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December 8, 1995

Dear Arne,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! Received your fax dated November 29, 1995 and were so excited to learn that you are truly alive and well. Also received a letter from Dad dated November 7 just recently so hopefully you'll receive this before next year! Dad mentioned that you have been mucho busy writing and publishing books as well as lecturing internationally. Is it possible that you could divert one of your travel trips to take in a visit with us? We'd love to see you and show off our leisurely life in the world of cruising through paradises. Our current plans are to remain here in Vava'u until April, then sail to Fiji via Tongatapu and the Haapai island group, cruise through Vanuatu and New Caladonia by late summer early fall, then winter (actually summer for us) next year in Australia during '96-'97 cyclone season. Dad wrote that Kristin and John are both honor students and that John wants to study engineering and Kristin will go on to graduate school in a health-related field. It would be wonderful for us if either Kristin or John would like to spend some time with us on Oso Bueno any time out here in the middle of the South Pacific or even crew with us during a passage and experience some real sailing. It is always the high point of the day for us yachties to hear word from home by fax or letter and it was especially nice Arne to know we were in your heart over Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving in Tonga! Cruisers form surrogate family for holidays away from home and we did very well with it this year. We were able to find two unfortunate turkeys and thirty five expatriates from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Europe to mix with several local Tongans to augment the half dozen Americans located here in Neiafu for this Thanksgiving. The feast was done as a potluck and turned out to be perfect. We ate our meal under a "fala" - a thatched roof structure without walls. An older Tongan lady had woven all of the decorations from palm fronds and other plants and flowers. Drink was everything from "bush beer" to 20 year old cabs from California. Everyone wanted to know just what Thanksgiving was all about and had a difficult time understanding the underlying reasons but all agreed it was a fine idea and a great feast. Last week an older American expatriate lady originally from San Francisco, 75 years old, came to Oso Bueno to find the new American doctor to take care of her cracked ribs. Her name is Pat and she came to Tonga 50 years ago and married a Scottish doctor who lived in Neiafu. She is locally famous and the author of three books about Tonga. She is the palangis (white) matriarch of Vava'u and a very interesting woman. She is hosting this year's palangis Christmas eve celebration and we are looking forward to it. Her best friend of 50 years, a stately elderly Tongan lady named Tu'ifua, has invited several of us palangis cruisers to her home for a

traditional Tongan Christmas day. We hope your holiday season with family is filled with wonderful delights. Know that we will be thinking of all of you a lot.

Two nights ago was "hat night" at the Bounty Bar. The Bounty Bar is an open air bar overlooking the harbor here in Neiafu and is the center of all cruiser activity. It is run by a Kiwi family with two cute daughters in their early twenties. A trip to town is incomplete without a stop at the Bounty Bar for a beer or burger and some friendly chatter. "Hat night" required us to wear a hat with the object of winning a prize. The music was provided by a German couple - she on the sax and he on the keyboard - playing nothing but American blues. The mix of people was amazing. A group of German tourists (Bobbi had stitched a laceration from a diving accident on one of them), a group of German cruisers, a couple of tables of Tongans, a catholic priest at a table with a young Tongan and a large table of English speaking people (The five anglo-Saxon nations as they are called here). We won no prize but had a good time and arrived back on Oso Bueno safely.

Most vessels that crossed the Pacific with us are now in New Zealand. The voyage to New Zealand takes about ten days from Tonga or Fiji and is generally on a rumb line. The weather this year was a bit more vigorous then most sailors hoped for and many vessels were damaged and two were lost. Several of our friends were caught in 50 knots or more, one boat was knocked down with a broken boom (friends Dan & Alice on Shaula, Dad met them in Raiatea while he was there), another boat had ruptured fuel & water tanks coupled with loss of rig & rudder (friends Bobby & Gayle on Tulum III, Dad also met these guys in Raiatea while he was there), another boat was lost on Minerva Reef (single hander acquaintance Craig on Maxwell's Demon). The worst accident and only one involving loss of life was the wreck of the Melinda Lee. The Melinda Lee was crewed by a husband and wife with two children, a boy and a girl, ages 9 and 7. This boat and crew were widely known and loved by the class of '95 but were not personally known us. We had seen them in Hiva Oa and later in Papeete and Pago Pago. Their vessel was run down by a container vessel 30 nautical miles off the north coast of New Zealand just two weeks ago during a storm. One child was killed outright and the other three made it into their rubber dinghy (their liferaft went down with the boat). The mother was washed ashore alive 40 hours later - the husband & surviving child were washed out of the dinghy by the huge seas and succumbed to the elements. News of this tragedy swept the cruising community of the entire South Pacific and poignantly saddened us all. The survivor, Judy, is still hospitalized in New Zealand. She suffered two fractured vertebrae from the battering she received crawling ashore on the rocks. We hear that family has flown in to be with her and that she will physically recover. Many vessels are lost out here each season and we are all keenly aware. This year's class included

about 300 boats and as far as we know only eight have been lost at sea with a total of three lives lost. We always keep an alert watch on deck at all times and sail as prudently as possible.

Because the cruising season for the South Pacific is over and the cyclone season is upon us silence has now descended upon the ham radio nets making communication to us yachties left behind even more difficult. We are learning that Vava'u is definitely off the beaten path and nearly back in the dark ages in telecommunication technology. Mail travel to Tonga takes 3 weeks on average but will eventually reach us whether it is addressed to either Box 11 or 191 at the Paradise International Hotel or addressed to The Bounty Bar as long as our name and yacht name is clearly noted. Fax lines are intermittently not working or dysfunctional such that days or even a week can go by without any fax being able to go out or come in or several lines or pages print out totally blank. The locals accept the outdated equipment with a shrug. Nevertheless fax remains the best and most reliable way for us to communicate. Use fax 676-70-292. If we were to attempt to telephone it would most likely be on a Sunday our time - that's Saturday your time - otherwise the jamming of loitering people around the station make it near impossible. Still send letters and newsy items by mail.

We have much free time now in Tonga and are trying to catch up on important tasks like reading lots of books and getting the roofs of our mouths suntanned. Bobbi has discovered fiction books and is enjoying it so, so much - more fun than medical journals - and calls them "mind candy". In the next weeks Dave will be taking his first class in diving - then he'll be able to clean the bottom of Oso Bueno with the use of our snuba compressor. Current project is braiding thick one inch nylon rope into a bridle and pennant for our mooring arrangement. Dave completed a water collection system which catches rain as it drains off the bimini. It works efficiently - now all we need is rain. Last week we hiked to the top of a mountain here on Vava'u and witnessed a panoramic view of both Neiafu harbor and the old harbor. We walked along paths with pigs, carefully avoiding pig turds, sweating in the tropical sun, occasionally passing thatched huts with the sound of Jingle Bells or some other Christmas caroll coming from it. Swatting mosquitoes and Christmas just don't go together. The children are cute. They always greet you with the expression "bye bye". If you say "bye bye bye" back at them they scream and run. I may make it as a stand up when I return. The line never fails.

bye bye bye

All our love,

Dave & Bobbi
i.e. Yours
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