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P. O. Box 4312
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Christmas 1976

Dear Friends:

In a nutshell, 1976 consisted of visits and visiting, and, oh yes, our household acquired a BIRD during the course of the year. Also, a few people passed away, but this is no place for a report on that.

It's funny how something that happened twenty-five years ago could cause a person to take a week of vacation in April 1976, but that was my experience. What happened in 1951 or so was that a scientist named Grote Reber, whose specialty was radio astronomy, was looking for a mountaintop to pursue his studies and I happened to have custody of one, namely, Kolekole Peak at the top of Haleakala, Maui; and we have been in contact with each other ever since, and long after he completed his use of Kolekole.

He wrote in December that he would be coming to Hawaii for his first visit in many years, probably sometime in April, and as the time drew near, the date and purpose of his visit became more definite, and these were that he had been invited to go the University of Hawaii's observatory at the top of Mauna Kea on the Island of Hawaii and wanted to know if I would like to go along; and he would be giving a lecture on the endless, boundless, stable universe at the Department of Astronomy at the University in Honolulu, which I was welcome to attend.

Since the Mauna Kea visit afforded an opportunity to examine the premises under red carpet circumstances I readily accepted and arranged for a week of vacation in order to have the leisure to go and come back as his desires dictated. Our companion for this venture was Gordon Stagner, a retired engineer from RCA, who was happy to have an opportunity to display and wear the fur cap that had been given him by the People's Republic of China when he helped set up communications there for President Nixon's visit in 1972.

Fur caps in Hawaii? You bet. Mauna Kea observatory is at an elevation of nearly 14,000 feet and at that time of year snow is all around, and with a brisk wind blowing, it's cold. I had no fur cap but used a woollen scarf my stepmother had handed to me in France one day in 1939 saying "Hang on to it; I'll write who to give it to."

Did she ever say? No. And for more warmth I wore two pair of flannel pajamas as underwear, double full length stockings, and a sweater and jacket over my shirt. I had been to Haleakala, 10,000 feet elevation, with ice lying about, a month previously when I accompanied two house-guests, Fred Wanamaker and Tom Mabie, on a visit to Maui, where we sat on the warm hood of the car between picture-taking; and I determined that this should be unnecessary at Mauna Kea.

Making the Mauna Kea trip had a double purpose for me. Mr. Leo Lycurgus, a director of our company, was retiring after many years of service, and the Board of Directors had honored him by adopting a resolution which had been placed on parchment, hand-signed in india ink by each director, and placed in a frame. How to deliver it to Hilo without damage? Charles provided the answer: Hand carry it.

In return, Leo took all of us to dinner after an appropriate round of cocktails at his home, and at the restaurant he had chosen we found ourselves confronted by a man who came over from another table and said he had overheard our conversation and wished to identify himself as the superintendent of the observatory and our driver for the ride up the mountain the following morning.

This coincidence had hardly been absorbed when another man came over and announced that he and Gordon had been fellow prisoners of the Japanese at Santo Tomas prison in Manila during World War II. Leo appeared stunned by all this attention being given his guests. A jolly time was had by all, and we were grateful for his choice of place to eat.

Back at Honolulu Gordon and Charles disgraced themselves by dozing while Grote gave a learned discourse on why he did not believe in the "red shift" theory of an expanding universe. It was, after all, reassuring to know that we were not hurtling through space at unprecedented speed, to an uncertain doom; dozing seemed to be in order.

After the discussion period I commented to Dr. Jeffries' lady assistant that students today surely learn their lessons well, judging by the penetrating questions asked by a bearded young man sitting next to me, who could hardly be more than 18 years old. She only laughed and said I was giving away my age; the young man was not 18, he was 31, and he wasn't a student, he was one of the professors in the astronomy department.

Grote had to hurry on to Tasmania for more radio astronomy studies but would be back in October and at that time would like to try the hydrofoil and hoped to inspect the University's observatory at the top of Haleakala. Perhaps he did; alas, I was on vacation in California and was unable to share his inspection trip.

Considering that 1976 was another of those years when I vowed on January 1 that this shameless squandering of funds on mainland trips must come to a screeching halt, it is amazing that I managed to visit Los Angeles for at least a few days in each of September, October and November, and San Francisco likewise in October and November, with an eleven-day cruise from Los Angeles to Acapulco and back on the M. V. Pacific Princess squeezed in between two of the first Los Angeles visits.

This is what comes of having friends who are officers in the merchant marine (Lloyd R. Haugh and Gerard Hasselbach), not to mention two mutual friends, known professionally as "The Gentry Brothers", who were among the entertainers on the Pacific Princess. The combination of all this resulted in a somewhat short-notice decision to head for L. A. on September 18 for the September 20 departure for various Mexican ports: Puerto Vallarte, Manzanillo, Acapulco, Mazatlan and hopefully Cabo San Lucas, returning to Los Angeles October 1.

First of all, vaccination. Better find out if it's needed, said a doctor. Local Department of Health, after much shifting from one person to the next, said yes. Then came the certification by another section of the same department. Heavens, no. Nobody has needed a vaccination to get back from Mexico for years. But they certified it anyway. And it "took", as everyone who went swimming with me observed -- first time since 1922. Next, passport. Not really required, but a good thing to have; it serves as proof of U. S. citizenship, helps avoid a Mexican restaurant tax, and facilitates the return through U. S. immigration.

All the Mexican ports visited were just great, perhaps Puerto Vallarte the best. Our acquaintance with the Gentrys opened up an avenue of young friends from the ship's company who were perfectly delightful people, several of whom accompanied us ashore when their work hours permitted. We have nothing but happy memories of an ideal cruise, sorry only that an approaching hurricane meant cancellation of the planned stop at Cabo San Lucas. We were joined everywhere by an employee of Princess Cruises on a postman's holiday, Jeannie Applegate, who decided to come on the trip just a half hour before sailing time, and was the sixth person at our jolly table in the dining room. She was a fine addition to our happy group.

So what goes on in Honolulu? For one thing, our household acquired a macaw, a large parrot-like bird. It was purchased as a decoration for a new restaurant but never used there owing to complications brought about by lack of caging and ventilation. So the bird sits on a perch in our living room without benefit of cage and periodically swoops through the room, landing no one knows where but sometimes on a guest, and most often on the dining room table, sweeping silverware, glassware, plates and flowers out of its path, looking silly while it's trying to put on the brakes. Very funny the first time, but the humor wears thin after many occurrences. So far there has not been an encounter between the cat and the bird; if fur and feathers should fly some day, my bet is on the bird to win out. Anyone want to buy a bird? The price is at cost, namely, \$950, and we'll throw in the perch free, plus a supply of Georgia peanuts.

After this lengthy recitation one might conclude that I had a dandy year. I did.

Aloha, and a Merry Christmas to all,

Charles Penhallow
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Honolulu