

Happy New Year, Dear Friends and Family!



Botanical Garden, Christchurch

The Year of Two Springs

Let's begin with the most important. We wish for you all that you are in the midst of a wonderful holiday season, that all that will remain of 2009 are positive memories, that you don't have anything so annoying about your lives that you've actually made New Years resolutions about them (but if mistakenly you have, that you'll keep them – except the ones about spending wisely and not drinking at celebrations), and that 2010 will prove to be the year in which you won the lottery or were chosen American Idol, or suddenly took up painting (or square dancing) and won the grand prize.

Here we are in Sumner, a suburb of Christchurch, New Zealand, ending our tenth full year on the road, SDF ('sans domicile fixe' = without a fixed abode). During these ten years our way of doing our annual Xmas letter has changed with the technology. We remember in December, 2000 sitting poolside in a modest Thai hotel assembling our cards by hand. We wrote the general text on a word processor but had it printed and photocopied locally. We chose a photo to be pasted into a real Xmas card and had about 60 copies made at the local photoshop. Then we pasted and folded and added some personal words, went to the post office and bought stamps and sent most of you real snail mail. At that time some used to complain about duplicated letters. But as the years went by the computer became widespread and almost everybody, including almost all of the complainers adopted the duplicated letter, happily with a few photos included.



Wartburg Castle, Eisenach, Germany. June

As the years rolled by we, you, and the world went from almost no internet to almost ubiquitous broadband and so we gave up embodied mail and went for ethereal mail, producing a six-eight page opus, with as much as half a page about each of the months in the year. Now the pendulum is swinging back: on the incoming side, in the last few years we've been in one place long enough that we have actually received real Christmas cards. And on the outgoing side, we send enough email and post enough of our doings on our own website (note the new address: www.chandlerbates.net) that those who aren't overwhelmed by close family can keep detailed track of what's up with us. So this year our Christmas and New Year's missive gets scaled back from its past 4000+ words to this much more readable opus of 1000 words.



Berlin Fasching (Carnival) Parade. February

Why have we called this the year of two springs? Winter and our first spring of 2009 were spent in Berlin and to a lesser extent in surrounding parts of Germany. Berlin was easy to love; we loved having our apartment with internet, easy access to the center by bike, the wonderful array of things to do. Outside Berlin we went to the Baltic coast twice and reveled in the history. The highlight of our year was our 35 day and 996 km trip by bicycle around parts of old East Germany. There were rainy and cold days but memory tints them just right as being fun too. We liked the result of getting in shape

(although certain uphill portions negated that idea). Our summer, starting a few weeks late, was in Paris, our fifth stay in gay Paris, our first with a complete summer, and our first with bikes. We went to all the usual things like lectures and concerts and we biked all over town, along the canals, to Jan's birthday celebration, out into the suburbs, far and near. And time, as all time does, passed too quickly.



Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris Region. September

Our second spring came here on the outskirts of Christchurch. With 39 hours of travel and three airplane flights we went from approaching winter darkness in London to lengthening spring days in the southern hemisphere. On arrival the time horizon seemed limitless so we didn't rush out to do anything in particular. But we managed to get to know the CBD (Central Business district) and to love the Avon river with its flowered banks; to appreciate line 3 bus drivers who would stop in the middle of the street to let us get on if we didn't make it to the bus stop on time and, if we were weighted down with things from the supermarket would stop at our corner for us; to meet and love Patricia of the American Club and have Thanksgiving with the club and tour the C-17 that supplies researchers in Antarctica; and to know and wish we could bottle the beauty of the Port Hills and the Banks Peninsula.

Ten years ago we were in Hong Kong, about to celebrate the end of a millennium. Our first year away wasn't over and some of you were already asking how we could go so long without a home of our own. When we left we thought we'd be home in two or three years at most. We didn't know then we'd get caught up in China for a year or Asia for two, that we'd visit Australia twice and the southern hemisphere three times or that Mexico and Central America would, combined, host us for over a year and that we'd only touch on South America, and biggest surprise of all that we'd spend a combined two years in France and Germany. In other words, we didn't know how big the world was and how much we wanted to see all of it.



Lyttelton Harbor, The Port Hills, Christchurch. December

Nonetheless the feeling that it's time to go home grows. Jan knows – really knows – we need a home of our own. Here, for example, in Sumner (Christchurch) we have a true “villa” as the locals call a modest Southern California wood-frame house with its own flower-filled garden. We think “if this was only ours”, we could go wild and trim and prune and paint and do so much more. As it is, instead Jan dreams through real estate ads and imagines us in many parts of the world. Gerry has some feeling along these lines but is a bit more dubious about taking on responsibility and giving up the freedom to always let someone else do the heavy lifting and change our surroundings whenever we feel like it.



Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch. November

So, as we say good bye to 2009, our old friend, the year of two springs, we are a bit torn. We have plans through December, 2010. Then maybe it will be time to establish some new roots. Or maybe we'll finally get back to South America and dilly-dally for another year. Or maybe we'll do both.

Looking forward to seeing you all again in person if not this year then next. Happiest holiday greetings and warmest wishes for a wonderful New Year.

Jan and Gerry
December, 2009