



November 30, 2008
First Sunday in Advent
Belgrade, Serbia and Cairo, Egypt.

Dear Friends,

This year, as we write our traditional Christmas Family Letter on the first Sunday in Advent, we're scattered across the globe. Rich has started his new job heading up the Serbian Media Assistance Program in Belgrade, Serbia; familiar territory for Rich. Suzi is working on Rich's former project, developing an FM station at the Alexandria Library in Egypt. Brian and Liz are in Minneapolis, while Kevin and Shannon are in Anchorage.

This year Rich spent a lot of time on the road working in Armenia, Georgia, Egypt, Kosovo and Serbia. Suzi traveled with him on some of those trips and between travels we celebrated our 40th anniversary in Vlora, Albania, surrounded by friends we hadn't seen in several years but with whom we remain close because of intensely shared experiences. This year we experienced many of the world's wonders. And the whole family, Kevin, Shannon, Rich, Suzi, Brian and Liz got together for a joyous weekend at the Winnipeg Folk Festival. (Below)



As we close in on Christmas the family will close in on Sitka. Suzi and Rich will move our things from Anchorage in mid December. Brian will join us to help set up furniture so there will be enough beds for us all. Kevin and Shannon come next, with a detour through New Jersey to see Rich's mom, and Liz arrives just in time because of her work schedule.

After the first of the year Suzi will move to Belgrade and she will commute between Belgrade, Cairo and Alexandria much the same way Rich commuted between Alaska and Egypt over the past year and a half.

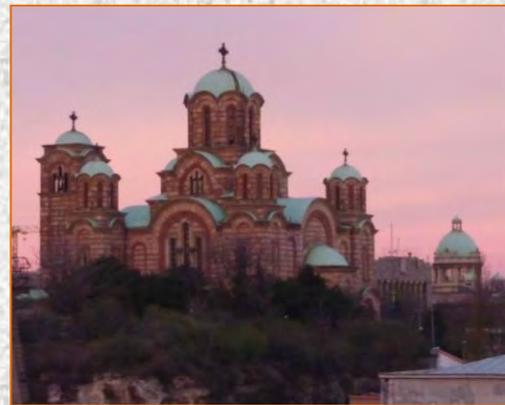
Our move to Belgrade comes as a surprise. We were working with a community radio station in Tbilisi, Georgia in May when Rich got a call from Washington. The US government has shut down the Serbian Media program (Mission Accomplished), but then Kosovo declared independence and the government decided that the close down was a bit premature. IREX wanted to rebid on the new program and needed a “Chief of Party” quickly. Rich had the experience and reputation. After hundreds of dollars in roaming charges on our ATT mobile phone Rich agreed, provided IREX won the bid. IREX has had the Serbia program for 11 years and many thought that the US Agency for International Development just might pick a new implementer. But IREX signed the contract on September 23 and Rich was in Belgrade by October 22. So for a few more years Rich, Suzi and two cats will be expats again.

There were two other milestones this year. Rich’s Mom turned 95 and we had a small party (only because Mom didn’t want a big one) with Rich, Suzi, Brian, Liz and cousins Johnny and Normae. We also spent some time in Minnesota seeing Kay Randall, Suzi’s stepmother, who turned 90. Of course we also got to see Suzi’s sister, Nancy.

The election was exciting for us both because of the Obama candidacy and the fact that our governor brought Alaska into the National Spotlight. Rich moved up to the “A” list of party invitations in Egypt, Kosovo and Serbia. No more Northern Exposure or Jack London, everyone wanted to know “What is Sarah really like?” The Obama win made Americans popular abroad again, but for how long no one knows. Rich has it on good authority that wearing an Obama button gets you good treatment at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris. “The French are actually nice to us.”

So as we write this, temporarily separated, we are exchanging drafts and edits by email. Rich is settling into a new flat in Belgrade, Suzi was in Belgrade last week to help with that, and we are getting necessary “passports” (no kidding) and health certificates, with certified and stamped translations, for the cats. We are all hoping *In’shallah*, to gather in Sitka for a relaxing Christmas. (St Marko’s at sunrise in Belgrade is below, right.)

Change was the code word for this year (although Rich notes that when he was growing up a “Change Agent” was someone selling tokens in a subway station.) But change has come to us in so many ways this year. For too many years we have worked in the shadow of war and unrest in The Balkans, Georgia and the Middle East. Our biggest prayer for change is that no one will ever have to work in the shadow of war ever again. That would be the best change we could pray for, for our family, for your family, for our country and for the world.



Peace on Earth, Good Will to All.
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