we dread or when we may be the *subject* of said call. **Don't keep putting that time with family off.**

I never had a soundtrack in my head for this trip (need to see last journal if you have no idea what I am talking about), but as I type this I am listening to Norah Jones "Come Away With Me" and it seems to fit.

I could meander on with the rest of the details of the next 24 hours, but all that really mattered was right there with me at that moment.

Hey, someone just saw a whale and an eagle off the side off the boat! *Gotta go...*



Docked in Vancouver

The Hazle Journal 2000—*"The Phantom Journal"*

The Iditarod: *"The Last Great Race"*

I don't remember how old I was when I first read Jack London's "Call of the Wild", but ever since reading this great saga, I have been entranced by the thoughts of the snowy frontiers, rugged men, sled dogs and wolves. Though the nuances of the plot have long left my mind, the exhilarating thoughts of man and nature working together and violently at odds stayed in the recesses of my mind for years. Every once in a while, one word would summon those thoughts forth: **Iditarod**. I knew so little about it, except that it was the dog sled race that ran hundreds of miles across Alaska.

I always thought that it would be awesome to be "The First Black Man to Win the Iditarod" (T.F.B.M.T.W.T.I.). I wasn't 100% positive that no Black man had already won it, but come on, I was 99% sure no Black man had even *entered* it. *I mean it's cold up there!*

So there I was, the summer of 1999, the Y2K bug was going to cause 'the end of the world as we know it' (T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I.). I was sitting in my office at AOL and the wild started calling me. I entered the word "Iditarod" in my Internet search engine. I hit the website for **Iditarod Tours** by Rich Montagna, a professional photographer who took people to see the race. I also read up on the history of the race.

The Iditarod is a dog sled race that runs from Anchorage, Alaska to Nome, a distance of over 1150 miles (!) through the undeveloped icy wilds of Alaska. It commemorates the time in 1925, when a diphtheria epidemic had broken out in Nome. The only way to get the life saving serum to this outpost was via the courageous dog mushers and the strong-hearted dogs. At that time, mail and other supplies were also sent across the



Me in Anchorage

frontier via dog sled. Joel Redding Sr. started the official race in 1973 to commemorate Alaska's rugged past **and** present. I also discovered that since the race itself was quite dangerous, you had to race two shorter qualifying dog sled races before they let you in the Iditarod. I

thought maybe before I became T.F.B.M.T.W.T.I. I should go and *watch* the race first, just to see.

So, I signed up for the trip. In the worst case if Y2K caused T.E.O.T.W.A.W.K.I. I wouldn't have to pay the bill.

Cut to December 31st 1999: Y2K comes without a hitch. So I guess in February 2000, I would be leaving for Anchorage.

The month before leaving, I did something I had put off for at least five years, I bought a real SLR camera, a Nikon N70. I loaded up my film and other camera equipment, I also had tons of winter gear including some heavy weight thermals. Someone had advised me to buy a snowsuit. But I figured my heavy thermals, with my jeans would be enough. Why spend \$200 on a snow suit? *I'm sure everything will be just fine...*

The flight to Anchorage was breathtaking, like it would be four years later.

There were going to be two starts to the race. One would be on Saturday in Anchorage, for the press and for fans. Then the mushers would ride the dogs down the street, out of town for a mile or so and then pack the dogs back onto a truck for the next day. Then on Sunday, the race really started in a town called Wasilla about thirty miles out-



My favorite picture from the whole trip! A random father playing with his son.

side of Anchorage.

I checked in and met my roommate Herb. The next day was a free day and we wandered around downtown Anchorage.

The next morning, we met up with the rest of

our group. Rich got us press passes, so we were going to be able to go behind the lines and get up close to the racers and the dogs. We wrapped up tight in our multiple layers of clothing. Then we readied our cameras and headed outside.



A musher and his team heads out of Anchorage

Hundreds of dogs were up and down 4th St. It was a dog lover's paradise! We got to meet mushers and see them ready their sleds.

The start of the race was an exhilarating, albeit dragged out process. There wasn't space to let 80 sled teams just take off and start running. Every two minutes a team came up to the starting gate and took off. Each musher got thunderous ovations from the crowds. I guess they figure if you're crazy enough to try this race, you deserve an ovation. I felt like a photographer for ESPN laying in the snow close to the road getting great shots and... **freezing my &^%\$ off!** My jeans and my thermals were damp and now freezing to my body! Aaaaah, denim jeans aren't waterproof... *like snowsuits*. I was in trouble. I ran back to the hotel to dry off and thaw out my nether regions. Herb was there and in one of the great

(Continued on page 11)

The Iditarod: "The Last Great Race" (Continued)

(Continued from page 10)

acts of kindness in my life, offered me his second snowsuit. If it wasn't for this, I might have been heading home that day, or to intensive care.

The next morning Rich drove us out to Wasilla to see the official start of the race.

Wasilla was much colder. We were definitely on the edge of the wild. Rich wasn't your hand holding type tour guide. His attitude was, "I got you a press pass. So go be a reporter and find some news." I wandered among the crowd, snapping pictures at will. The dogs were itching to go! The excitement was a thousand times stronger because this time it was for real. When these teams left, they would not see civilization again for 10 - 17 days.

Just to give note to all you dog lovers out there who might be screaming "Animal brutality!" All people involved with the Iditarod are dog lovers too. The dogs are taken better care of than the people. Every fifty miles along the race there are check points with veterinarians. They check every dog from every team and they have total authority to pull any dog out of the race. A musher starts with 16 dogs and must have 12 to continue. When a musher arrives at a checkpoint, he feeds and checks all his dogs first, before taking care of himself.

For the second part of our adventure, we flew out to the 'town' of McGrath. Now this was Alaska! There are no roads leading to McGrath. The only way there is by a tiny commuter plane or by sled dog. McGrath was about the 8th checkpoint on the list so in two days or so, the mushers would start coming through. It could be any time, even the middle of the night. We were there to offer help if needed, otherwise stay out of the way. The Hotel McGrath was a cozy bed & breakfast that would be our

home for the next 4 days.

Outside of this, there wasn't a ton to do in McGrath, which suited us just fine. We rode snowmobiles and had a picnic in the snow, out in the middle of the wilderness. Two nights later, about 1 AM, the call rang through the Hotel, "A Musher just came in!" We got dressed and ran out into the night and looked in hushed reverence. The musher laid out hay for the dogs to rest on, then he put together each of their meals. While the pageantry of the race start was great, I thought, "This was the Iditarod, a rugged determined man, out in the wilds, facing down nature ... GREAT GOD ALMIGHTY IT IS FREEZING OUT HERE!" Well, looked round, I sure didn't see no other 'Brothas' up here. That might be all the record setting I would do for now.

For a few more days we watched mushers come into McGrath, night and daytime. Rich had a friend in McGrath who owned his own sled dogs, for his personal use. Towards the end of the week we got the chance to do what we all had been dreaming of. We went out onto a huge frozen lake and took turns mushing.

Right before taking off, the dog owner told us that if we ran across a moose, the dogs would go after it and the moose would start slashing with its antlers, killing dogs and perhaps me. So he showed me the gun in the sled and told me to be prepared to shoot, in the unlikely chance we ran across one. Well, I wanted rugged...

The pulling power of 16 sled dogs is tremendous. It was like hanging on to a pickup truck. I am not sure words can capture the thrill of fulfilling this



A doctor checks out a dog in McGrath

dream. Words probably also can't capture feeling a cold so strong that it's like six inches needles are being driven through every part of your body!

On the final day of our trip, another musher came in late in the afternoon. She was a young woman about 19 years old, racing her first Iditarod. She was hopelessly behind the others; she wouldn't win even if they attached a motor to her sled. But you've never seen a bigger smile on someone's face. She checked her dogs, fed them and didn't even stop to take care of herself. As I watched her and her dogs head off into the sunset, my "Call of the Wild" was satisfied.

Then, I went inside and had some coffee and watched TV... where it was warm.



The checkpoint in McGrath



Meeting Libby Riddles the first time



A dog at rest in McGrath

The Hazle Journal

Jaguar Films

1317 N San Fernando Blvd. #326
Burbank, CA 91504

Phone: 818-247-0744

Fax: 818-247-0241

Email: waynehazle5@aol.com

To the most distant
corners of the earth!



<http://www.jaguarfilms.com>

<http://www.waynehazle.com/travel/>

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The color, electronic version of The Journal will be kept at site of my Alaska pictures:

<http://www.waynehazle.com/alaska/>

It requires Adobe Acrobat™ Page Reader to open.

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Epilogue

We all made it back to our respective homes in one piece, though my parents' and sisters' bags took an extra day to make it home.

Mary Ellen's grandmother is home and doing pretty well. We all could only hope to be so tough at eighty-one.

Overall, I still wouldn't say I am a "cruise person" but I gotta' admit this trip was a success in almost every way. No matter what else life brought, we all spent this time together. That can never be



Overlooking the port in Vancouver

taken away.

I am still chugging along through "A Tale of Two Cities". I think it has something to do with these two cities...

I am putting a homing beacon in my fedora so it doesn't get lost on our next trip. Speaking of which, what's next? Well if all goes well the next Hazle Journal will be the greatest of them all: **Africa!**

Until then I will leave you with a little Nora Jones...

"Come Away with Me" Norah Jones 2002

Come away with me in the night

Come away with me

And I will write you a song

...

I want to walk with you

On a cloudy day

In fields where the yellow grass grows knee high

So won't you try to come

...

Come away with me in the night

Come away with me

And I will write you a song

...

And I want to wake up with the rain

Falling on a tin roof

While I'm safe there in your arms

So all I ask is for you

To come away with me in the night

Come away with me

