



Advent, 2003

Prishtina, Kosovo

Dear Friends,

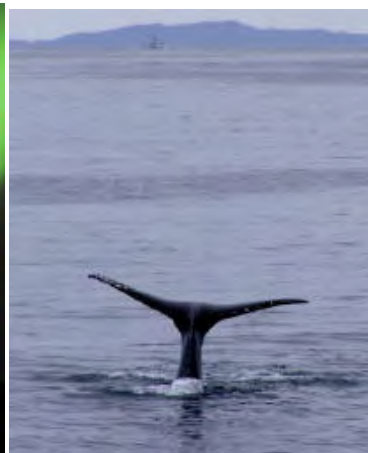
Sitting in the front row of a church watching your kid get married brings out all sorts of emotions. You think of his fear the first time he climbed to the top of a slide in a Grand Rapids park or the bumped forehead when he was on Rich's back as Rich got out into a van on our second trip to Alaska. He looks so big now. And when his brother sang a solo beautifully, that brought back memories of the two of them together; the four of us together.

Then Liz sang and we felt such joy that she was joining our family, that her parents and sisters and their families were joining our extended family. For an event so momentous it was so relaxed and easy, like we all had been family together forever. It was hard to hold back the tears. Brian and Liz were married in October. That was the highlight of our year.





There were other milestones. We quietly celebrated 35 years of waking up and cuddling together each morning. (We were married in the same church where Brian and Liz celebrated.) Rich's mom celebrated her 90th birthday with friends and family, including Brian and Kevin, in New Jersey in September. KLEF, the classical music radio station we helped start in Anchorage, turned 15 and we were there for that. In Serbia the Association of Independent Media (ANEM) turned 10 and we were asked to give the organization its charge for the next ten years. We returned to Albania with Kevin for a wedding of two close friends and renewed friendships there. And on the stage of the 30th anniversary Winnipeg Folk Festival we were given a stained glass banjo for our support of the festival over the years.



This year was the first since 1995 in which we spent 6 months in Alaska. Rich got a Washington DC job that allows him to telecommute using the Internet and phone from an office on the ground floor of our home overlooking Sitka Sound. It was a good year to spend so much time at home with warm and dry weather, an invasion of four different species of whale into the sound, and this autumn's amazing display of northern lights.

We still spent almost half a year on the road. Rich's job took us to the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) for the first time. We celebrated Halloween in Latvia in the best Lutheran fashion,



although neither of us is Lutheran, by listening to Bach performed on the fourth largest organ in the world, in the Riga Dom. We heard his Organ and Cello Sonata where 6712 pipes blended beautifully with four strings.

People are starting to ask us when we plan to slow down. They're often younger than we are and we think they may be asking our permission for them to slow down. Staying home for 6 months is slowing down. But our work remains interesting. For instance, Suzi led a seminar on news coverage of women's issues in the Balkans and Rich continues to work on press freedom issues, work made more pressing by worldwide attacks on media freedom in the wake of the war on terrorism and America's adventure in Iraq.

Each year we start this letter on the first Sunday in Advent, the Liturgical New Year. This year we're writing from Prishtina, Kosovo where Christmas goods are just going on display (although before getting this letter printed and mailed we traveled home through Vienna and added the picture on the right). We plan to spend Christmas in Sitka with family and friends. It's been a better year for the McClears than it has been for the world in general. Our prayer is that in 2004 we all have good years and the world comes closer to freedom, peace and mutual respect.

Take care, stay involved and keep in touch,

Suzi and Rich

Suzi and Rich McClear

