

A Circle of Memories

By Sheila Johnson

As a young girl, I had visions and hopes of visiting the beautiful state of Alaska. I studied its history in world geography, a topic I disliked, and therefore did not commit much of the information to memory. But I was able to recall pictures of snow-capped mountains, white bear tracks across a vast terrain, Eskimos peeking out from their igloos, and scenes of frost and snow that induced a false reality of blowing, white, cold, flakes of ice falling on my face. Yet those chilling visions ignited warmth from within my soul that beckoned me to step foot on a land so foreign and so far away from my southwest home in El Paso, Texas.

In June 2001, the year of my 50th birthday and 30th wedding anniversary, that warmth grew into flames causing a real dream to come true. Michael and I flew to Seattle, Washington and spent the night with my niece, nephew, and their family. The next day, we embarked the Dawn Princess in Anchorage, Alaska. The sun set at 1:30 am and rose at 3:30am. The early morning sky was simply breathtaking! That part of my life's journey will be embedded in my heart until it stops beating.

We cruised the inlets and borders of Alaska, stopping at various ports, taking in the cities, people, lakes, fjords, glaciers, colonies of bald eagles, beluga whales, Native American restaurants, quilt museums, and the sounds of blue thunder. As each piece of blue ice broke away from the floating icebergs and hit the water below, sounds of thunder echoed across the ocean. I cannot find words to adequately describe the euphoria that was taking place in my mind. The captain and his crew were both gracious and generous with their hospitality. The ship had taken us 360 degrees round the outer and inner passages of Alaska. We bid bittersweet goodbyes to new acquaintances, the captain and his crew, and to a land that nurtured my soul.

There was more to come. Arriving in Vancouver and heading back to Denver, we took a planned detour (part of my surprise) to the Vancouver Aquarium and spent an entire day with the whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, and tropical fish. We drove back to my niece and nephew's home in Seattle to supposedly spend our last night before returning to Denver. "Surprise!" shouted my children, family and friends from Denver. My shock led me to believe that I was in the process of dying, and recalling the people in my life! I thought my life had come full circle—360 degrees! When the fog finally lifted off my brain, I was able to enjoy and savor the entire evening. There was yummy food, games, prizes, and lots and lots of love!

Many folks, who celebrated with me in June 2001, have changed or are no longer on this earth. Overall, these changes are good, and the memories will repeat the full circle forever.