



First Sunday in Advent
Belgrade, Serbia and Cairo Egypt.

Dear Friends,

We had planned that this letter would be datelined Sitka, Alaska. A year ago we had every intention of being home. Instead we're engaged in an experiment in long distance marriage. Rich's contract ended Sept 30 but the USAID mission responded to his request for funds to do a lot of new and exciting things using mobile phone applications for news and hyper local internet news portals. They waved a lot of money in front of the program on the condition that he stay in Serbia for another year. So instead of heading home on Sept 30 we were renewing leases.

At about the same time Suzi got a call from IREX. The Chief of the Egypt program took off for greener fields. The Egypt program ends at the end of March so you can't blame him. At the beginning of November Suzi moved to Cairo to bring a decent end to the Egypt Media Development Program, making sure that the program spends just enough but not too much money and documenting successes of the program's 5 year run.

So on this First Sunday in Advent Suzi is working (Sunday is a work day in Egypt) and so, actually, is Rich, since the mid-term evaluation team arrived today (USAID pumped a lot of extra money into Rich's program and THEN did the evaluation.)

Suzi managed to get back to Europe for Rich's 64th birthday, which they spent at the Budapest Christmas fair. They will, insh'allah, spend Christmas with the entire family in Sitka and Rich will join Suzi in Egypt for the Orthodox holidays. We are both looking at airline schedules to see where we can meet to spend long weekends. There are all sorts of places we haven't seen.

Rich's mom (right) passed away in September, just days short of her 97th birthday. She went into hospital on Sunday, was diagnosed with widespread cancer on Wednesday, refused treatment, including a feeding tube, went home on Friday and was gone on Sunday. She died with grace and courage, on her own terms, surrounded by family singing her spirit home.



Brian and Liz are expecting our first grandchild this spring, "one child born in a world to carry on." Kevin has a new job as production manager at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts and both kids and their wives are enjoying their new homes, into which they moved at the end of last year.



In late April and early May Rich took time off to work with Suzi evaluating the Palestine News Network. We enjoyed traveling the West Bank, working with community stations in Bethlehem, Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus. We spent quite a bit of time in Jerusalem which we realized is mostly a fraud. The house where Christ held the last supper was

built in the 11th Century AD. The first floor of the same building holds David's tomb. The gate through which Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was built by the Ottomans 1500 years after the fact. There are even two sites of the crucifixion and resurrection, one for the Protestants and one for everyone else. The Wailing Wall seems real, as does the mosque at the Dome of the Rock.

We commuted daily to the little town of Bethlehem, (with its own share of religious Kitsch, including the "Holy Family Hotel" where, presumably, there is room at the inn. The mural at the right is from the Chapel at Shepherd's Field.) Bethlehem is the home of the Palestine News Network and is virtually surrounded by checkpoints and a wall bigger than Berlin's. The experience gave us a perspective on what it is like to live with daily roadblocks and spot checks, sometimes it took an hour and a half for what should be a 20 minute drive. We enjoyed that once when we were stuck in a traffic jam and the guy in the car next to us was Prime Minister Netanyahu. (The banner at the head of this letter includes us with the Bethlehem skyline behind.)



We've taken advantage of our location to travel a lot this year with long weekends in Istanbul, Malta, Lisbon, and Dubai (we could write a whole letter on that experience). We also had some time to visit Suzi's AFS sister, Lise, in Denmark. We had a wonderful family reunion at the Winnipeg Folk Festival with Kevin, Shannon, Liz and Brian, along with Liz' mother Karen Flitton. (The picture at the left was taken by Andrew Stricker, who also came with us.)

Next year we hope to be writing this letter from Sitka, (you've "heard that song before") but who knows where the waves of the world will take us. Our employer, IREX, has a new positioning statement "Build a Better World." A "better world" with joy, fun, friendship, family, celebration, and perhaps a little rest for us all, that's our wish for the New Year.

Happy Holidays!

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