

Our year 2011 can be summarized in six numbers: 4-2-1-3-1-1. What's that? These are the number of months we spent living in each city or country this past year. All but four weeks were in Europe, somewhat repeating our 2008-2009, but we still found it a bit strange, given that our first years of travel were mostly in Asia. Here in London the ring of English in our ears still comes across as strange.

The bookends for our 2011 were two stays in London: we were here through the Christmas and New Year Holidays in 2010-2011 and are now repeating that adventure. Both times, thanks to our friend Paloma, we got to spend just over two weeks in a lovely little house in North London while its primary occupants went away for the holidays. How lucky is that?

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After that first stay, in early January, 2010 we flew from London to Florence to spend three months in a flat 20 minutes by bus from the historic center. Initially we walked into the city but Gerry overused his legs and so thereafter we reluctantly relied exclusively on the bus. We hadn't been there but a few weeks when we decided to extend for another month. (Maybe we should have added another six months; but as economists say that would have had a great opportunity cost – we'd have had to give up the other stuff reported below.)



**Bronzini Fresco, Special Exhibition,  
Florence**



**Ducal Palace, Pisa**

*Note: For much more detail pictures can be zoomed using PDF readers to 400%*

You'll find pictures of Florence and links to our later Italian travels at <http://www.chandlerbates.info/ItalyTrav/Firenze2011/firenze.html>.

The flat itself was simple, with an old fashioned kitchen somewhat modernized – it had the remnants of an old wood stove. It was on the side of the building away from the street with a wonderful view onto a garden where we saw real Italians enjoying the Italian life; we wanted the garden for ourselves. While small, the apartment was big enough for guests; we were happy to have Sandro and Yvonne with us for several days and wished that others had been able to accept our invitations.

In Florence we got ourselves a first class education in Renaissance art and architecture. One of the things we learned in these places and subsequent visits to museums in Paris, Rome, and London is that every place has its favorite sons. For example, some Venetian artists that fill the walls of Bergamo or London museums are hardly represented in Florence. We also picked up some Italian history, which had been a big gap for us, helped by the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification. Last but by no means least, we got to go from non-existent Italian to reasonable comprehension, thanks to a nearly daily dose of TV and newspapers. Apart from a small problem remembering the difference between Italian and Spanish, we can now read Italian quite well and stutter quite a few words too.

From Florence we made a handful of day trips to see the closer famous Tuscan towns of Lucca, Siena, Pisa, San Gimignano, and Prato. Talk about Renaissance overload! But we loved each one of them and only wished we had had even more time to enjoy them. If we'd stayed in Florence longer we'd have repeated our visits to each. We also went to Bologna for the day, which is as close as some of the places in Tuscany, but not part of it.

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**Piazza Navona, Rome**



**Dante's Tomb, Ravenna**

As usual, when we arrived we didn't know what we'd be doing when we left. At one point we thought we had arranged a house-sit in Majorca; at another we thought we might set out on a trip on our Florence-acquired bicycles. But in the end we found a flat in Rome and moved south for two months. This time we were on the side of the building that opened on the street, so we got to know all about double parking and the ensuing honking and honking and we got to know the mailman's door buzz. Why didn't he have a key so he could come in to deliver the mail? The building and its neighborhood dated to 1924, according to the son of the owner, whom we met.

Imagine, only 3 km from the heart of Rome and in 1924 there were large estates yet to be broken up and built upon.

In Rome we arrived in full jasmine blossom season; every time we stepped out we were assailed with its sweet scent. A great reason to move to Rome! Our first days were church days, joining the enormous crowds attending the beatification of Jean Paul II. Afraid that Rome would be a bit of an anti-climax after Florence, we were instead delighted by its rich display of Italian baroque. We discovered the amazing paintings of Carravagio, which almost but not quite dislodged Ghirlandaio as Jan's favorite Italian painter. We managed to tour all the main government buildings, from Senate to Assembly to Prime Ministers; now when we see something on TV we raise our fist and shout “we were there.”

Besides the Forum, Colosseum, and other inner-city ancient sites we had great pleasure in walking a fine spring day along the Apian Way and taking the commuter train to the remains of Rome's pre-Christian port of Ostia Antica. Farther out we also spent a day visiting the wonderful old hill town of Orvieto for a renewed taste of the renaissance. Although a bit cold we fondly remember a lunch in a tiny square there. Viterbo leaves a bitter-sweet taste: the city is interesting, a bit like a Roman version of San Gimignano, and we're glad we spent the two hours to get there. But Jan overdid it and has suffered with her right hip ever since in her walking.

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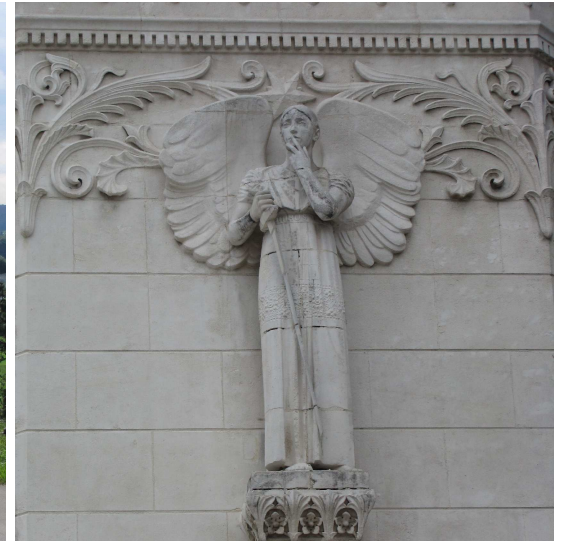
We left Rome at the end of June and undertook a month-long overland trip to Paris, via Switzerland. Traveling by bus and train, we covered, in chronological order, Assisi, Perugia, Urbino, Ravenna, Parma, Milan, and Bergamo. Italy thus became one of our favorite destinations ever; a nice combination of history and ease of living. We'd happily go back there and spend lots more time wandering churches

and ogling frescoes, oils, sculptures, and more. Perhaps one day we'll do a bicycle trip that takes in the parts of the Po plain that we missed, including Ferrera, Padua, Verona, and Mantua . Those who know her food tastes will be amazed to learn that Jan even learned to tolerate Italian food.

That hectic couple of weeks, just over halfway through the year, marked the end of our being mostly on our own and the start of months of more and more seeing friends and family.



**Field near Yvonne and Sandro, Henau, Switzerland**



**Basilica Detail, Lyon**

From Milan we went on to a wonderful chill-out week in Switzerland with our friends Yvonne and Sandro and their two darling boys Fernando and Luciano. We'd seen Fernando at 1 year old and now at 4 it was amazing to see the change. Fernando speaks Swiss German of course, but to Jan's great pleasure he could understand her standard German. Problem was, she couldn't understand anything he said back :-(. Gerry, as usual, repeated his claim that Swiss German, like Dutch, Welsh, and so many other “regional” languages, was going to disappear from the face of the earth. Sandro hotly debated that; Gerry said we'll see in 2099.

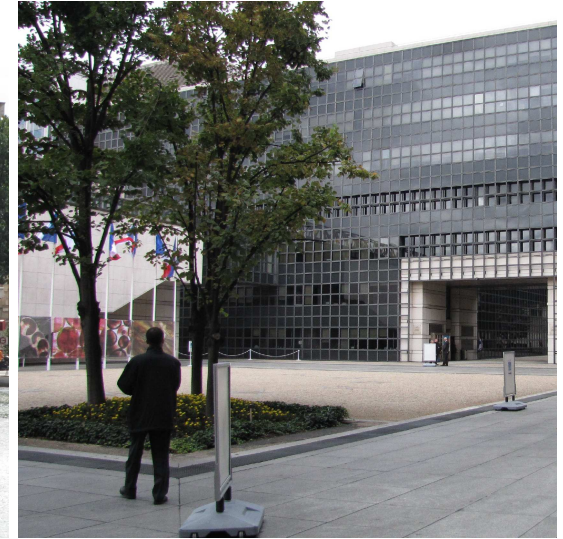
We both rate Switzerland as the most scenic country in the world, so how could we not be delighted to spend half of the week in a small village where you walk to the nearby farm to get your milk and spend the second half high up on a Swiss mountainside with a fabulous lake view. Add to that just about the biggest selection of music CD's and movie DVD's to entertain us and you will understand what a great time we had. Jan even got to practice a bit of German. We passed through but only spent moments in Zurich and Geneva.

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Our final stop en route to Paris was a long weekend in Lyon as a special birthday treat for Jan. She had never been there, but remembered her friend Mo saying how much she liked the city, so was very pleased to finally get to know it. In spite of some rather hot and muggy weather, we got a very good feeling for Lyon. The birthday dinner was at a sidewalk cafe just as Gerry's had been in Florence. Happily, this time we didn't need to be all bundled up.



**Canal Saint Martin, Paris**



**Ministry of Finance (“Bercy”), Paris**

And then, finally, back to Paris for our fifth stay in Veronica's apartment. We caught up with her on our arrival but missed her when we left. We got to see and play host to our friend Ann from Scarsdale and we caught up with François and Sylvie whom we hadn't seen in a long time. The rest of our stay was about as peaceful and quiet as any traveling Jan could wish.

Without checking the calendar it's hard to say what we did, but we did go to the Sunday fruit and vegetable market much more than ever before and ditto for swimming. We followed closely the Socialist Party primary to select its candidate for the 2012 presidential election. As part of that we went to a big, jam-packed rally

for François Hollande, the eventual winner. And we followed DSK's (Dominique Strauss Kahn) problems with sexual mores from his home territory. Along the way we revisited just about every famous Parisian monument; in good weather it was often to have a picnic looking at the marvels. Our one visit to the Louvre was spent in the Italian Galleries. We'd been there before but with six months education in Italy we understood so much more.

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Jan broke her stay to go to Darlington for a week. In September she learned that her youngest sister Carol had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Not even 50 yet and on her very first mammogram suspicious cells were discovered that ultimately led to surgery and reconstruction. Jan made an emergency visit to be able to spend a little time with Carol after her op. This was one time when email just wasn't enough. Thankfully, all went well and the prognosis looks good; three months later she is well on her way to complete recovery. Thank goodness.

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The year three-quarters gone, and with Veronica's return looming, we had to make some decisions about where next. Jan wanted to be in England in December for Carol's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. And that meant that we needed to find somewhere to go in November. Since December was all about Jan, Gerry got to choose the November destination. He bought books on Andalusia and Sicily and seriously considered them but they lost out to Morocco. Someday, somehow, we'll tour Sicily the slow, Chandler-Bates way.



**Medina from Skala Fortress, Essaouira    Snowy landscape in Atlas Mountains**

We flew from Paris to Marrakesh and spent a month making a big circle of about 2100 km from Marrakesh west to the Atlantic, north to the Rif, south through the Imperial cities of Fez and Meknes, then to the southeast to see some of the Atlas gorges, and finally back to Marrakesh via Ouarzazate. We were delighted that it snowed the day before our half-day bus trip; it made the mountains look magic. A favorite was the little town of Essaouira where we stayed in a tiny B&B run by a Franco-Moroccan couple that was as relaxed as the old Medina (walled city) that it was located in. The fresh air and sea breezes combined with wonderful Moroccan food were a real tonic.

You'll find some details and photos at

<http://www.chandlerbates.info/MenaTrav/Morocco2011/morocco2011.html>.

In some ways going on a trip like the one to Morocco is like going to a big, accidental cocktail party. In a Rabat garden we met a father-son pair from France and had a long discussion with them. On the bus to Fez we met a Spanish couple living and working in Amsterdam and over a fine dinner learned all about them and their two homes. Still another time we shared a collective taxi with an Italian living in Hungary and his Hungarian companions; a week later we ran into them again. We stayed in half a dozen riads, family run B&Bs built around a very decorated courtyard, and in everyone of them we had the chance to have long talks about how things were in Morocco. In these discussions Gerry found that he spoke more French than he ever managed to in France because the French almost all insist on speaking English while the Moroccans usually can't..

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Another flight, from Marrakesh to Manchester, and suddenly we had very short days and very chilly, damp, English weather. Rather than the usual “straight to Darlo” we visited four English cities in a week. First we got to know a bit of Stockport (where we stayed with Lindsay, Dave, and baby George) by taking the local historical walking tour. The next day we visited Jan's alma mater, the University of Bradford, where after over four decades nearly everything was unrecognizable, and then went on to a visit and spend a night with our friends Dennis and Margaret in York. We made it back to Darlo, but only for one night before setting off to celebrate sister Carol's birthday in Berwick-on-Tweed. With input from the rest of the family, Jan had the pleasure of writing a short poem that recounted Carol's life. A super time was had by all.



**Town Hall, Stockport**



**Natural History Museum, London**

An added benefit for us was a lunch in Berwick with our friend Cheryl, who lives not too far upstream on the left bank of the Tweed. Besides the partying and fattening up (of us; there went our Paris diet) we spent two cold but very clear days walking around the fortifications of Berwick (which should be called *-on-the-Sea*). Gerry tried to walk the 3 km from our hotel to town along the beach cliffs but the wind nearly toppled him over so he turned back.

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And now here we are back in London, seeing more old friends and when they are busy (often) going off to museums. We even caught up with Veronica, having missed her in Paris, as she returned home from visiting family in Plymouth. We've continued our love affair with Italian art by enjoying more of it at the National Gallery. By chance we timed our visit to St Paul's just right and took in a late afternoon Christmas Carol service there, singing along and ogling the magnificence. Our entry and exit was through a decrepit tent village of the "Occupy" sort. As we did last year, we'll have Christmas dinner with Mick and Dinah and we hope to take in a West End play with them, too.

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While the year has been very positive there were sad moments. The saddest was learning of the deaths of family members and friends. We unhappily learned that we'll never again have the pleasure of the company of Vic in New York or Patricia in Christchurch, both so charming. Sadly, Margaret, our sister-in-law Sandra's mother, also succumbed. We will miss them all.

A much more positive note came almost at years end. Jan finally became a professional translator of Russian. Professional as in paid! She started her Russian studies in high school in 1965 and carried on at University, but was a poor student. Since our 2005 trip to Russia, however, she has subjected herself to an almost daily regime of reading 10 pages of Russian and has now gone through dozens of books. Via a web-based translators' exchange she got an offer and earned a crisp 100 euros. Through the same website we bid on and got the translation of a physics book from French to English. The language pair is old hat for us, but past jobs (we do three or four a year; Gerry is the reviewer) have been in economics and telecommunications. So it is exciting to be about to start on a 250-page physics effort.

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And now our friends, the end is nigh! Not just of this letter, not of the world, and perhaps not of the euro, but of our peripatetic ways. Shortly, we think, when people ask us where we live we'll be able to give a simple but honest answer. In other words, we're about to become real homeowners. After a lot of thought we've decided to take advantage of the fall in home prices and find something in the Washington, DC area. By the end of January we expect to have renewed our New Jersey driver's licenses, bought a car, and headed south. It will have been just a few months short of thirteen years since we left the good ole' USA to see the world.

We've got a flight to the USA on January 4<sup>th</sup> – Newark, to be exact. When we were last in the USA in September, 2007 we hardly imagined it would be a full four and a half years before our return. Once there we'll spend about three weeks seeing a whole gaggle of friends in the NYC/NJ area. One of them we'll not have seen in 37 years. The reunion comes about because of the internet age; now it is possible to find just about anyone.

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To sum it all up, this is how we see it (with apologies to Joe Khajadourian, Ross Golan, and Alex Schwartz):

*And now, the end is here  
And so we face the final flight  
Our friends, we'll say it clear  
We'll state the case, which we know is right  
We've lived a life that's full  
And traveled half of nearly ev'ry place  
And more, much more than this, we did it our way.*

*Regrets, we have a few  
But then again, too few to mention  
We did what we had to do  
And saw it through without exemption  
We never planned a charted course,  
nor took planned steps along the byway  
But more, much more than this, we did it our way.*

*Yes, there were times, We're sure you know  
When we wondered when it would be through  
But in bus, boat, and train, when there was doubt  
We chewed it up and spit it out  
We handled 12 years in all, spring, summer and fall and did it our way.*

*We've loved, we've laughed -- and oh yes, we've cried  
Now we've had our fill, our share of bumpy rides  
And now, we find it a matter of pride,*

*To think that homeless no more will we be  
And may we say, not in a shy way  
"Oh, no, oh, no, not us, not homeless anyway"*

*For what is a couple, what have they got?  
If not a ticket and a destination, then they have naught  
Unless it be a three bedroomer with two baths cum PC  
And an easy Metro ride to DOWNTOWN DC!  
And yes, the memories, the memories that we did it our way.*

To Each And All, to All and Each, we wish a

*Humungous Happy Hanukah  
Super Gigantic Merry Christmas  
Happiest of New Years  
A Wonderful 2012*

*Gerry and Jan*