

**Liz & Jeff's Alaska Trip Report** is brought to you by Liz (who is writing the text) and Jeff (who is putting in the pictures) Copeland of 3243 165th Ave. SE, Bellevue WA 98008. Being done July 27, 2001 for SFPA 222.

Some general comments: we had planned to alternate busy days with relaxed days. This allowed all of us to not feel too rushed and gave Bill, who has now been diagnosed with cancer on top of the Parkinson's, a chance to rest if needed. For the most part, it did work out that way and was needed. Second, Alaska is huge. We saw only a little bit of the state.

### **Monday, July 9**

Our flight from Seattle left a bit after 7 pm so we arrived in Anchorage at 10 pm, local time. It was still quite light out. The Anchorage airport has 2 terminals connected by a shuttle bus and of course, our flight arrived at one and the rental car offices were in the other. So we followed our stewardess' directions and went toward the baggage claim area and turned right at the polar bear. A dead, stuffed one in a glass display case, but a polar bear nonetheless. This was not our first sighting of Alaskan wildlife, as Allie saw a fox out of the airplane window trotting along the runway, but it was still an impressive sight. I would not mention the tedium of getting a rental car except that I want to say that Alamo lied to me when I made the reservations and asked about the total cost and they tacked on additional fees and surcharges that raised the total almost 25%. The only good thing about the rental was that they had switched from 7 person vans to 8 person ones with extra luggage space so I no longer had to worry about how to fit in 4 adults, 2 children, a wheelchair, 6 rolling suitcases, 3 carryon bags and 3 backpacks. (Sorry, no partridges in pear trees allowed.) We finally got the car rented (did I mention the long slow lines at the Alamo counter?) in time to meet my mom and Bill, my stepfather, at their gate. Everybody was into the car and to the hotel, Duke's 8<sup>th</sup>, and the luggage into the room by about 1 am. I made a quick run to the local Safeway (okay, they're called Carr's in Alaska) for breakfast food and it still wasn't dark outside. It was an odd sort of twilight, being fairly bright to the north and much darker to the south.

### **Tuesday, July 10**

Some of us woke up earlier than others so it took from 7:30 to 11 am for everyone to have breakfast. Mom and I made up a grocery list, assuming we would eat out on the days we had daytrips out of Anchorage, and we also took note of everything that we had forgotten to pack, a fortunately very short list. Oh, okay, it consisted of bungee cords, and my jacket, and JJ's jacket and we ended up not needing the bungee cords because of the car upgrade. So, we went grocery shopping. Besides doing what came to be the daily run to Carr's, we used this handy dandy map given to us by the hotel and went to the Alaska Seafood and Sausage Processing store. In addition to processing fish for visiting fishermen, they also produce and sell salmon and halibut and reindeer sausage. We bought some smoked salmon (not lachs which you might know as lox) and some of the

reindeer hunters' sausage. The latter was extremely tasty and didn't last long. After a late lunch, we drove out east of town to the Alaskan Native Heritage Center.



The heritage center is a collaboration of the various tribal groups in Alaska. They have this 5-colored map of Alaska to show where the various groups live. While there was an informative little video, the big attractions were the tribal dancing and the display areas that showed the different native crafts. The dancing is done by a multi-tribal group and in the last dance, they invited members of the audience to join. Allie and I were invited and joined so Jeff took pictures of us both dancing. I was feeling camera shy so I kept my back to him. This didn't stop him from taking pictures of me anyway but I've threatened him with dire consequences if he includes them in this report.

The arts and history displays were fascinating. Just inside the entryway, there was a woman making birch baskets trimmed with spruce roots. We stopped to chat with her for a bit, and discovered that she has a daughter living in Washington just east of us. We wandered on and saw fascinating things: a water bottle made from a moose heart, tiny grass baskets so tightly and intricately woven that it takes 40 hours to make a thumb sized one, 2 guys in the back carving a canoe using power tools, a wonderful mask that Allie took a picture of but we don't have her film developed yet, beaded garments that are gorgeous. All interspersed with demonstration tables showing some of the items being made. It was a small but very good exhibit.

We were running late and didn't have time to go outside (in the rain) and see the villages around the grounds so instead we headed to the gift shop. (Turns out the gift shop is the exit from the Center. Our first instance of the tourist trap nature of Alaska.) I got 2 books on Indian art, mostly about masks, which I will be using in a second version of The Magician quilt, the obligatory pin to go on my blue denim travel bag which Guy will remember as the purse I carried almost 30 years ago, 2 stuffies for JJ: one wolf and one otter, and a gold dust key chain for JJ. Allie got a notecard of a watercolor of puffins with an Indian stylized outline of a puffin superimposed. I later discovered the stylized outline of a puffin is in the Tlingit style that is well known outside of Alaska, as they're the dominant tribe in the part of Alaska that all the cruise ships visit.

We went for dinner at Gwennie's Old Alaska Restaurant, which is a kitschy sort of family restaurant with a stuffed bear in the middle of a pond with a pink flamingo floatie at his feet. We had a stuffed beaver overlooking our table and he insisted on being in all the pictures. As this was my mom & Bill's anniversary, there were lots of pictures taken for the beaver to be in. Dinner was salmon for everyone but the kids and we discovered their



extensive pie menu. All samples of the pies tried were pronounced very good.

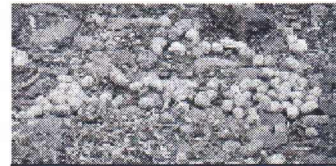


Anchorage, 8th St, eastbound, 1130pm

After dinner, it was still very light out and we headed to Kmart to do some shopping. We had a cruise scheduled soon and I knew that JJ and I would need jackets. I had called ahead to check the hours and it turns out that both Kmart and Wal-Mart are open until midnight. Alaska: Land of the midnight shopper. We found stuff for JJ easily at Kmart, but they didn't carry any large size women's jackets. So, we trotted across the street to Wal-Mart. They maybe carry large sizes during the winter, but not in July although they had women's jackets up to size L and all the men's sizes. I guess fat women don't get to go outside. I ended up buying men's jackets that fit okay but won't close in the front.

### Wednesday, July 11

This was the day we didn't see Denali. We had been scheduled to fly around Mt. McKinley and over Ruth Glacier but the weather had the plane socked in so we drove up to Talkeetna to get our refund. We did do some shopping in Talkeetna and bought jade earrings for allie & hematite ones for me. We managed to resist the gold painted moose nuggets. (I did get this mental image of two Alaskans sitting around one winter trying to decide how to get money from the tourists, and one of them said Shoot, it's not that hard, we could paint the moose shit gold and they'd even buy that. Hence the moose nuggets.)



Real moose turds

On the way back to Anchorage, we added one new haircutting place to Bill's ongoing list. Bill tries to never get his hair cut in the same place twice so he always gets a haircut when he's on vacation. We had passed a place with a big sign calling it the Best Little Hair House in Alaska so how could we resist? Both Bill and Jeff got haircuts and we had a nice chat with the woman who lived there. After a scenic but somewhat long drive back to Anchorage, we ended up trying to find someplace downtown to get dinner at 6:15pm. This was a big mistake. The restaurants that appealed to us the most were booked solid until after 8 so we ended up at Phyllis' salmon bake, which had a diner's appearance and prices similar to, say, Outback Steakhouse. The food was okay but the service was surly and the ambience was non-existent. After dinner, we understood why the place was half empty at 6:30. Definitely not recommended.

### Thursday July 12

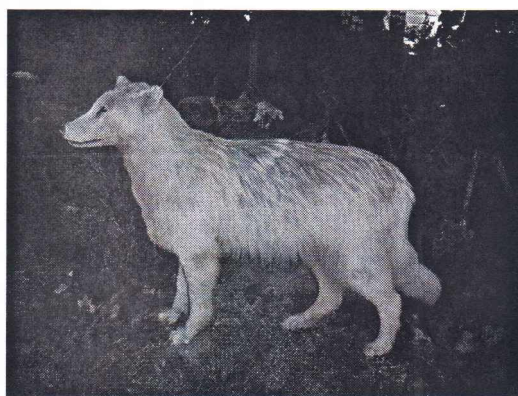
Our cruise out of Whittier into Prince Williams Sound was scheduled for Friday. The info sent by the cruise company had warnings about not missing the scheduled time to drive thru the tunnel so Jeff and I were curious. Naturally, when seeking information, we



went to the library. The Anchorage library is a large and impressive place. We took our place in the queue of chairs to wait for a free computer terminal as we had the webpage address for the tunnel. (I think all of Alaska has web pages. I suspect there's not much else to do when snowed in during the winter.) We got our info and found that we could get thru earlier than the cruise company specified. On the way out of the library, we admired the statue of William Henry Seward and got the 25 words-or-less scoop on him from the plaque. I had forgotten that Alaska had been called Seward's Folly. I'm sure the oil companies are quite happy that we bought it from the Russians all those years ago.

On the way back to the hotel, we bought some lachs and some more reindeer sausage. Having already gone thru most of one pound, I splurged and bought 3 pounds. This turned out to be almost enough sausage for the rest of our vacation.

We picked up the rest of the party at the hotel and walked over to the Wolf Song Museum. This is another in my continuing collection of small museums and it is well worth visiting. The museum is dedicated to wolves. There were pictures of wolves in the snow, wolves hunting caribou, wolves hunting musk oxen, and stuffed animals galore including musk ox, wolf, muskrat (also known as the devil bear) and arctic fox. We watched part of a video on a wolf pack that tracks a caribou herd across Canada and read information about the wolf re-introduction programs in Yellowstone and Idaho. The most interesting part was a board that had various pelts attached to it. Sea otter fur is fabulously soft and feels wonderful to stroke. This explains why the Russians almost hunted them to extinction before selling us Alaska. A very informative and interesting visit.



After a mid-afternoon snack in the hotel, we were off to the Alaska Zoo. This was somewhat disappointing. It's a small zoo with the animals mostly in cages that are small enough to cause them to pace continuously. I guess we've gotten spoiled by some of the wonderful zoos we've visited and have come to expect more natural habitats and much more room. The musk ox had more room than most of the animals, except for perhaps the moose, and Allie became quite enchanted with them even when they did this growly snort at us as we walked by. We did get to see a pair of yaks

named Elvis and Priscilla, a 2-hump camel that lives in cold climates, and a very nervous stellar jay in a cage next to a red-tailed hawk. The latter two were in the zoo to recover

from injuries. We bought some amusing paper maché ornaments in the gift shop to add to our eclectic ornament collection. We ended up closing the zoo and then going back to the hotel room to cook dinner. We had decided to eat in the room more often given our disappointing dinner expedition earlier.

After dinner, Jeff and I took the kids to Earthquake Park, which overlooks the part of the bay that used to be cliffside houses. For those of you who don't already know, Alaska had a 9.2 earthquake in 1964 that lowered part of Anchorage into the ocean. Seward and Valdez were also hard hit. Earthquake Park has a series of displays showing the before and after terrain at the park site and explaining the history of the quake. The views from what remains of the cliff are excellent and it was a very nice little outing.

### **Friday July 13**

Despite the date and the weather (cloudy with light to heavy drizzle), our tour was a huge success. We got up early to get to Whittier in plenty of time for the cruise. I expected us to leave by 8:30 which meant we would probably miss the 9:30 tunnel opening but be first in line for the essential 10:30 one. We left a bit early and got there about 9:20 so we had an hour to kill in Whittier instead of sitting in the car in the lines for the tunnel. The drive there was on Seward Hwy, which goes west along Turnagain Bay before heading south toward Seward. It's a scenic drive with mountains and water in all directions but we knew we'd driving this again later so we didn't stop at any of the turnouts to see the bay or take pictures. We might as well have, as there's very little to do in Whittier. As near as I can tell, Whittier exists for the purpose of providing a port for cruise ships & kayakers, and a shipping point for oil. There was one gift shop open with a square footage of less than 100 but selling very delicious fudge. We bought some fudge, wandered around trying to find coffee for Bill, and after buying coffee, we ended up going back and sitting in the car in front of the cruise ship waiting for the crew to let us on. Jeff and I had our Palms loaded with Hugo nominees, so I read *The Retrieval Artist* by K.K. Rusch. I liked it even though I think she didn't quite know how to end it.

Once we finally got on the cruise, we saw that the very nice lady at the check-in shack had given us excellent seating, one of the benefits of the wheelchair. We were the first tables inside the entrance, with ready access to the bathrooms, the deck on the bow of the ship and great views out our windows. If the ship had been at maximum capacity, it would have been very crowded, but we had only 85 out of a possible 140 people on board so it was quite comfortable. This was the Glacier Cruise but we did see a variety of



wildlife. There were eagles nesting in the Sitka spruce trees along the shore, a trio of sea otters accompanied our boat for a while trying to duck each other under the water, and Allie and I got windburn from staying on the bow during the transit time. As we entered the glacier area, we saw multiple small waterfalls due to the melting and runoff of the ice and snow pack on top of the mountains. The boat slowed down considerably as we neared the glacier, mostly due to all the floating



ice. The captain assured us that this was a good sign of probable calving activity at the glacier. Allie was not so sure about being merely another ice cube bobbing in a punch bowl. We also found out why glaciers are blue; the compression of the ice causes the glacier to be dense enough to absorb all light but the blue one instead of being mostly white like regular ice or snow. We ended up in front of one glacier where we sat for close to an hour so that we had enough time to see it calve several times. Allie had her camera pointing right at the glacier when it calved once so we are very hopeful that we might even have a picture of it. The difficulty in taking a picture of the calving is that the glacier doesn't make noise when the iceberg drops off. The iceberg makes noise when it hits the water. So, by the time you hear it, it's already too late. This was our first real experience of the immensity of Alaska. Towering mountains with glaciers were everywhere. (One cruise company advertised "See 29 glaciers in 1 day!") We all enjoyed the cruise quite a bit and were so happy with our cruise company that we looked forward to our next cruise with them out of Seward.



We managed to be at the head of the second rank of cars going back through the tunnel so we had a fairly quick trip back to Anchorage despite all the RVs who ignored the signs about pulling over if more than 5 vehicles were backed up behind them. (The RVs in Alaska tend to go about 10 miles below the speed limit and not be really good at staying in their lanes, either.) A late dinner of sausages, smoked salmon, crackers and cheeses finished off a very

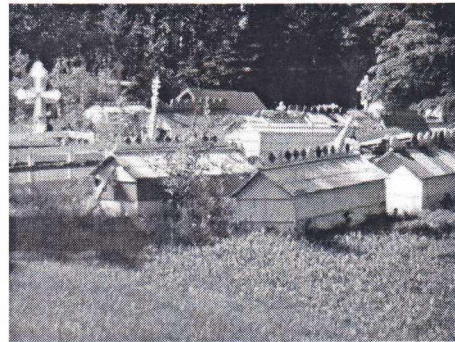
good day.

### **Saturday July 14**

Having bought lachs earlier, Jeff now wanted bagels and cream cheese so we went out on a bagel buying run. Unfortunately, not that many people from New York City move to Alaska so the bagels weren't quite up to Jeff's standards. JJ was very happy with them, though, because the chocolate chip bagels had the holes filled in with chocolate goo and we had bought one for him. The highpoint of our bagel search was hearing Click & Clack on the NPR station. One of their callers was a woman living above the Arctic Circle in Alaska who had an interesting question about using an ATV (All Terrain Vehicle) to train her sled dogs. See, the dogs need work during the summer, and in order to train them, you need something sorta heavy on wheels. But, you also need to be able to increase the resistance at will. So, the question for the car guys was whether to use the brakes exclusively or put the ATV in gear now and then when the dogs were pulling it. They voted for the brakes but suggested checking the warranty to see if sled dog pulling

while in gear would invalidate it. We thought this was just perfect: even Click & Clack were helping to make our Alaskan vacation a success.

After a leisurely brunch, we headed out for Eklutna, the oldest continuously inhabited native village around. The Russians converted the natives to the Russian Orthodox faith early on, and the villagers came up with an unusual way to combine their traditions with the new faith. Specifically, the villagers used to cremate their dead. The missionaries started them using a cemetery but their traditions didn't allow naming the dead so headstones were out. Instead, they built spirit houses that were small wooden houses to sit on top of the grave (after the 40 days of the spirit roaming around during which time only a blanket was on the grave to mark it). The spirit houses are painted in the clan colors except for the decorative spine ridges that are painted in individual colors to distinguish individuals within the clan. The houses are not maintained so the age of the grave can be told by how much the spirit house has fallen apart. This is still an inhabited village and the cemetery is in current use. Starting with graves in the late 70's, there are some headstones with names but only a few. The other buildings on the site include 2 prayer chapels with Russian icons on the walls, the original church building which is now unused except as display space for some of the icons and a 350 year old banner, and the new church which is also full of icons. The churches have the onion domes on top complete with some gilding. I found myself wishing I could get closer to the banner but I understand their need to preserve it from accidental damage.



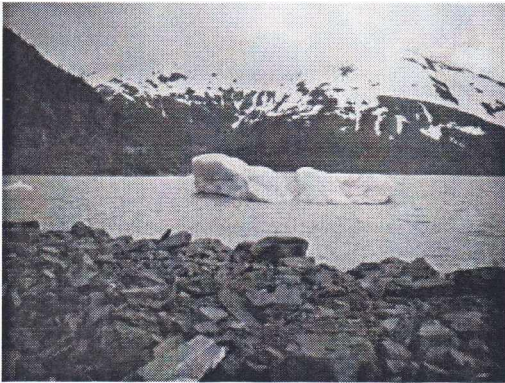
After dinner, Jeff and I took the kids out to Beluga Point on Turnagain Arm in a vain attempt to see beluga whales. We later read an article in the Anchorage paper about the beluga population in the bay declining from over 1300 to under 400 so it would actually have been quite an achievement to see them. Apparently, the native hunters are taking too many but local politics makes it difficult to just declare them an Endangered Species because then Anchorage would have to improve their sewage treatment facilities. Instead, they want the Fish & Game people to restrict the native hunting which is awkward for other reasons that I don't think I fully understood. However, we did see some mountain goats up on the hills behind us and with the benefit of the telescopes at Beluga Point, we could practically count the hairs on their heads.

### **Sunday July 15**

The hotel room in Anchorage was smaller than we had expected. (They lied when they said there was room for a rollaway bed in the living room. Only if we put the TV and the



coffee table out in the hall and didn't unfold the foldout couch.) And we had discovered that Anchorage is really just another city with not much in the way of midpriced restaurants in the downtown area. So, I called Wayne, our landlord in Seward, and got our arrival date there moved up. We packed up and left Anchorage by 11 am and drove along Turnagain Arm again. We again failed to see belugas at Beluga Point, but we had fun looking at the scenery, trying to figure out why there were all these dead trees along the highway, and scaring Jeff to death with my passing all the RVs whenever possible.



We had lunch in Girdwood, as a friend of Bill's had suggested it. We had funny directions that had us driving around the ski resort just a few miles up the road but we eventually found the restaurant and had a warm and tasty lunch. After lunch, we stopped at Portage Glacier, and saw some ice floes.

We got to Seward around 4 pm and then spent an hour trying to find a working pay telephone that wasn't in use by a teenager. (Wayne runs a

small, private operation and doesn't want to give out directions in advance. Also, he doesn't live on the property so we had to call him to find where we were going to stay.) We finally connected with Wayne, and unloaded the car and went off to have dinner at a nice restaurant on the waterfront. Chinooks is the local fine dining which meant they served wine and beer, had a view, and served better than average food at reasonable prices. We ate more salmon, and I had crab cakes, and we all splurged on dessert. It was after 8, but still quite light out, when we drove back up the hill to our apartment. As I approached the last corner before our parking lot, Allie started shrieking that I had to back up Right Now! Seems there was a mama moose and her calf eating in the shrubbery between our apartment and the road. It wasn't quite a big enough space to be a vacant lot, but it was more than just some bushes along the road. They were quite happy grazing while we ran quickly to get our cameras and took pictures from our bedroom windows and watched while the calf nursed. JJ wanted to pet them so I had to explain about wild animals and how momma moose don't like people approaching their young so he should stay on the other side of the pickup truck from them. The kids were thrilled. We later learned that moose make a 2-3 week circuit through their territory so if we hadn't come to Seward earlier than planned, we would never have seen them. Wayne was there to give us his running commentary on the moose, which was nice, but not so nice was the reason. He had put us in the wrong apartment so we had to switch apartments. Not a biggie except Mom and Bill had already unpacked. The rest of us, being lazy slugs, just had to wheel our suitcases next door. But after that little to-do, we were settled into a nice apartment with 3 bedrooms and a couch in the livingroom for JJ. Everyone had room and there were no midnight dances in the room upstairs. Sleep for all had been achieved.



## Monday July 16

One of the big things to see in Seward is the Sealife Center, paid for by Exxon as part of the reparations for the Exxon Valdez spill. The Sealife center is both an educational and research center, focused on what the normal life patterns are and how oil spills disrupt them. The center is at the end of downtown, on the Resurrection Bay waterfront. It's a smaller, more focused aquarium than Monterey Bay, but with a similar approach to its subject matter. We saw the local wildlife in captivity, including puffins that are



very playful and active, sea otters, especially a pair that liked to swim in tandem, and one lazy sea lion that didn't seem to move the whole time we were there. Allie and JJ had fun with the touching tank where they poked and touched various starfish and even a sea cucumber. But one of the nicest things for me was that the halls were decorated with various quilts donated mostly by visitors and depicting both sea life and Alaskan wildlife. One quilt that we admired and discussed for a bit was from Carol Doak's foundation pieced patterns that I have at home.

After a couple of hours at the Sealife center, a snack and some browsing in their gift shop, we moved on to the heart of Seward. 4<sup>th</sup> Street to be exact. Seward is a small town that has several very good restaurants and a boat harbor. The harbor is because Resurrection Bay is a fjord, carved out by glaciers, and hence very deep. And Seward is far enough south that the harbor doesn't freeze in the winter so it is a year round harbor. The restaurants are there because Anchorage people weekend in Seward. There are 4 streets from the waterfront up to the highway and only a few more above the highway where the mountain begins. Mountains in Alaska tend to be somewhat abrupt so the elevation goes up quickly from the highway. This was good for the people of Seward when the Big Quake hit. The quake ruptured oil tanks in the harbor and set them on fire so when the tsunamis hit, the town was inundated with burning water. The townsfolk had already moved to higher ground so there was little loss of life but significant property damage. Seward's other claim to fame is the creator of the state flag. [Ask Allie about this]

But I digress. We were on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, the heart of downtown Seward. Downtown is all of about 3 blocks along 4<sup>th</sup> so it didn't take us long to do our preliminary shopping. I had been looking for a hematite necklace to go with the earrings I bought in Talkeetna. The ones in Talkeetna were certainly priced well, but I didn't like the shape of the beads. The ones in Anchorage were more what I wanted but not at 10 times the cost of the Talkeetna ones. We found hand knotted hematite beads of the right length in the general store on 4<sup>th</sup> for only twice what the Talkeetna necklace cost. I was thrilled. The other item I was looking for was hand carved ivory done by a native artist. There were several stores in Seward that carried nice pieces but I found the one I liked best in a little store that sold Russian imports and native artwork. Allie was carefully cataloging what she liked from each store and its price so she could plan what to buy given the souvenir money we had

allotted for each child. JJ was madly buying golf balls with Alaska motifs on them. (He played 3-par golf with his uncles when we were in NY the week before going to Alaska and he was enthralled. It looks like I'll be taking up golf. And JJ is now creating killer golf courses on paper. Which David Schlosser could have heard all about at Westercon if not for his back. But I digress again.) After scoping out most of the stores along the street, we returned to the apartment for dinner and an evening of yahtzee.

## Tuesday July 17



JJ has a passion for wolves and what he calls “wolf dogs” or huskies so one of the must do items on our list was the Ididaride dog sled ride. We had a reservation for 11 a.m., which gave us ample time for a leisurely breakfast. They run 2 sleds simultaneously and each sled holds 6 people so we had a sled all to ourselves. Allie and JJ got to sit in the front where they could see the dogs and really enjoy the ride. But first we got to watch them hook the dogs up to the sled. Each sled has 12 dogs and they are all hooked to a center rope usually in pairs. One dog wanted to be on the other side of the central rope and had to be moved back 4 times. Another dog didn't want to be next to the dog he was hooked up with and was very noisy about it. The boys were kept hopping getting the dogs hooked up and keeping them from being too obnoxious. And the whole while the dogs were barking like mad because all 60 of the dogs in the yard wanted to pull the sled. Small digression: The family who owns the dog operation is on the third generation of Ididarod entries. The grandfather helped start the Ididarod race, the father has run in it for years and places in the top ten often, and the sons are just starting to be old enough to run as adult entries and are winning the Jr. Ididarod race. So, in addition to being pulled by the dogs and helping them in their summer training course, we got to talk to people who have lots of experience in running the Ididarod. After bouncing around in the dog sled, we came back to a tour of the kennel, a chance to cuddle some very cute puppies, and a small talk from one of the older boys about the equipment used and the hardships of the race, the worst being only a few hours of sleep each night for over a week of racing.

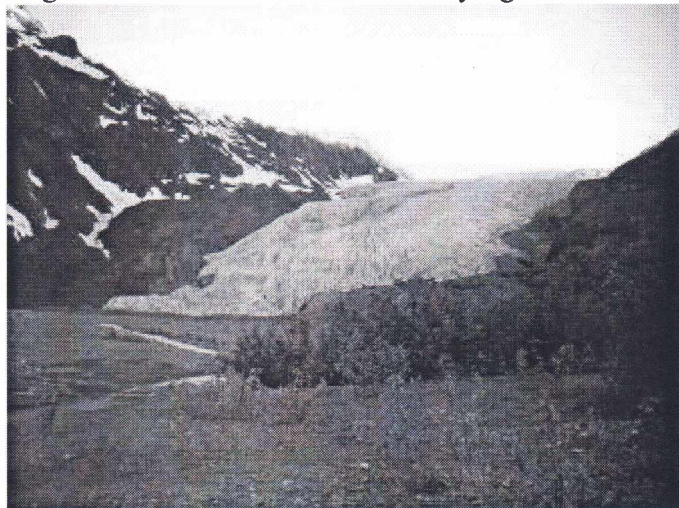
After a late lunch, Allie and I dragged Jeff back to 4<sup>th</sup> street to do some serious souvenir shopping. The carved ivory piece I wanted to buy was expensive enough that it required agreement between us on getting it. I had also picked out some smaller items in other stores and now had to decide what to get. I love little boxes of various shapes and sizes so I was thrilled to find a triangular box, made of birch and trimmed with layers of various woods cut into decorative shapes. It is a beautiful blend of shades of brown and the shape is different from most boxes. My second box is a black orca whale with a small cavity under his dorsal fin. Mostly a knick-knack instead of a real box but I liked it a lot anyway.



Then we hit the Russian and Native arts store. I had my eye on a diving whale figure that was really more modern in some ways than most of the carvings. Jeff initially preferred another whale so we had both out on the counter while we dithered a bit. We wandered over to check out the spoons from the Kremlin collection. We had tried to get a pair in silver for Jeff's parents last Christmas but the PBS catalog was out of them. Now we had our choice of several pairs but all in gold. We ended up getting that for this year's Christmas gift for them. After some other browsing we came back to the vexing whale question. The girl behind the counter had already started ringing up some of our purchases so we felt pressured to decide quickly. While we were trying to decide, she decided to enter the diving whale info into the cash register and when we told her we wanted the other whale, which cost more, she said she couldn't change it. It's the first time I've had a store clerk tell me I couldn't spend more money in her store. JJ ended up with several more golf balls and Allie bought a wooden mask that smiles one way and frowns the other, a yak stuffie, and some more earrings. Now, we were souvenir sated.

### **Wednesday July 18**

While watching the moose from the parking lot, Wayne had informed us that if we wanted to see bears, the best thing was to go very early to Exit Glacier Park. We got up at 6:30 and roused the children but let my mom and Bill sleep. We drove out to Exit Glacier Park, and walked the nature trail backwards from the normal route because there were other people out there. The trail was impassable by wheelchair but was otherwise interesting in showing the effects of the glacier on the terrain and the varying rates of plants covering the exposed soil after the glacier retreated. We finally got to the face of the glacier but we didn't have boots to wade thru the runoff so we could get right up close to it. The rangers have a rope about 10 feet from the face of the glacier to keep people from getting conked on the head by falling ice but we were only able to get within about 60 feet. It was still an impressive sight.



There was also a higher viewing spot from which we could see part of the icepack that covers most of the mountains in the Kenai peninsula to a depth of over a thousand feet. Getting up high enough to see it really well requires either a multi-hour hike with good hiking boots or hiring a helicopter. We decided to skip seeing the ice field that well. We saw no live bears but we did see evidence of their being there. Along with a nice big pile of moose nuggets. On the way back to the parking lot, we passed several signs giving the year that the glacier had reached that far. The glacier is actually still proceeding down the hill; the problem is that it's melting faster than it moves downhill so the face keeps receding. After that brisk walk, we decided to visit the local coffee shop where Allie was able to get a latté made with soymilk that temporarily

quenched her latté withdrawal symptoms. We returned to the apartment to find Mom and Bill up and moving and ready to go visit Exit Glacier. I had been up since 6:30 and had had problems sleeping before that so I took a nap and Jeff and the kids took Mom & Bill out to the glacier. Part of the path was paved so Bill was able to get a good look, although not as close as we had gone earlier. They came back with funny ranger stories and tales of the baby bear that had been seen on one of the trails a couple of days earlier.

All six of us went into town to drop off one roll of film to see if they were worth the exorbitant prices they were charging, stopped by the local thrift store on the way back to the apartment, and had an early dinner. After dinner we went to the Resurrect Art Coffee House & Gallery which turns out to be where the locals hang out. The art displayed was so-so and the advertised entertainment didn't appear so we went back to the apartment and played more yahtzee.

### Thursday July 19



Our second cruise, the wildlife cruise around Resurrection Bay, didn't start check-in until after 11 am, so we had a leisurely breakfast. (We'll ignore my 4:30 a.m. run for TP. Note to self: 6 people use more than 1 roll per day.) We were on a larger boat with lots of deck space but again the weather was overcast with

some drizzling. We also had a Kenai Fjords Park Ranger on the boat with us. She was great: informative, talkative and humorous. We stopped frequently to spot wildlife. Eagles were nesting ("Look for the white golf ball in the trees") and otters were frolicking. But when we stopped to look at the jellyfish in a cove, an eagle circled the boat, posing for pictures. There were puffin-nesting sites. Black legged kittiwakes galore. And the sea lion haul out rocks: dozens of sea lions lounging about on the rocks waiting for the sun to break through the clouds and warm them up. Then we headed out of the protection of the bay and had the joy of trying to stay on our feet in the bow of the boat while searching for whales. There were two humpbacks spotted by the captain, but we mostly saw just their spouts. After that, we headed across the mouth of the bay in enough of a rough sea to make lots of people on board afraid they would be sick. I'm afraid some of us were very happy to be heading back.

We ended this cruise wet and queasy so we went back to the apartment to clean up rather than heading straight for dinner. Allie and JJ wanted to plop in front of the TV, so we ordered Chinese food for them to be delivered and we headed out into the rainy evening in search of a nice dinner. The first place we went had over an hour waiting list so we went down to the docks again and tried Ray's Waterfront Restaurant. They had a bar to



wait in, so the adults plopped in the bar, ordered drinks and a couple of appetizers and settled in to be warm and happy. We got a table in the dining area before we were finished with the appetizers and had a nice view of the harbor while we ate. My mom was shocked when I ordered the Courvoisier XO from the drinks menu. Not at the booze, but the price: \$13. Okay, it was an indulgence, but hey, we were on vacation and had survived the mildly perturbed seas that day. Personally, I was celebrating having successfully planned and executed this vacation with very little in the way of problems.

### **Friday July 20**

We got up, packed up and were out of the apartment by 11 a.m. thinking we would have a quick run up to Anchorage and time to see a few of the smaller things that we had not gotten to earlier. Silly us. There was road construction. So we sat in a line, in the rain, for over 45 minutes, just a few miles north of Seward. We ate lunch in Girdwood again, this time in the bar because the dining room was closed. We got to Anchorage in mid-afternoon and immediately headed for the quilt store. It was a very nice store, with a wide selection of fabrics, but not any that I can't get elsewhere for less money. I did pick up 4 Alaskan patterns featuring the Alaskan equivalent of Sunbonnet Sue and her companion. I've already got an idea for making a lap quilt featuring photos from the trip and these blocks. After mailing back our excess stuff, which managed to fill an 18 x 15 x 9 box, we tried to find a café or deli that we could go to for a snack. We had made dinner reservations at one of the better restaurants that had caught our eye earlier but had been too busy to fit us in. Restaurant Orzo had us booked for 8:15 so we had plenty of time to kill. But there was nothing other than fast food equivalents available so we ended up at this park that runs 1 block wide and about 12 blocks long just south of 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. Lots of yahtzee was played, we snacked on our leftover cheese and crackers and Allie talked Jeff into returning to this retro shop we had visited earlier so she could check on a pair of over the elbow black gloves. She ended up buying the gloves and deciding to use one of the buttons she had picked out at the quilt store. Bill took a nap in the van while Mom and I played yahtzee and JJ played games on my Palm.

At about 7:20 we decided to go get a parking space and then see if the restaurant was ready for us. If not, there were shops in a small gallery behind the restaurants so we wouldn't be bored. The parking took much longer than getting seated at the restaurant. After we got the music turned down a bit, it was an extremely enjoyable meal: excellent food, good service and a wonderful end to a great vacation.





Children's chapel at Eklutna



Exit Glacier

Seals and a Kittiwake named Francis from the Sea Life Center

