



Dawn Kisses the Southern Alps

Dear Family and Friends,

December, 2010

As you no doubt remember (having been bludgeoned over the head with the fact at the time), six years ago we vanished from the Known Universe to enjoy a sabbatical year in Karlsruhe, Germany, where Xandie developed an insatiable taste for something called *flammenkuchen* (“pizza” in Italian; we’re not sure of the English word) while Geoff relaxed over endless mugs of *Bier* (“beer”). Unfortunately, Pat had a rougher time of it, primarily due to the fact that her German was limited to a “Guten Tag” so badly mispronounced that strangers would attack her on the street whenever she tried to greet them.



Whale-watching?

Northern Hemisphere, we reluctantly looked southwards. “Hey,” said Geoff, “There’s a computer installation in Antarctica! And it’s supposed to be incredibly beautiful there!”

The looks that Xandie and Pat gave him cannot be described.

OK, maybe not quite *that* far south. South Africa? They have elephants (always a winner with the squirt). But the *word* “Africa” sounds hot, which Xandie doesn’t like. Australia? Exotic bouncy critters with duck bills (we may be a bit mixed up about some of the details). And Australia was having wildfires at the time. Geoff was pretty sure they’d manage to put them out within a year, but Pat wasn’t having any of that. “What if they get even bigger? Australia is one giant tinderbox waiting to explode! You remember that movie *Mad Max*? That was a *documentary*! You want to live in a place where they have wars over gasoline?” Geoff tried to point out that it’s called “petrol” over there, to no avail.

That left only one final option: New Zealand, which is well known as the place where there are more sheep than people. A **lot** more. This produces some interesting effects; for example, they don’t use traffic signals in the cities. Instead, sheep dogs just chase any cars that misbehave. The only downside of this approach is that the dogs like to bite the wheels; at any given time half the cars have flat tires and the streets are filled with “thup-thup-thup” noises.

So, after a stressful spring of packing the house, finding tenants (a wonderful family who pamper our cats even more than we do), and taking an 18-hour plane trip, we wound up in Christchurch in July. That was when we discovered that July in New Zealand is the middle of winter (which might have something to do with it being in the Southern Hemisphere). But the upshot was that there we were in our requisite tourist outfits of Bermuda shorts, Hawaiian shirts, and sandals, while outside the wind was howling, the rain

was pouring (at least it wasn't snow!), and the Kiwi taxi drivers were so doubled up with laughter that we couldn't get a ride to our motel. . . which turned out to be an igloo.

But we soon settled into a lovely (if drafty) house that offers an amazing view, an easy bus ride to Geoff's office, and a propane stove that works most of the time. Xandie enrolled at a school where they don't teach long division ("None of that old-fashioned stuff here!") and Pat found a Czech cello teacher. Charming Czech cellist? Charmingly challenging? Cheery?

Sorry about that. Down, boy. Have we mentioned that her first cello teacher at Cal-Arts was named Cesare, pronounced "CHEZ-er-ay?"

DOWN, BOY!

Where were we? Oh, yeah, New Zealand. Winter turned into spring, the weather got nice (or at least nicer), and we found some time to explore. We discovered penguins, wineries, and penguin wineries (if you think penguins are comical in the zoo, you should see them after they've knocked off a couple of bottles of Cabernet). Geoff loves the mountains (especially downhill on his bike), Xandie loves the libraries (there's no limit on how many books you can check out), and Pat loves teatime.

And then there was the earthquake. That was lots of fun, if you define "fun" as "unbelievably terrifying." A Richter 7.1 monster struck at about 4:30 AM on a Saturday and knocked down most of the brick buildings in the city. So what did we do? At Geoff's insistence, Pat got up at 8 and drove Xandie to her orchestra rehearsal. "Maybe it's not that bad," he said. "Our house didn't fall down. I'd hate to have her miss a session."

As they say here, "Yeah, right." The streets were covered in debris; twice Pat had to get out of the car to push it singlehandedly over seven-foot piles of rubble. The music school had disappeared into a smoking crater from which hot lava was spewing to a height of 10,000 feet. (OK, we might be exaggerating a wee bit here.) Reluctantly, Pat and Xandie returned home—but not without stopping at a library first.

Yet despite the numerous aftershocks, the July winter, and the very, um, unique Kiwi accents, things are good with us. We'd love to have some of you stop by for a visit; we're having a blast here.

As in, the wind never drops below 73 MPH.

Love,

Geoff Pat Xandie

P.S. Pat and Xandie's blog, at <http://downunderandover.weebly.com>, is a blow-by-blow recitation of our adventures. Geoff also occasionally mumbles at <http://sleepyprofessor.blogspot.com>.



Harbor-watching?



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