

# IN MY OPINION

**Caroline Porter**

## Greetings from Chad Country

Yes, we've been in Florida. Where else? The drawing cards were my parents, who just happen to live in Sarasota, warmer weather and salvaging life and limb by escaping the ice and snow for awhile. Vacations are a great change from the usual routine, work and responsibilities, but that doesn't mean life doesn't go on, just maybe in a different form.

The weather was warmer and there was no snow and ice, but there was a different weather interest. One morning I stepped outside our little apartment and drew in a deep breath — of smoke! There is a severe drought there and not far away from us was a brush fire blazing away on over 3,500 acres. We were between Tampa and Orlando, not far from Walt Disney World. The big interstate between those two cities is I-4 and thousands of travelers, including the wild and crazy Super Bowl fans, found themselves engulfed in clouds of smoke as they careened down the highways. Some of our days were smokey, depending on the direction of the wind.

Other tidbits from Florida include the news media counting the "over" and "undervotes" from the presidential election. No news here: Gore won. I've got to find those new bumper stickers, "Re-elect Gore in 2004." We were able to watch the inauguration from the scene of the crime, sitting in the midst of some of those now famous counties — Orange, Volusia and Polk.

Talk about county politics. While we were there, in an adjacent county eight county law enforcement officials were suspended for spending a *lot* of work time on the internet logged on to pornographic web sites. We hear this is the same outfit that got into trouble a few years ago because while the cops were in a sting operation to catch prostitutes, they managed to allow them to get totally naked before making the arrests. So, things are pretty mild in Knox County, eh? And let's just keep it that way.

Just as the smoke was beginning to gather, a woman in a community near us discovered red blood worms in her glass of water. That'll make you gaze long and hard at your next glass of tap water. Apparently this was just a local problem from a single "sanitary" water system — and I use the word loosely.

At least three people drove cars into buildings in a three day period. A teacher's aide said she was trying to commit suicide by driving 55 miles an hour into a fourth grade classroom she had just left. She will be charged with attempted murder of every child in the room. A gentleman says he had a seizure and ended up in someone's dining room. Fortunately, no one was dining.

Honestly, we really had a good time, but sometimes I can be entirely too interested in the news.

We went to Disney World three times and it was fun, even for old people. There is much more for children, of course. Our conclusion is that the whole deal is beautifully organized and employs thousands of people, which is good, but the expense is prohibitive.

Another amazing feature in that tourist area was that so few people spoke English. We heard French, German, Spanish, Japanese and some unidentifiable tongues. We went to a huge place called the Florida Mall one afternoon and, since I'm not much of a shopper, I just get exhausted in those places. I'd much rather be in a little dress shop at home with half the selection. My husband waits for me and watches the throngs, but as I wander off in a strange place, he's fearful he'll never see me again. In those parts, it's not a totally unfounded fear. I know he's enjoyed himself more than I though when he reports, "I've seen two nines, an eight and a couple of fives." The man is incurable.

We like small towns, so we visited several. If we were to ever really retire, we wouldn't want to be in a retirement community. Give us a town with a downtown, inhabitants of all ages and the usual community activity. We traveled to Lake Wales in Central Florida, a pretty and progressive town which, like Galesburg, had received the Main Street Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

You can imagine the hype down there for the Super Bowl in Tampa. I tried to get some information about the Australian Tennis Open, held just prior to the game, and it wasn't easy. The Super Bowl is usually the most overrated event ever, but this year it was particularly boring and disappointing. I rooted for the New York Giants because that idiot, Ray Lewis, who ought to be in jail, is a Baltimore Raven. And he was the most valuable player. That about sums up the caliber of the NFL.

Well, we visited friends and relatives in Florida and have just arrived back to the frozen tundra. It's been a hoot, but it's time for a vacation in Galesburg.

*Caroline Porter is a free lance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at (309) 342-1337 or [cporter@galesburg.net](mailto:cporter@galesburg.net).*