



Dear Friends,

This is the first year since 1995 that we've spent more time in the States (about two weeks more) than abroad. We have continued work in the Balkans and also had the chance to work, again, in Slovakia. It's a long and difficult road to democracy but this year we have begun to see some positive results. The victories seem small but, to us, significant. In Kosovo Albanian journalists have begun to support the rights of Serbian journalists to get information. It's a small but a real victory when journalists stand up for each other across ethnic lines. Rich was able to travel from Kosovo to Montenegro, without incident, through both Serbian and Albanian communities in Mitrovica, a region divided by ethnic conflict. In Serbia B92 radio, the constant voice of peace in the Balkans during the past dozen years, has become self-sufficient. In Slovakia a democratic coalition turned back an attempt by the former autocrat to regain power. Our work has been filled with hope despite the looming clouds of conflict.



Much of the time we spent in the States we spent with family. We welcomed the new year in Sitka with Brian and Kevin along with Brian's girlfriend, Liz Flitton, who has since become his fiancé. Brian and Liz have been going together, off and on, for 7 years, so this was not a surprise but a source of great joy. They plan to be married in the fall. We got the chance to meet Liz's parents Karen and Ed when they visited Sitka in August. In Sitka we also enjoyed an all station reunion for Raven Radio's 20th birthday. We spent time with Rich's mom for her 89th birthday in September and at Thanksgiving and with Suzi's dad at a June family reunion and a week ago. Rich took the opportunity, while in Minnesota, to go out to Suzi's family's farm in Stillwater to cut a Christmas tree. After cutting it we found that individuals can no longer send packages by airfreight for security reasons. So we had to pack it in a big tube and send it as checked luggage. We got some strange looks at Northwest Airlines but managed to convince the lady at the desk that it was no taller than a set of skies. We saw it loaded onto the Alaska Airlines plane in Seattle but it didn't get off in Sitka. We had them hold the plane while one of Kevin's friends, who works at the Sitka airport, went into

the hold and found it, and gave it, with a ration of grief, to Kevin. Our Minnesota Norway pine tree now sits in our Alaska living room dressed in ornaments we've collected on our travels.



After living abroad for the better part of 10 years coming back to this side of the planet takes some adjustment. We reintroduced ourselves to Alaska by driving the Alcan to Anchorage, riding on the ferry up the coast and taking a jet boat up the Stikine River. We find life is so much more convenient in America than we remembered. And the American belief in getting together voluntarily to make things happen is invigorating after living so many years in the former “evil empire” where voluntary action in a civil society was discouraged with force.

However, we do have some difficult adjustments. This was our first election in the States in years and we were shocked at the nastiness and mean spiritedness of it all. The amount of garbage we generate is appalling, as much in a day here as in a week in Europe, and most of it coming to our house without invitation. Thanksgiving was disorienting. Overseas we always tried to keep the holiday by inviting friends to a celebration where we cherished that friendship and gave thanks for our full and happy lives. We spent Thanksgiving in the lower 48 this year and realize that the holiday has become a day-long infomercial for Christmas Shopping with a little football on the side. And has the traffic really increased in our cities as much as it seems in the last ten years? But reverse culture shock cannot hamper our joy at this season. We have a wonderful, (and now expanding) family, live in a privileged land, are home in a town we love and enjoy satisfying work. Our prayer, as it is every year, is the same blessings for you and your family and that, somehow, we can find a way to live in a peaceful world.



Peace,

Suzi and Rich McClear

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