

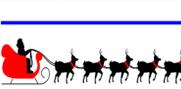
**Phoenix the Capitol of Arizona**

Well, we started out December with a bang!! Remember the storms early in the month that moved east with rain snow and ice? Well, Arizona got a year's worth of rain, about 5 inches half way through the month. That was the first time I ever saw it rain more than 5 drops at a time in AZ! This was a month just chock full of happenings. December was a continuation of last month as far as socializing with our 400 Family and our bio family members. It was also the site of our Christmas and New Year's Gathering. Rather than highlighting too much here, I will begin telling you what we did.

**Just Hanging Out Together!**

Besides trying to keep dry the first part of December, we got an occasion phone call announcing a spontaneous 4 o'clock or we responded to someone's idea for an activity. Right at the beginning of December, we all met at Ironwood RV Park for a social hour and to help Paul celebrate his birthday. On another day we all got together to celebrate the SUN coming out and the Eisslers joined us by driving up from Casa Grande. As the month progressed and the late afternoons became cooler, the 4 o'clocks became 3:30 o'clocks! Then Barbara remembered Ray's addiction to decorating for Christmas and was happy to accommodate him by inviting us all over to watch him decorate her house! Afterwards we all went to the Old Country Buffet for dinner. He had a blast!! Barbara warned us not to even think about leaving town before the 'undecorating party' takes place! There was no doubt in my mind that Bob & I were going to see a local theater production of 'A Christmas Carol', my favorite Christmas Story besides the 'Nativity'. When I asked our friends, three other couples wanted to go also. I had never seen a theater production of this story and the Hale Theatre, where it was being presented, is the oldest continuously operating private theater in the country. It was a theatre in the round which we had never experienced also. What a great show! It was fabulous and the theatre in the round made the audience really feel like we were involved. Bob & I liked it so much we plan on seeing different show when we come back in January. To the right on this page is a summary of our tour of the Capitol in downtown Phoenix in the company of Shirley & Buddy Barbie. Paul & Angie along with Barbara & David volunteered to host the Christmas Gathering here in Mesa. About 15 couples attended and started to arrive on the 21st. I decided I wanted a ceramic Christmas tree but could not find one as they went out of style about 10 years ago. Ray & Karen found one for me. We found some new lights at a local craft store and it is as good as new. It fits just right on the steering wheel cover. I think it is evident that we have had a nice time hanging out with our friends over the holidays

On 12/07 Buddy & Shirley and Bob & I had a very nice tour of the State Capitol and grounds in Phoenix. We didn't realize it until we got down there, that it was also the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Flagship, USS ARIZONA was sunk in that attack resulting in the death of 1,177 men. There were special programs both on the grounds and inside involving some of the survivors of that event along with the local news media. This was clearly one of the more interesting Capitols with a museum depicting a history of the area and the multitude of memorials inside and outside the building. They spanned history from the early pioneer days to more modern times. Through this they seem to try to demonstrate the multi cultural influence in the development of the state through its people. Arizona became the 48th state on February 14, 1912. This is one of the few States where the Territorial Capitol is in the same location as the later State Capitol. There is so much to talk about, I could probably fill this whole newsletter, but this is not practical. There are a couple of things I would like to include, however. There is the presence of the 'Merci Box Car' and then the memorial to 911. The original Capitol Building is primarily a museum which holds this treasure among others. This is a box car sent to the State of AZ as well as other states from the people of France thanking the American people for the food sent following the devastation of WWII. This was the first time we were able to view actual contents of one of these cars which included hand made items, family treasures and gifts from the heart. On the grounds there was a memorial to 911 which included a piece of one of the twin towers. Coming from NY, I appreciate the sense of unity and community this demonstrates. The State House and State Senate House were separate buildings to the left and right of the original Capitol. The grounds hold numerous memorials to various groups as well as the anchor belonging to the USS ARIZONA. Following our self guided tour, we all set out to satisfy our hunger and introduced Buddy & Shirley to SWEET TOMATOES, a wonderful soup and salad restaurant on our way home.



**Christmas in Mesa!!!**

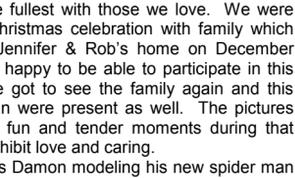
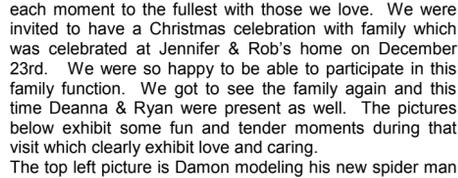
**Celebrating Christmas with Family in Arizona**

Our group started rolling in between the 20th and the 22nd. We early birds acted as the reception committee, sitting in our chairs along the curb watching incoming traffic. We talked the parking attendant into giving Ray a ticket for parking 'Rudolph' too close to the road. That was played out in the office where they pretended to give him a \$50 fine. He was a good sport! We also teased Barbara & David who live a few miles from the park, brought their Class C over to be with us and then went home most nights and slept in their house, because they didn't finish packing the camper! After everyone got in, all 30 of us went to dinner at the Old Country Buffet. On Sunday, Bob & I went to a family dinner, while the rest of the group went on a tour of a Greek Orthodox Monastery. We will take time to go there sometime in January. On Christmas Eve, we got together in one of the park recreation rooms, had hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, drinks and good company. For our gift exchange this year, each gift was put in a brown paper bag, we all sat around in a circle, and passed the bags according to directions read by Carolyn Eissler. Carolyn read a story and each time she used the word left or right, we had to pass the bag accordingly. There was much laughter, crinkling of paper and at times confusion. Believe it or not at the end I ended up with my own gift, peppermint bark! Buddy exchanged with me afterwards for a music CD. The rest of the evening was spent socializing and singing Christmas Carols with Karen playing the piano. Christmas Day we had dinner in the Resort with about 700 other people. The resort provided the turkey and gravy and every group of 36 people had a table where we all brought a dish to share. It was such an efficient operation, all tables were served in about 20 minutes and everyone was eating. The rest of the week was filled with short trips, 'stuffing our faces', playing games and just socializing. Christmas Day morning, we all stood in front of Ray & Karen's coach, and called the East Coast Group who were celebrating Christmas in Florida, and sang to them via speaker phone. We think we had more fun!

Christmas brings many emotions to the surface in each of us, some are happy and some are sad. It brings to mind those who we have loved and lost and reminds us to give thanks for the many blessings we have and to treasure each moment to the fullest with those we love. We were invited to have a Christmas celebration with family which was celebrated at Jennifer & Rob's home on December 23rd. We were so happy to be able to participate in this family function. We got to see the family again and this time Deanna & Ryan were present as well. The pictures below exhibit some fun and tender moments during that visit which clearly exhibit love and caring. The top left picture is Damon modeling his new spider man costume. On the right is the family sitting down to dinner. After dinner, some gifts were opened, especially by the children. More than anything else, family members enjoyed each other. All three children love to read and in this picture Aunt Deanna takes a turn reading 'The Story of Christmas, with everyone sitting around. Deanna is a very caring Aunt and is an important person to Ashley, who is fast becoming quite a young lady in her own right. In this picture, she is enjoying that relationship. Last but not least is a picture of Kacee in her new outfit she got for Christmas and she is absolutely adorable in it. Then there is the mother of these three beautiful children, Jennifer. The picture at the bottom is one of those tender moments caught by the camera. A picture of motherly love, peace and unity. This is what Christmas is all about.



**Merry Christmas!**



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