

First Sunday in Advent, 2011
Budapest, Hungary

Dear friends,



A year ago our Christmas letter had two datelines, Cairo and Belgrade. In that letter we said that this year we would be together and in Sitka. We were half right -- but more on that later. The big news this year was the April 15th arrival of Liam Conall Boru McClear. Brian and Liz are parents, and so we are grandparents. By the end of April we were in Minnesota to meet our grandson and to start his education right by accompanying him and his parents to a May Day parade.

We all (Brian, Liz, Shannon, Kevin, Suzi and Rich) spent Christmas 2010 in Sitka and then went our own ways. Suzi and Rich arrived in Cairo just before midnight on New Year's Eve. The bellman said: "I'll deliver your bags next year." Cairo Tower had flashing "Happy New Year" lights so we went out on the balcony to see what happened to those lights at midnight. The hour struck, the lights went out. No late night holiday in this Islamic land. Rich went back to Belgrade just in time to miss out on all the fun. Suzi's flat was close to Tahrir Square but separated from it by the Nile; so she only heard the noise, saw the smoke and perhaps caught a fleeting whiff of teargas. Her street was protected by a barricade set up by neighbors as the community pulled together. Suzi was evacuated in February but was back in Cairo within the month, as she was deemed "essential." We got together during Suzi's Egypt posting in places like Aswan, Mt. Sinai or Doha, Qatar, where we marveled at the Museum of Islamic Art (designed by I.M. Pei) and joined the street dance celebrating Mubarak's departure. Qatar's headlines read "Egypt Wins, All Praise to Al Jazeera," giving the story a local angle. Rich got back to Cairo in the spring to help Suzi pack out when her program closed, and by mid April we were together in New Jersey closing out Rich's Mom's estate.

For the first time in years we spent July 4th in Sitka where Brian and Liz introduced Liam to Brian's 20-year high school reunion classmates. Then all 7 of us (adding Shannon and Kevin) got together in Minnesota. (Only Kevin was able to join us for the Winnipeg Folk Festival this year because Shannon watched Liam as Liz went back to work -- sooner than she wished.) This year we did our usual road trips around neighboring countries, including visits to the coast in Montenegro and Croatia (for work, no less!) Rich also had some work in Jordan, which is trying, in its own way, to come to grips with the Arab Spring.

Rich was supposed to finish in Belgrade in September but we're spending the first Sunday in Advent further north along the Danube, in Budapest, for the Christmas Fair and the "ignition" of the first



Advent candle. It was a difficult year for Rich because of fits and starts in federal aid funding. He didn't get as much done as wished, so we extended to Nov 18, then to Dec 16. We are scheduled to fly home Dec 19 for Christmas but this year we make no predictions for the future-- except we hope it includes more time for friends and family in the States, and no more experiments in long distance marriage.

Have a wonderful holiday and a happy, healthy New Year,
Suzi and Rich

M^cClear Family Christmas Letter, 2011



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