

Around the World and Back

Mary Jean Lord still enjoys seeing how people live in foreign lands

By Jeanie Senior

Many people enjoy traveling, but people like Mary Jean Lord of Goldendale must be in a separate category.

During the last three decades, Mary Jean has visited every continent and more than 55 countries around the world.

Last year, she went to Antarctica, to Italy and the Grand Canyon for a 14-day raft trip.

"I was making a list of all the things I wanted to do; that I had waited too long to do," says Mary Jean, who will be 75 in September.

The Grand Canyon raft trip and Antarctica were both at the top of her list.

"And here I went to Antarctica, and then the Grand Canyon," she says.

Her friend, Carol Basse, who introduced Mary Jean to rafting and invited her on many rafting trips in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, persuaded her to try the Grand Canyon.

"She had a stroke and she was a year older," Mary Jean says of her friend. "I decided if Carol can do it, I can do it."

So far in 2006, she has made only one trip—to Sri Lanka and Hong Kong. But it's early yet.

The group she traveled with was led by Sri Lanka native Amali Koerner of Mosier, Oregon.

"We pretty much covered all the country except the far northern part," she says.

Mary Jean says she is still trying to digest "a very interesting, very



Above, Mary Jean Lord shows pictures from her many journeys around the world. Opposite page, Mary Jean writes detailed stories of her adventures once she returns to her Goldendale home.

diverse" country, where she visited tea plantations, saw elephants, and also saw the devastation left by the tragic tsunami in 2004. She also saw the house that donations from her group helped to build and furnish for a family left homeless by the killer waves.

"Because of the tsunami, people think they shouldn't go," she says. "But the only places affected were along the coast. We got there at the end of the monsoon, but we still had a monsoon rain. I was kind of pleased. I wanted to see a monsoon rain—it's just buckets coming out of the sky. Then it cleared up."

They visited members of Amali's family, including relatives who live inside a fort near the tsunami area, who were protected from the waves by the fort's high ramps.

When Mary Jean returns to Goldendale after a trip, she writes about her experiences.

"I do it for myself, really," she says. "But I have some people I send them around to."

These are not short memos: "Grand Canyon Adventure, August 9-23, 2005" is 64 pages long, sin-

gle-spaced, not counting the bibliography. Its lively style takes the reader along on Mary Jean's trip.

Researching and writing the pieces "kind of helps me understand the country, the people, the culture and history," Mary Jean says. "I do some research when I'm writing, and I keep notes when I'm traveling, notes about things that are happening."

Her first trip outside North America was to China in 1979, when she was part of the first group from Eastern Washington to visit the country. They happened to be in Beijing for the opening of the American embassy there.

When she went back to China a few years ago, it was very different.

"I was glad to have made the first trip," she says. "The contrast was quite amazing."

Mary Jean often travels with her sister and her brother-in-law, who live in Bellevue. The sisters grew up in Twin Falls.

When they first saw the Taj Majal, "we said, that's pretty good for a couple of Idaho girls."

A few years ago, she went to Iran

with one of her daughters, a trip she still remembers for the kindness of the people.

“Everywhere we went, people would say, ‘I don’t like your government, but we like Americans,’” she recalls. “Most of them have family in America.”

Married at age 19 after attending Idaho State College in Pocatello, Mary Jean and her husband taught one year at a rural school outside Twin Falls.

She stayed home with their five children for a few years, but went back to school and eventually earned her master’s degree in English at Washington State University.

Her husband, Richard, a mathematics teacher at Yakima Valley Community College, died suddenly when he was 50.

Mary Jean spent six years as press secretary to U.S. Representative Mike McCormick, a job that ended when he was defeated in a re-election bid.

A new job at Klickitat PUD

brought her to Goldendale.

“That just seemed to be a good fit for me,” she says. “I thoroughly enjoyed working at the PUD.”

It was a varied job. She handled public relations and also managed energy conservation programs.

Mary Jean also orchestrated the groundbreaking ceremony for the three giant Mod-2 windmills erected on the Goodnoe Hills. Since disassembled and removed, they were the largest wind turbines ever built at the time. But they were experimental machines, and only lasted from 1981 to 1987.

When Mary Jean is not traveling to foreign lands, she is active with the Friends of the Goldendale Community Library. She is now president of the group.

She is a docent at Maryhill Museum and a member of a writers group.

Her five children include two daughters who are librarians in Oakland and Seattle; a daughter who works for Adobe; and a fourth who works for a statewide parent-

ing hotline in Washington.

Her son, an attorney, works for a nonprofit organization that advocates for people who are developmentally disabled or have other disabilities.

“They all like their jobs and I’m very proud of them,” Mary Jean says.

There are still a lot of places she wants to travel. She says she has not been to Greece and would like to make it there.

Mary Jean says she travels because she likes seeing how people live.

“You find that however different people might look, they are very similar,” she says. “Almost all people, what they really want is to be able to care for their families and to be peaceful. They don’t want to be fighting with their neighbors. It’s always just a few people that stir things up.

“Age, especially when you get to be my age, is not nearly as important as whether you’re healthy, how much you’re able to do.” ■

