

December 31, 1994

Sitka, Alaska

Gezur Kristlindjet,

Otherwise known as "Cheers for Christmas." Or perhaps it's "Happy New Year" by the time this gets to you. In Sitka we're in the middle of the Christmas Season. A large part of town celebrates Christmas on the Julian Calendar so we get two holidays. The "Western" has Santa, lights, familiar carols and Western European goodies. The "Russian" has change bell ringing from the tower of St. Michael's Cathedral, staring (visitors follow a large star to homes singing Russian songs.) and Eastern and Native Alaskan goodies. We are fortunate to live in such a cultural crossroads.

This year has been one of change for our family as we settle into new careers after having been in Albania. Both Brian and Kevin are seniors. Brian is at St., Olaf College in Northfield Minnesota. He has been working in technical theater, and has declared a major in "Showmanship, The Art of Turning the Mundane Into the Magical." He says if he manages to convince Olaf to give him a degree in a discipline like showmanship he will have deserved it. His "historic" mentor is fellow Unitarian P.T. Barnham. Brian says the highlight of his year was working in a childcare center this summer. Not the kids themselves, although he likes them, but being responsible for himself, getting himself to work and keeping house (in the manner of our family) while the rest of us were on vacation in Minnesota.

Kevin says the highlight of his year was being selected for Southeast Alaska Honor Choir. This meant that he got to go to the "Honor Festival" in Haines. "Honor" meant sleeping on the floor in the weight room underneath the Haines High swimming pool, and the late night ferry - airplane transfers in Juneau. The choral groups Kevin is in sound wonderful. Kevin is also working on the High School TV station (where did this Radio family go wrong?) and is learning digital editing at Raven Radio. Kevin is considering several colleges, mostly in the Upper Midwest.

Of course the highlight of the coming year will be that both boys graduate on the same weekend 2,700 miles apart. We are already pouring over airline schedules and looking at "red eye" flights that Rich said he would "never" take again. Kevin was not able to get the school to replace "Pomp and Circumstance" with the "Pink Panther" march. Nice try kid.

Suzi has been doing a number of different things, organizing a conference on early childhood education and doing historical research, but she says her highlight this year was teaching at Sheldon Jackson College. Suzi and Rich team-taught classes in American History and International Relations with Suzi being the lead teacher. Suzi also renewed her acquaintance with watercolors and has charge of the record library at Raven Radio.

Rich has gone into the consulting business and was surprised that he has had a lot of takers. His main contract is with the six Southeast Alaska public radio stations, coordinating fundraising and planning. The contract that was the most fun was with the BBC. Rich got on World Service in several pieces about Alaska and got calls from friends who heard him from all over the world.

Rich is dabbling with writing; his yearly highlight might have been attending the Sitka Symposium, an intensive week with other writers and "perhaps" writers. Suzi wears a button that says, "Help, I'm living with an unpublished writer."

We had several opportunities to move to other places this year, job offers, new possibilities, but we decided that Sitka was where we want to live. Even "Good Morning America" seemed to justify our decision by featuring our community on National TV. Actually it came at a good time. The pulp mill in Sitka, the town's largest employer closed a year ago and we needed the publicity. It did not seem right to leave our community when it was at a low point. That's one theory why we stayed, the other is that Rich was on the phone talking to some folks about accepting a position in Anchorage, three humpback whales breached right in front of the house. Rich watched them from where he was sitting, talking on the phone. By the end of the conversation he knew we were staying, at least for a while.

The future? Rich and Suzi are trying to get back to Albania for another stint. It may happen sooner, or it may happen later, but it will happen. Knowing we will have Sitka to come back to will make it all the more enjoyable.

We hope that you all have a peaceful and happy new year.

Please take Care,

Suzi, Kevin, Brian and Rich McClear