



# Nineteenth Annual Granger Holiday Newsletter



## CURRENTS

**Not a shred of evidence exists in favor of the idea that life is serious.**

— Brendan Gill, columnist and author

**H**appy holidays from the Grangers! In a departure from the past, our family will be flying to the four winds during Christmas week, visting relatives in far flung places like Idaho and Utah. Those of us staying in San Diego decided to just say “no” to frenetic meal planning. Instead, we’re making a pilgrimage to Pechanga Casino in Temecula to partake of their fabulous buffet.

### Milestones

Karen’s stepfather Woody will be 90 years young in January, and Ma continues to be involved with a lot of activities at 87. Staying active and alert in the golden years seems to run in the Casner family. Maybe it was something in the water when Ma and her siblings were growing up, or their great positive attitudes, or both.

Nephew Gary went to Costa Rica with some buddies for a week of deep sea fishing followed by a wedding (a pretty expensive fishing trip any way you look at it). Gary hooked a 115-pound sailfish and then attended the wedding party at week’s end, where his friend got ~~hooked~~ hitched. When he isn’t catering Hollywood parties, Gary is finally capitalizing on his movie-star looks by breaking into the modeling biz – a career move his family has been urging him to make for years. He’s already appeared in a Mercedes Benz catalog. While his teeth seem fine, the fact that Gary is considering \$25K of dental improvements suggests a serious intent.

Great niece Windi, now in her 5<sup>th</sup> year as a performer in the YMCA circus in Redlands, continues to expand her repertoire of skills. She is now expert in acrobatics as well as unicycle. Last we heard, her sister Roxy is busy working in the restaurant industry. Brother Art and Linda are continuing work on their dream house in Placerville. They now raise chickens and are born-again omelet lovers, cholesterol be damned...

Sister Carol joined sister Alisa’s jewelry business, [www.treasuresbyalisa.com](http://www.treasuresbyalisa.com). December has been their biggest month of the year. It seems that even in a recessionary economy there is still a market for quality, inexpensive jewelry. Carol is planning to return to school for nursing (LVN) training in the fall, and finds fulfillment in volunteer work at



*Nephew Gary hauls in a 115 lb sailfish off Costa Rica.*

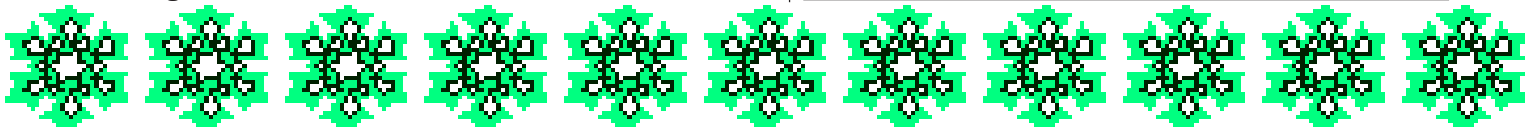
Animal Friends of the Valley. She adopted three kittens this year and would no doubt adopt more if she could. Son Dylan has been doing well in his sophomore year in high school. He plans to go to college and then teach English in Japan.

Niece Savannah is 10 and the budding actress/comedian/salesperson/politician is now attending Gate classes at Montessori school 3 days a week. Great niece Angela, 7, has also received academic awards this year. Niece Mara has been dating Dale, a writer/editor, for over a year. She recently moved to the Long Beach area and is loving it.

Sister Laurel and Luis moved to Rancho Santa Margarita in Orange County from Oceanside this year to be closer to work. They visited England and Scotland for a week of



*Great nieces Windi and Roxy hike Torrey Pines Beach.*





Our Brewtality Softball Club celebrated a championship season at Poway Sportsplex in March.

sightseeing back in March. As fate would have it, they arrived on quite possibly the first plane to disgorge luggage at London Heathrow's Terminal 5 on the day it opened – a day that shall live in travel infamy. The highly touted new baggage system broke down almost immediately, and the ensuing chaos and confusion resulted in an out-of-body experience for passengers. As Laurel described it, "We first knew something was wrong when we met the throngs of bobbies, news reporters, and locals wearing red T-shirts reading "STOP THE EXPANSION" as they have environmental concerns about ongoing building. I, with no make-up and ratty hair from little sleep on the plane, saw a reporter with camera and microphone approaching; I tried to hide behind another man, but couldn't avoid the camera in my face. We weren't aware of any huge delay except that we had to wait 30-40 minutes for our bags and little groups of airport personnel kept disappearing into the doors behind the conveyor belts. I just said we were glad to be there and the terminal was beautiful. Then the shuttle person asked us to pose with her for a photo for their magazine. All very exciting." Coincidentally, we passed through Terminal 5 a month later, after things had quieted down somewhat.

## SPORTS

**Talent is God given. Be humble. Fame is man-given. Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful.**

– John Wooden, UCLA basketball coach

In March, John's softball team Brewtality (it's all about the beer) finally won a league championship after being a bridesmaid several times in the past 7 years. To win the whole enchilada, the team had to beat the other two

top contenders back to back. With the first game knotted at 7-7 in the top of the last inning, and playing right field for the first time all season instead of 1<sup>st</sup> base, John caught a screaming drive down the right field line while running at full speed to thwart a rally. While not exactly a blur, his teammates appreciated the catch. In the final frame, John experienced the moment that every player dreams of: coming to bat down by one run, bases loaded, two outs, and the game-winning run on second base. After flying out in his last at-bat, John selected a lighter bat. You wouldn't think that 2 ounces makes much difference, but it was just enough to drop the ball in front of the center fielder's glove. As the ball rolled to the outfield fence, the winning run scored and the Brewtality bench erupted in cheers. In the second game, good friend and fellow ol' timer Tom Brotherton drove in the winning run with a scorcher down the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line to win the championship. Old guys rule!

The Chargers' season has mirrored the financial markets performance this year: lots of ups and downs. After being left for dead in November, the Bolts exorcised their demons and have played superbly the past few weeks, winning in improbable fashion in Kansas City and decisively in Tampa Bay. As part-time Chargers fan and Las Vegas sports critic Pablo Nogatoches opined, "they're no longer playing like zombies." Now that the team once again has a pulse and finally appears to be playing up to expectations, we are looking forward to the season finale and a thorough trouncing of the hapless Broncos, who are now virtually on life-support. "Of course, should they lose" says Pablo, "it could become the greatest Charger Masochist game of all time, eclipsing even the infamous NE Patriots debacle of 2006."

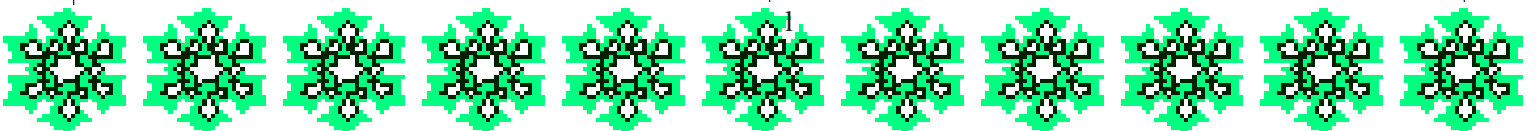
[Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus](#) and there may yet be a post-season worth remembering...

## TRAVEL

**Cross country skiing is great if you live in a small country.** - Steven Wright

Spring is a great time to visit Europe; it's just starting to warm up, and the crowds haven't arrived yet. We traveled to the west German spa town of Baden-Baden in April where we rented an apartment for a week and shifted into neutral. Situated at the northern end of the Black Forest, Baden-Baden has been a popular destination for Europe's elite for hundreds of years. Its famous casino provides the adrenaline and its spas the relaxation.

Since they are subsidized by the state, Germany's spas are an incredible bargain. A visit to [Friedrichsbad](#) which includes a massage, steam, sauna, and pool runs about







*Sizewise, Karen would have matched up very favorably in a jousting match back in the 1300's (The Treasury-Berg Eltz)*

26 Euro. A visit to neighboring [CaracallaTherme](#), built over the original Roman spa dating to 100 AD, costs even less.

The second week we went mobile to get our castle fix, exploring the Mosel and Rhine river valleys by car. While many castles were in ruins, a surprising number were still intact despite coming under siege countless times. We hung out in Stuttgart for a couple of days, taking in a spring version of the famous Oktoberfest and touring the Mercedes-Benz Museum before flying to London for a whirlwind, one-day tour and returning home. And now, the awards:

**Most Fun:** The Canstatt Spring Festival in Stuttgart.

**Most Beautiful:** [Reichsburg Castle](#), Cochem, on the Mosel River.

**Best Food:** A whole roasted chicken with sauerkraut, washed down with a liter of beer at The Canstatt Spring Festival. It just doesn't get any better than this!

**Best Hospitality:** The hotel staff of [Hotel am Markt](#) in [Baden-Baden](#). Service with a smile, and they go the extra mile.

**Most Enchanting Town:** [Strasbourg](#), France. Still medieval after all these years

**Best Fairytale Town:** [Bacharach](#), in the Rhine Valley. The city gate has welcomed visitors for over 700 years.

**Most Breathtaking Work of Art:** The Treasury, [Berg Eltz](#).

**Most Unusual:** The astronomical clock in the [Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Strasbourg](#), dating to the 1300's!

**Most Impressive Castle Ruins:** Berg Rheinfels on the Rhine. Its cavernous wine cellar is a great place for a Viking party.

**Most Intact Castle:** [Berg Eltz](#), Mosel Valley. Hardly a scratch after 1,000 years under the same ownership.

**Most Unique:** The spas at [Baden-Baden](#) re-define "relaxation".

**Biggest Surprise (Wouldn't Want to Repeat):** navigating the one-way streets and avoiding suicidal pedestrians in the university town of Trier.

**Best Serendipitous Moment:** Rising to the status of minor celebrities in the Baden-Baden Casino bar while dancing to the classic rock stylings of a Croatian band led by Andre Agassi's body double.

**Most Thrilling Moment:** Moving into the fast lane on the autobahn.

**Craziest Moment:** Taking in the grandeur of the Roman ruins in Trier for all of 10 seconds. If you remember the [Grand Canyon scene](#) from "National Lampoon's Vacation", you know what we're talking about.

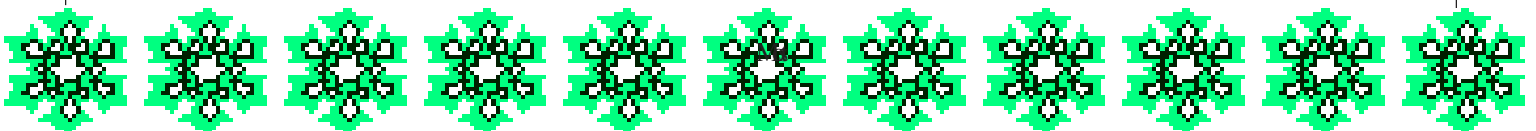
**Mr. Toad's Wild Ride Award:** the [Big Bus Tour](#) of London. Visiting London on a rare, warm spring day is like being dropped into an ant farm.

For a more extensive virtual tour of western Germany, please help yourself to our trip diary and photo stories on our Web site: [www.jkgranger.com](http://www.jkgranger.com).

In October we returned to our home away from home, our timeshare in Poipu Beach in [Kauai](#). While partaking of all the wonderful activities the island has to offer over the years, we still manage to discover new ones. If exploring secluded beaches, floating down a man-made



*Having fun at the company holiday party at The Stingere in downtown San Diego.*



river through the jungle in an inner tube, or watching raging waterfalls during a torrential downpour sounds like fun, then Kauai should be your next vacation destination. The island is still relatively uncrowded, so please don't tell anyone. Let's keep it our little secret...

## BUSINESS

**It's not based on any particular data point; we just wanted to choose a really large number.**— Treasury spokeswoman explaining how the \$700 billion number was chosen for the initial bailout, quoted on Forbes.com, Sept. 23, 2008

John celebrated his 15<sup>th</sup> month at [Sempra Global](#) in December. Still only 10 years young, the company is continuing to grow and acquired several businesses in 2008. The acquisitions support Sempra's long-term strategy of remaining a major player in the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) market. The company is also committed to developing renewable energy resources; a 10-megawatt solar plant outside Las Vegas came on line this month and is the first of many. As project manager for training & education for the IT group, John develops and delivers programs to support the company's efforts to manage its vital documents. It's a lot like herding cats, exasperating at times but rewarding as well.

After completing extensive courses in accounting last year, Karen has been working part-time with extended family member Cherie Umscheid's consulting business. She is enjoying the work, learning the latest accounting programs, and looking forward to growth. She has been spending time on her interest in crafts, including crocheting afghans and embroidering, making Christmas ornaments, and would like to take up quilting as well. Karen may also rekindle her drawing and painting talents next year and learn how to tackle a blank canvas again. Attending some community college classes may give her a start.

We have kept up the Career Management page on our web site as a public service. If you're considering a job or career change, or know someone who is, you may find the links and articles helpful: <http://www.jkgranger.com/work/>

## PERSONALS

**Love one another and you will be happy. It's as simple and as difficult as that.** — Michael Leunig

As always, we welcome this time of year for the opportunity it brings to reflect on our blessings and renew contact with those who mean so much to us. We hope this letter finds you well and smiling, and we wish you the best for a happy and prosperous 2009.

### Last-Minute Gift Ideas from [Dave Barry's Annual Guide](#)

It is a medical fact that most people do not get enough sleep. Why? Work, that's why. Incredibly, even in the 21st century, very few employers outside of the brothel industry and certain government agencies provide beds for their employees, which means workers must spend the day sitting in chairs, awake, using up precious energy reserves that they need for evenings and weekends.



What can we do about this? The answer is so simple it's hard to believe it took so long for somebody to figure it out: We can wear sleeping bags to work. Specifically we can wear the Lippi Selk wearable sleeping bag, which combines the comfort of a regular sleeping bag with a level of chic fashion elegance normally associated only with the Michelin Man. When you put this baby on, your bed is any place you happen to be — on a conference table, under your cubicle — even, for catnaps, in the elevator. And just think how great it would be to wear a sleeping bag on a plane! Especially if you're a pilot ([www.drinkstuff.com](http://www.drinkstuff.com)).



Are you stressed out and "uptight?" Do you often feel tense? Would you like to enjoy the kind of physical relaxation and peace of mind that result from looking like the biggest dork on the planet? If so, you need the Head Spa Massager. According to the manufacturer, when you put this on

your head, "it's like thousands of tiny fingers simultaneously massaging your scalp." That's right: not just a few dozen tiny fingers, but *thousands* of tiny fingers. *Simultaneously*. The manufacturer suggests that you wear the Head Spa Massager "on your morning commute in traffic" or "at your desk at work." We have no doubt this would make a strong impression on co-workers and the public.

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER: I'm here to see Mr. Johnson about making a large purchase.

RECEPTIONIST: That's him over there.

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER: Never mind.

You might be surprised to learn that the Head Spa Massager is mandatory headgear at all meetings of the Federal Reserve Board ([www.scientificsonline.com](http://www.scientificsonline.com)).

