Greetings!

As a child, I learned that being raised Ukrainian orthodox gave me a special advantage over my non-orthodox school mates–I had two sets of holidays, while they only had one. Not only did we get to have a traditional "American" Christmas, with the tree and gifts and carols and Rudolph and Santa and all that, but we also got to celebrate our Ukrainian Christmas. On *Sviat Vechir* (Christmas Eve) we would fast until we could see the light of the first star, then we would have the traditional feast. Beginning on Christmas, and continuing through *Schedriy Vechir*, New Year's Day, there was *kolyada*, going carolling–we would go, carrying our paper and gilt star, to houses of friends and strangers, sing, and be rewarded with candy and other treats. We had a Christmas pageant at church, *Yalynka*; I would be a snowflake and my brother a bunny, and then *Dyid Moroz* (Grandfather Frost) would hand out presents. And on *Yordane*, the Epiphany, water was blessed[1]. As an adult I appreciate this dichotomy of the commercial and traditional aspects of Christmas, but I also appreciate a really good excuse for getting this letter and my Christmas cards out late....they're still in time (maybe) for Ukrainian Christmas, my *real* Christmas!

As I sit down to begin to write my annual letter, it would appear that winter is finally here, at least what any born and bred Michigander would consider a proper winter: snow and sleet and ice and cloudy skies. The landscape, although I cannot see it from this small cell they call an office, is covered in white.

> Oh the weather outside is frightful,
> But the fire is so delightful,
> And since we've no place to go,
> Let it snow! Let is snow! Let it snow!

November dark and dreary has been banished, December white and wintry is here. May it last. Those of us from the North know that you can't have a proper Christmas without snow and the threat of frostbite; not for us relaxing on the beach, working on suntans and drinking silly drinks out of coconut shells with miniature umbrellas[2].

For Christmas to be real one must suffer a bit, climatically and spiritually[3]. Windshields need to be scraped of frost, cars need to be cleared of snow, and all this done in the dark at subzero temperatures[4] in a howling wind. Toes and noses and the tips of ears need freezing. How else can you properly enjoy lounging in front of a nice, big fire on the hearth? We in the Midwest are the descendants, psychologically if not genetically, of the Puritans, Lutherans and other grim-faced religious reformers, and any pleasure is suspect, especially unearned pleasure. One must suffer first in order to justify enjoyment. Thus our love of winter. That, and, aesthetically at least, a barren landscape with snow is just so much prettier than a barren landscape with mud and brown foliage.

> I'm dreaming of a white Christmas,
> Just like the ones I used to know,

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[1] For several days thereafter, the priest would visit our houses and sprinkle them with holy water, to bless them for the new year. The visits were announced by a series of surreptitious phone calls, fellow parishioners warning each other of his approach. *Every* room would be entered and blessed, so there was a lot of hurried cleaning!

[2] One of my Australian friends tells me of travelling in the south of France at Christmas time many years ago. She noted two women having a picnic on the cold and windy beach. "I knew immediately they were Australians," she said, "for us Christmas is barbecue and a picnic on the beach."

[3] Although recent studies have shown that the suicide rate, contrary to popular belief, does not skyrocket during the holiday season, the Midwest is still a bastion of SAD (seasonal affective disorder). Because of short days and cloudy ones at that, sufferers do not get exposed to enough sunlight and go quite mad.....er, depressed. Shining full spectrum light on one's self for two to three hours a day has been shown to be therapeutic. Some sufferers wear head lamps; others attach small devices behind their knees which expose the skin to light.

[4] That's subzero Fahrenheit–we're talking -18ºC and below. Now **that's** cold.

Where the treetops glisten and children listen
To hear sleighbells in the snow.

In recent years, the winters have been disappointing. Whether you blame el Niño, la Niña, global warming, or simply too much hot air emanating from Washington, D.C. and other world capitols, the result has been the same–wet, dreary, muddy winters, gray Christmases:

They said there'll be snow at Christmas,
They said there'll be peace on earth,
But instead it just kept on raining,
A vail of tears for the Virgin Birth.

The winters of my youth, as I recall them, were always cold and snowy[5]. I remember huge snows, massive snows, on a regular basis. There was the year the snow was so deep our street was impassable; my Dad had to hike in from the main road, and bring the groceries in on my sled. Then there were the ice storms, where we'd wake up and the outdoors would be a fairyland, everything coated with clear, glassy ice. The snow would be covered with sheets of ice, too, and we would break it and pile the pieces into ice forts.

There was the one Christmas we went away. In 1967 my Dad drove us to my grandparents' dairy farm in central Wisconsin. I remember being bundled up in blankets in the back of the car, trying to keep warm. At the farm, we cut down our own tree and decorated it, a first for me[6]. On Christmas morning, the furnace went out; we huddled to keep warm while it was stoked with wood and the house slowly heated up again. Then we ran downstairs an opened presents I still recall–Chinese checkers for me, a "Big Shot" tank for my brother. Simple gifts, and not many of them, but appreciated all the more for that. Then, later, as we were trying to return home, a blizzard trapped us on the farm. There were drifts as high as the house; the car got stuck in one and had to be pulled it out with the tractor. We spent New Year's Day on the farm, too.

So, anyway, Christmas, my most and least favorite time of the year, is here. Most favorite, because I love the pagan pageantry of it all. I love the tree, the candles, the decorations, the fire in the fireplace. I love getting together with friends and family that I haven't seen in ages. I love watching small children discovering it all for the first time, their starry-eyed belief in Santa, and the joy of Christmas morning. Least favorite, because of the work it entails–decorating the yard, decorating the tree, cleaning the house, sending out cards and letters, cooking and baking and mixing up gallons and gallons of home-made Bailey's. And the worst task of all–shopping! This year I've decided that, if it can't be bought at a hardware store or bookshop, I won't be giving it for Christmas!

Quite a few years ago, a local band called the Dog Latin Choir released a Christmas single (on vinyl, so you know it's been a while) called *Politeness in the Holiday Season*. It goes, in part

Show some politeness in the holiday season,
Lay down your bayonets, guns and knives,
Show some compassion to those less fortunate,
Be a nice person for once in your life.

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[5] But not necessarily the Christmases. According to a report I heard recently on NPR, although most of us remember Christmases as being white, this is not usually the case. In fact, there are only two places in the continental USA that are guaranteed a white Christmas–one is International Falls, Minnesota, and the other I can't remember, but it wasn't Detroit. Most parts of the US don't get any significant snowfall until sometime in January. Another reason why the orthodox calendar is better–our Christmas, January 7th, usually <u>is</u> white.

[6] When we were very young,, our tree had resulted from a trip to the tree lot. Later, our tree became plastic, and our traditional Christmas would consist of bringing the box down from the attic, and reassembling the tree, trying to remember which color-tipped branch went in which hole. Not Dickens, to say the least. Our tree was at least green–my aunt and uncle had one of those shiny silver trees that you projected colored lights on. I think it was in reaction to all this and, with fond memories of that Wisconsin Christmas, that, when I moved out on my own, I began cutting my own trees.

Give the legless bum on the skateboard
A portion of your ill-gotten gains,
Surrender your seat on the bus to an old lady,
To be sufficiently polite you must take great pains.

Thank your God you've got a nice warm bed
And be thankful you've got a roof over your head,
Thank your sweetheart for being your girl,
And thank your parents for bringing you into this world.

I think we could all learn from this. Especially the Republican Party, who've shown little in the way of kindness or charity to the American public. After putting us through the debacle of the impeachment trial, and making the US the laughingstock of the world, they continue to do anything in their power to obstruct the running of the US government[7] and to try and get Bill Clinton[8]. Hundreds of judgeships remain unfilled[9], many members of the cabinet have been indicted[10], and ambassadorships are delayed[11]

But enough depressing political ranting. Think of how much entertainment value our political system has provided us this year! Donald Trump, Cybil Shepard and Warren Beatty are contemplating runs for president, with the Donald willing and able to produce a series of First Strumpets if elected. Jesse Ventura, a former professional wrestler, whose trademarks were his feather boa and shaved head, is governor of the state of Minnesota[12]. Pat Buchanan is making another run for president, and recently published a book claiming that Hitler was simply

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[7] Which is, according to them, inherently evil, the great Satan, run by jack-booted thugs. On this point they are in agreement with the Ayatollah and their minions. Unless, of course, it is handing out farm subsidies to mega-agricultural-corporations or other forms of welfare for the rich. Welfare for the poor and needy, on the other hand....

[8] I saw the a cartoon in the Funny Times the other day that perfectly illustrates this point. It depicts two GOP senators being blown off the face of the earth (what a pleasant thought...), and one is holding a piece of paper that says "Nuke Treaty Rejection":

Senator 1: Did we really want to blow up everybody on the planet?
Senator 2: Yes, as long as one of them is Bill Clinton!

[9] The Republicans are delaying in hopes that a Republican president will be elected in 2000 and then he (and it will be a he) will appoint judges more to their liking. Meanwhile, the courts are tied up, and cases can take years to go to trial. "Justice postponed is justice denied."

[10] To the expense of many millions of dollars with no significant convictions. It should be noted that there were more officials indicted and convicted during the Reagan and Bush administrations.

[11] The appointment of an ambassador to Liechtenstein was delayed for months because the nominee was gay. Apparently Jesse Helms felt that he would be a bad influence on the people of Liechtenstein, although they didn't seem particularly concerned. In the end, Clinton gave him a recess appointment. When I last checked, Liechtenstein had not become a modern Sodom or Gomorrah, nor even a Fire Island.

[12] Other wrestlers have not fared as well this election year. In mayoral voting, pro wrestler Jerry "The King" Lawler finished third in Memphis, Tenn. (11 % of the vote), and Outlaw Josey Wales IV finished third in Houston (10%), and African-American Albert Jones finished third in the Louisiana governor's race, six weeks after ballot officials rejected his attempt to list himself as Albert "Super Nigger" Jones.

misunderstood[13]. All the Republican candidates, those watchdogs of the public purse and enemies of welfare, with the exception of John McCain, bravely supported continuing price supports for gasohol during the Iowa debates[14]. At those same debates, Bush, Orrin Hatch and Gary Bauer all, when asked to name their favorite political philosopher, named Jesus Christ. Funny....I always had him pegged as a *religious* philosopher. And George Dubya, now that he's figured out he may have to do something besides show up and feign compassion to be nominated, is spending his holidays cramming, trying to learn the state capitols and names of foreign heads of state.

Enough politics. Let's discuss the things that really matter–my garden, for instance. This was a much better year than 1998 (a drought year.) The year began with a huge blizzard and cold snap which shut down Metro Airport, trapping passengers on planes for many hours, and most of the city of Detroit. The storm also killed some of my more tender perennials, with many plants disappearing completely. Others were less severely affected–the buddleias (butterfly bushes), which had reached enormous proportions due to the previous mild winters, were killed down to the ground; they grew back, although not quite as huge.

The rains came early and heavy, making for an ugly spring, but providing a head start for most of the plants. The lilacs bent under the weight of their flowers. With the exception of my asiatic lilies (which have suffered the depredations of my now largely exterminated moles), most everything thrived this summer. The hostas around my trees in front just grew and grew; the basil exploded; the currants, gooseberries, strawberries, and mulberries were loaded down with berries; my plum tree had masses of fruit, which the birds, squirrels and kids apparently enjoyed. Even the new sweet cherry trees had a few berries. There were huge numbers of hazelnuts, upon which the squirrels feasted. As always, the tomatoes were largely a loss, even though I planted only "wilt resistant" varieties. This fall, there were huge mounds of mums, and lots of pears, peaches, and wormy apples, and a bumper crop of acorns. Walking barefoot became a dangerous undertaking. I planted huge numbers of new bulbs, and hope to be rewarded by masses of daffodils, lilies and irises this spring. We'll see.

As for the family, everyone is doing well. My parents continue on with their hobbies: gardening, embroidery, woodworking, and keeping an eye on my house while I'm out of town. They also spend a lot of time babysitting and spoiling their grandchildren. Their house remains a child's Eden, but without the forbidden fruit. Aladdin didn't have it as good! If a ride around the yard is desired; out comes the tractor. If there aren't enough chestnuts on the ground to play with, Duce (my Dad) and Baba (my Mom) will shake the tree. Several trips to the playground at the end of the street are de rigueur, with the poor, tired Fuzz being carried back if needed. Pancakes are served any time of day or night, as are pudding and ice cream. Skittlesand Mentos are available on demand. There are lots of toys, crayons, play-doh, videos and books, and lots of love. As for discipline...not their concern! Unconditional love is why grandparents were put on this earth.

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[13] John McCain and Donald Trump each responded with brave and principled statements denouncing Hitler. George W. Bush , apparently trying not to alienate the Nazi vote, demurred.

[14] Most of the money from the price supports goes to Archer Daniels Midland, and Iowa-based company which has contributed quite generously to the Republican party and its candidates. It has, even at this level of giving, gotten back about 1000-to-1 on its investment. According to an article in Time magazine (November 9, 1998), " The king of corporate welfare may be Archer Daniels Midland Co. The global agricultural-commodities dealer has artfully preserved one of the more blatant welfare programs–a subsidy for ethanol that has already cost taxpayers more than $5 billion in the 1990s. Some **$3 billion** of that has gone to ADM.

"In return, ADM's famously connected chairman, Dwayne Andreas, has passed a lot of money to government types, both willingly and unwillingly. On the voluntary side, ADM contributed **$2.8 million**...in the 1990s. On the involuntary side, it was compelled to pay a $100 million fine to the Justice Department in 1996...Ethanol is a corn-based fuel additive subsidized by taxpayers (and lobbied for by ADM). It is added to gasoline to reduce pollution and oil imports–although it's questionable whether it really does either. (Even if every ear of corn grown on American farms were turned into ethanol, the U.S. would still have to rely on foreign sources for more than 30% of its oil. But then, of course, there would be no corn to eat or use for feed.) Further, ethanol costs more to produce than it can be sold for on the market, thereby necessitating a 5.4[cent]-per-gal. tax credit (also lobbied for by ADM)."

This year we had two additions to the family, and may soon have two more[15]. Most recently, while I was in Japan, Alex's wife, Wendy, gave birth to a wee daughter, Dmitria Alexandra, in Chicago, where they now live. She appears to be a nice enough child, small and red. I barely had time to make her acquaintance at Thanksgiving, the last time she was in town; her aunts wouldn't let go of her. Last May, "little" Roman Michael Petrusha, aka Romko, was born to cousin Andy and his wife, Laurie M. He weighed in at a whopping 9#1 on May 22, 1999, and has grown to be a sweet, smiling , pleasant child, so much so that he has inspired both of his aunts, Lisa and Helene, to contemplate reproducing themselves. He has also grown quite huge–23 pounds, or only three pounds less than Fuzz, who is now $2^1/_2$ years old (going on six).

Fuzz (aka Maria) has finally grown a bit of hair and is, in the words of her parents, a "pistol". She may refer to herself as the baby, but she refuses to act or be treated like one. She hangs out with the older kids, and wants to do what they do. Somehow, she's managed to miss out on the "terrible twos" altogether; whether this is because they are indistinguishable from her baseline personality, or because she's just decided to be five, is hard to tell. Bill claims that her personality is a cross between that of mine and cousin Lisa's. This was not meant as a compliment, I fear. Fuzz is stubborn, bull-headed, opinionated, and quite set in her ways. "No" is not a word she chooses to hear, although she uses it quite a bit. She may be small, but she is scrappy. There is something, though, that gives her true joy–Winnie the Pooh. Bedtime cannot possibly begin until she's tucked in with Piglet, and anything Pooh-related will send her into squeals (and I mean loud, piercing squeals) of delight. Unlike her siblings, she's not a Baba's child; Mom is usually number one with her, but lately she's begun clinging to her Dad. He can't understand it (as it goes against her usual mercenary grain), but is enjoying it while it lasts.

Nick is growing, too, and occasionally asserting his independence from Kalyna, although he still adores and admires her; she is the sun to his moon. He is a sweet child, always willing to share and look out for others. It's Nick's last year of relative freedom, though–he soon turns five and, this fall, will be off to school full-time. He should do well, though, being the social creature that he is. He is also becoming the sportsman; although he, like his sisters, enjoys books, he prefers to do things which require the expenditure of huge amounts of energy, like running around in circles. He loves sports, especially any which involve the use of a ball. This year Santa brought him a bat, and a variety of balls: baseball, softball, basketball, soccer ball, football, foursquare ball, volleyball....Nick was in ecstasy. He also enjoys our lengthy tickling sessions; amid long bouts of uncontrollable giggling and energetic wriggling, he keeps asserting that he's not ticklish! For Nick, this was a Pokemon[16] Christmas, with all sorts of horrible little creatures under the tree (I mean, besides the kids). I find it amazing how much effort kids can and will expend to learn the names of hundreds of these creatures, all those really odd Japanese words. I guess it's akin to the dinosaur craze of years past, with both sorts of knowledge having about the same amount of real-world value.

Kalyna has grown quite old; she's seven and in full day school this year, and is loving it. She was born to do this–there is chalk dust in her veins. She loves homework and classes, and finds Sundays boring because here is no school (Saturdays she goes to Ukrainian school, which she still enjoys, although it's not the same without Aunt Vera teaching). Kalyna is reading quite well now, far above her grade level; she sort of skipped the kiddie-book phase (Dick, Jane and their lot) and went straight to narrative. Although she prefers books with lots of pictures, she is beginning to enjoy the written word for and of itself. For Christmas, I bought her the first three of the Harry Potter[17] books; she should do well with them, once she gets going. Kalyna still loves Barbie (although none of us can fathom why), and this year, to our even greater amazement, asked Santa for gifts having to do with make-up. Santa brought

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[15] In late-breaking news, cousin Vera has just learned that she will probably be able to adopt twin girls from Ukraine. They are now 16 months old, and Vera has been working on this adoption since she first met them while delivering supplies to orphanages last May. Things may yet fall apart, as they often do over there, but we're hoping Masha and Dasha, to be renamed Ivanka and Sofia, will be joining our family soon.

[16] For the two or three of you out there who may not have heard of them, these are cute little fuzzy Japanese cartoon creatures who all have fangs, horns and special lethal skills. They appear in a poorly-animated cartoon series, in which they fight each other and run a successful marketing campaign.

[17] At least in part because I wanted to read them. They were great, well written with good plot development, and kept me on the edge of my seat. I am eagerly anticipating the next four volumes!

her a Make-Up Angelica[18], which she happily played with all day. Where she gets this from, neither her mother nor I can guess. [19] We're hoping she grows out of it. One thing she hasn't grown out of is being Baba's girl. She remains the ultimate Baba loyalist; Fuzz and Nick may love their Baba, but not with the passion and selflessness of Kalyna[20].

As for me, I continue to play the good aunt, and to work at Huron Valley hospital. It's a living, and it's still fun to be involved in the birth of babies. I keep thinking about doing a fellowship, but the number of hours that would entail is a bit frightening; that, and it would severely cut into my travel time. It remains an option, as does enlisting with the WHO or Doctors without Borders (if either organization will have me).

I'm still having fun playing with my Macintosh computer; I've found e-mail to be quite a boon, and have enjoyed keeping in touch so much more easily with so many more people. Besides lots of personal notes, I've also written and distributed five long group letters, in which I wrote about my travels and doings, about the garden, the kids, and the books I'd read, and even included recipes. If you have an e-mail address, *please* send me an e-mail message at my current main address,

lubap@earthlink.net

so I can add you to my address book. I have another addresses, that I use only when travelling:

lpetrusha@yahoo.com

It's much simpler to use the internet to access Yahoo! that to try to connect with my own server abroad. (I no longer use my HotMail address, because it attracts too much spam, is a bit clumsy to use, and I have my doubts about its security). My web page is still in its nascent stages; when it's ready, I will let you know. For my analog friends, please check your address books to make sure you have my correct address. The post office has finally settled on a mailing address for me; it is

2401 Burleigh Avenue
West Bloomfield MI 48324-3623

I no longer reside in Union Lake, although I haven't moved, and the last four digits of the zip code get your mail to me much more quickly. Take advantage of the new year[21] and update your address books!

I've kept busy with my travels this year, spending eighteen weeks on the road. It's almost too much to write about in one letter. I will try, but keep in mind that I am leaving out quite a bit. After all, how can you condense two months in India or a month in Japan to just a few paragraphs?

India

There's something about India that keeps drawing me back. I first visited India in 1992, touring Bombay, the world's busiest city (with its maimed beggars and extreme poverty), and Goa, hippie capitol and Portuguese Christian enclave (with crumbling colonial buildings, massive cathedral, and St. Francis Xavier under glass). It was an interesting cultural experience, and I thought I'd gotten India out of my system. However, I hadn't had a chance to see any nice Hindu temples.....so, when I got invited to a small travel medicine conference in the south of India in 1998, I went[22]. I became fascinated by India. I didn't think India had all the answers, or even very many of them, but the

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[18] The small evil girl-child from Rugrats, who, I am convinced, may be the Anti-Christ. If not, she is certainly one of his minions. We are living in end-times, after all.

[19] Laurie is an engineer, and except for a brief (and quite uncharacteristic, she assures me) stint as a WSU cheerleader, has never been much of the glamour girl. I, a somewhat radical feminist, none-the-less used to wear lots of make-up, back in my punk days, but it consisted of black lipstick and nail polish, heavy eyeliner and mascara, purple hair dye and heavy-duty hair gel, and pale white/green skin cover (sort of proto-Goth). Neither of these models could have inspired Kalyna's passion for pink lipstick and rouge.

[20] At the family Christmas dinner gift exchange this year, Baba got a large Santa figurine which she really liked. Kalyna broke down in tears and wept inconsolably when she thought somebody (as part of our gift game) might take it from Baba!

[21] as opposed to the new millennium, which, as everyone knows, begins on January 1, 2001

[22] A detailed description of last year's trip can be found in last year's Christmas letter, covering the medical visits, and the tour I took with Jane of Tamil Nadu, visiting

people I met were friendly, the culture fascinating, and the food spicy and wonderful. Even though I'd now seen more than enough temples, I had to go back.

So I did. This time I went as a physician volunteer/observer to Vellore, in southern India, near Madras. I returned to CMC (Christian Medical College) with no real idea of what my role would be. I had visions of healing the sick and poor; instead, I spent a lot of time reading, rounding, teaching and learning. It was a valuable experience.

I arrived in Vellore from Madras by car, after a long plane trip from London via Bombay, and was soon ensconced in Sunset House, fourth floor. As a single female, I was put up out of harm's and temptation's ways with all the other single women. No men were allowed on our floor–a sign prominently stated this. The rooms were large, spartan and concrete, with a private bath and a view of the countryside: dusty plains, out of which poked the rocky hills of the Eastern Ghats. The medical school campus, on which I was housed, was a green oasis in the surrounding desert. I had supper that night at the Big Bungalow with members of the Vellore Board, and gained insight into CMC.

The Big Bungalow was to figure prominently in my life for the next two months. It had been Ida Scudder's home, converted to a guest house after her death. Here short-term guests and visiting dignitaries would stay. There was a pleasant verandah out back, where we volunteers would have breakfast in the (relatively) cool mornings, while catching up on local news (gossip) and the news of the world (the *Times of India* and the *Hindu* newspapers had good international coverage). The bus would pick us up just outside to take us to the main hospital in town. We would have supper, together, around the long table; formal departmental functions and dinner parties were also held here. On Sunday, our day of rest, we would often sit long hours on the verandah, enjoying the garden, reading, talking, and watching the birds.

My first morning I was awakened by loud Hindu temple music[23] and the call of the aptly-named brain-fever bird. I met my new colleagues, the other volunteers, over a breakfast of toast, tea and egg[24]. They were doctors, nurses, and social work volunteers, and hailed from all over: Austria, Switzerland, Ethiopia, Germany, Australia, England and the USA . The bus came and took us in to the city, and to work. The medical school campus, where we were staying, was in the garden suburb of Bagayam, the hospital in Vellore proper.

Vellore (population 330,000+) is an old, dusty, market town, known throughout India for its production of bidis (tiny cigars), its fort[25], and **CMC Hospital**. The hospital was founded 100 years ago by Ida Scudder, a daughter of American missionaries. She had spent her childhood in southern India, and then returned to the US to go to school, having no intention of becoming a missionary herself but, rather, finding a rich husband and living a life of ease (or so her official biography states). On a trip back to visit her parents, she watched as women died for lack of proper obstetrical care, because there were no female physicians (due to religious constraints, men were not allowed to take care of them). She returned to the US and studied medicine. Once she'd completed her degree, she raised funds and came back to start a clinic; it grew into a hospital and medical school,the first in India to train women doctors.

CMC grew to become, in the 1960s, the referral center for all of Southeast Asia. Medicine in Asia has improved since those days, but CMC is still the referral center for eastern India, with patients travelling from thousands of kilometers away to receive consultations and care.

I reported to the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, which they called "OG". I was placed in the third division, OG3, with Dr. Padmini Jasper, the current head of the department, and began to work. In the morning I would join them for rounds through the obstetric and gynecologic wards, and check on the laboring patients. It was fascinating

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nature preserves, Pondichery (former French colony), and lots and lots of temple towns. Write or e-mail me if you would like a copy.

[23] I apparently caught the tail-end of a major Hindu festival that required the playing of music at loud volumes at 0430 each morning. The volume was loud but had been much louder in earlier weeks, I was assured. I never located the temple, but it sounded as though it was right under my window sill.

[24] Despite all the wonderful spicy breakfast food available in India, we invariably had toast, egg and tea. Jens got to be good friends with the staff, and could occasionally talk them into French toast. Once in a while, we would get idli (rice dumplings) and coconut chutney, a real treat.

[25] This fort without a king, one to the "Seven Wonders of Vellore" (the river without water, the college without knowledge, the women without beauty...), is a 16th century Vijayanagar fort that was occupied by the British in 1760 after the death of Tipu Sultan. It is built of granite blocks, surrounded by a moat, and is being restored as part of a campaign promote tourism in Vellore.

for me to see our differences in management of common conditions; this was due in part to training[26] and in part to economic considerations[27]. It made me reconsider what we do at home–how much of it is really necessary,and how much is rote, and how much done for medical-legal reasons?

Twice a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays, we would have clinic[28], where huge numbers of patients would be seen: some local, for routine obstetric care, and some from far away, for gynecological consults. Often these consults were for second opinion for hysterectomy. There are many doctors in India, not as well trained and much more mercenary that the ones at CMC, who have opened their own small hospitals and perform much unnecessary surgery and other procedures to make a comfortable living. I heard horror stories of young women having there uteri removed for benign conditions and being left infertile[29]. Patients would tell me that many of these doctors would asses a patient's wealth, and then treat them until the money was all gone. This seemed a particular problem in West Bengal, from where a disproportionate number of our patients seemed to come; many would sell everything they owned to come to Vellore. We also had days where we did mostly ultrasound, and OR (GYN surgery days); I spent the latter visiting other clinics (perinatology) and divisions (reproductive endocrinology, the infertility clinic; Vellore has the capability to do in vitro fertilization and lots of other high tech procedures).

It is the custom, in India, for the parents of the wife to take care of her and pay for her first pregnancy and delivery. We had, in our clinic, many young women who would move to Vellore, with their parents, for the last two months of their pregnancy, so that they could obtain their care at Vellore and have a healthy baby. We also had a large number of poorer patients; some were city patients[30], but others were from outlying towns, and had been referred to Vellore because of pregnancy complications. The most unfortunate patients were those who never came to clinic, but were sent to us in labor, with horrible problems. Some were just obstructed labors who just needed a c-section, but others had dead babies because of ruptured uteri , severe preeclampsia or eclamptic seizures. Many had been brought from the village to a small clinic by bullock cart, and then to us by motorized transport; it was a long trip, and they were often very sick.

There were always patients in the labor unit; it was here that I enjoyed spending my time, discussing cases with

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[26] Many of the physicians here were trained, to some degree, in Britain, and many of the textbooks used had a strong British influence. Despite independence, India still has strong ties to England educationally.

[27] India is a poor country, they cannot afford to provide the same level of care that we do here in the States. The government does not provide a lot in the way of spending for health, and most of the people cannot afford very much. CMC is not government supported, and relies on fees for its services. Much care is discounted, but at least a minimal payment is expected from patients, because it is felt that free care is not properly appreciated. The rich patients seeking tertiary care services like assisted reproduction and CAT scans subsidize the poor ones.

[28] There was an amazing lack of privacy in the clinic. The door to the consultation room was left open, and people wandered in and out, dropping off charts, asking questions. At any given time there were a bunch of men peering in. Exams were performed in a small curtained area off to the side.

[29] Fertility is of paramount importance here; lacking social safety nets, it is necessary to have children to assure support in one's old age. Interestingly, on rounds,almost every OB patient is presented as having "x year history of infertility" (time between marriage and first conception). I suppose women who do not conceive immediately after the wedding are considered infertile.

[30] I learned that obstetric patients at CMC received free care under two circumstances:

1. If they lived in the Vellore cachement area served by CMC and presented for care prior to twenty weeks gestational age.
2. If they were local residents and had a post partum tubal ligation done.

This of course did not stop patients on the labor wards from asking for concessions, pleading poverty. Jiji said that one of the indicators they use to assess wealth is whether a woman's top matched her sari; if it did, the family had money and could afford to pay.

the residents and students, and helping manage them. Unlike the US, there was rarely a lively debate about anything, because, unlike the US, there is no fear of dead silence; Indians can quite contentedly sit in complete silence for long periods of time[31], where in the US someone would say something, anything, just to get rid of the silence. I was used to students who would engage and challenge me; here they fear being wrong, so do not like to even venture a guess. It is a very different method of learning. We discussed the management of preeclampsia at length, and I helped teach a few of the younger doctors how to interpret fetal monitor tracings. Electronic fetal monitoring is still fairly new to India, and old hat for us in the States. I taught them not to panic, and how to mange decelerations non-surgically[32] .

Hospitals in India are hard for Americans to imagine. We are used to modern, pristine facilities; ask an American patient to stay in a semi-private room, and they feel put out. Round-the-clock nursing and other services are expected and provided. And, unless you're one of the forty million uninsured, most of it costs next to nothing, as insurance picks up the costs . It's easy to demand nothing but the best when you're not paying. In India, the government provides some very basic care in government hospitals, but this is usually not of very good quality and is the last resort of the poor. Most hospitals, and all of the better ones, are private or religious institutions.

CMC provides good care, but the facilities are spartan–large wards, with long rows or beds, and only breezes or fans for ventilation. The beds are metal with a thin mattress; one set of linens is provided, and it is up to the patient's family to keep them clean and laundered. Food is also provided by the family. Nurses are there to provide nursing care, not maid services. A patient, male or female, cannot be admitted into the hospital unless accompanied by a female relative, who will stay with them, sleeping on the floor next to the bed, feeding and cleaning them. The doors of the hospital are closed at night to men; only women caregivers are allowed to remain. Labor wards are similar, a long row of labor / delivery beds, with only curtains between for privacy. Supplies are used more sparingly; gloves are washed, sterilized, and reused. Plastic is less common–glass IV bottles and syringes prevail. But the medical care, at CMC at least, is good; as in many other countries, it is the resources that are restricted, not the knowledge.

While at CMC, I arranged to visit other medical facilities, trying to experience more of the scope of Indian medicine. Two were affiliated with CMC, and the other a mission hospital:

CHAD: this is the community health and development branch of CMC. CHAD is the primary care branch of CMC ; here the medical students learned how, using limited resources, to provide care to patients and their families in a community setting. On clinic days, there would be huge numbers of people queuing up to be seen; obstetric care and some surgery was done on site. More complicated patients were transferred to the main hospital. There was also a leprosy unit attached to the center. Leprosy is still common in India, and learning to care for lepers is important.

RUHSA: the rural unit of CMC. It was much further out in the countryside, staffed mostly by new doctors just out of training, and with even more limited equipment and supplies. Both CHAD and RUHSA have outreach programs; the medical staff would take a bus out to remote villages, and run clinics there on a once to twice weekly basis. Medications for chronic conditions were provided, prenatal care given, children weighed and immunized. In some villages, a building was provided; in others, the scales, tables and chairs were set up outdoors.

Madanapalli: a mission hospital in Andhra Pradesh, not related to CMC. Dr. Patricia, who had finished her residency the year before at CMC, was here, fulfilling her obligation to work in a mission hospital. I spent time with her seeing patients in the clinic and the hospital, and being a " visiting professor". It was rewarding; I felt, here, as if my knowledge and training could really make a difference in the care these patients received. I plan to go back this spring and spend more time working here.

My time at CMC was not all hard work. There were concerts and sports days at the college, and lots of small get togethers involving cake and tea at the hospital. Jiji and I went for tea every day–the tea break was sacrosanct, and the clinic shut down twice a day so everyone could have their tea. I went shopping at the market, and even went to the Tamil Nadu State Fair–a loud, exuberant affair held yearly in town. There were displays, in Tamil, of the tea industry, the bidi industry, the police and fire departments; there were agricultural exhibits, including lots of fowl;

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[31] A few weeks before my arrival, there had been a radiologist visiting from Harvard, and older woman who used to hike in to the main hospital every morning (several kilometers). The students told me, that during a talk she gave on ultrasound to the OG department, she kept interrupting her talk to check and see if they were still awake, as she rarely got a response to her questions.

[32] Once, when a multiparous patient was having deep variable decelerations, the resident was eager to perform a cesarian section. I suggested they put the patient in deep Trendelenberg (i.e. stand her on her head in bed) instead. At home, this would be accomplished by cranking the bed into position; here somebody ran and got two concrete blocks, which were placed under the foot of the bed. It worked, and the patient soon delivered vaginally. A few days later, when walking through the unit, I noticed another bed on blocks, and felt validated.

there were shops selling every imaginable form of plastic. There was the midway with cotton candy booths and the food stalls, with rides and attractions: the chopped up guy, the snake with a girl's head, the woman without hands who did everything with her feet, and the best of all, the Well of Death[33]. I would talk people into going into town with me at night; it was cooler then, the town more lively, and it was fun to just wander around. I even organized a few group dinners at the Amritha, my favorite vegetarian roof-top restaurant.

I took a week out of my time in India to travel a bit. I had gotten to know Leah Kroon, a nurse from Seattle, at CMC, and both of us wanted to visit the North. We arranged to fly into **Delhi**, where we stayed with my friend Kiran's mum Indra. She was quite sweet, and a very good cook. She took us to see a bit of Delhi, the Bahai Lotus temple (a huge white building shaped like a lotus flower), and a nearby Hare Krishna temple. Through a travel agent friend of her son-n-law, we arranged a driving tour of the North.We had a car, a new, comfortable Ambassador with a functioning suspension, and driver, Major Singh, who was neither military nor a Sikh (no turban). We drove through dry, flat plains, to Agra and the **Taj Mahal**. I had avoided seeing the Taj on my previous visits; it seemed like such a tourist trap, and I was sure it would be a disappointment. But all my Indian friends urged me to go, telling me I was wrong, that it was spectacular. They were right.

Agra, which was once the most polluted city in India (coke factories), has cleaned up its act, moving industry out of town, and promoting "Clean Agra, Green Agra". The pollutants in the air had begun defacing the Taj, the area's main attraction, so steps were finally taken. No automobiles are now allowed within a kilometer of the Taj; only pedicabs or electric vehicles go there now. Even so, it was packed–we had arrived on Friday, free entry day. It appears to be the aim of everyone in India to be photographed in front of the Taj. There were huge school groups and lots of families, all posing in turn, and lots of noise and crowds and jostling. It wasn't the scene of serene beauty that we had imagined, so we returned the next day, in early morning, to watched the sun rise. The marble picked up the pinks of the sunrise. There were no crowds, all was quite and still. It was magnificent.

Shah Jahan, who had built the Taj as a tomb for his beloved wife, had arranged it in two and four part symmetry. As you walk around, the view continues to be the same or mirrored. There are four minarets, two mosques, and beautiful reflecting pools. The Taj is on the banks of the **Yamuna River** (second most sacred in India); on the other bank is the **Agra Fort**, also built by Shah Jahan, with marble fretwork on the windows and wonderful views of the Taj. It is here that he spent his last years, overthrown and imprisoned by his son, in part for squandering his state's wealth on the Taj. He could look out his windows and gaze on it for the rest of his days.

We travelled on to **Fatehpur Sikri**, a ghost town built by Akbar in 1571 and abandoned 14 years later. Legend has it that Akbar was without a male heir, despite a large number of wives. He made a pilgrimage to Sikri to see a Muslim saint, who foretold the birth of three sons. When this came true, Akbar was so impressed that he built this city and made it his capitol. Fourteen years later, he moved his capitol to the more central Lahore and FS, serving no other function, was soon abandoned. Most of the city has crumbled away, but the palaces, built of beautiful red sandstone,and exquisitely carved, have been beautifully preserved. Akbar built a palace for each of his wives: Hindu, Christian and Muslim. In one courtyard is a huge Pachisi board; Akbar used slave girls as playing pieces.

Even more deserted was **Deeg**, which we visited next. It had the air of faded grandeur about it. The palace, a beautiful white-marble building, was built in the mid-18th century by the maharajah. It fronts onto the tank (huge water pond), is flanked by pavilions, and set in extensive gardens with lots of reflecting pools. Unfortunately, as the palace is no longer in use, the fountains and pools were dry–the water is turned on only for special occasions. The maharajah used to keep tigers (a few stuffed ones remain), and had ramps built to the roof of one of the buildings so he could ride his horse to the top.

We stayed nearby at **Bharatpur**, within **Keoladeo Ghana National Park**, one of the most important bird sanctuaries in all of India. 415 species have been recorded here. Originally, the land was a vast semi-arid region; the maharajah diverted water from an irrigation canal, creating a series of shallow lakes, and soon birds settled here in vast numbers. The maharajah did this not out of the goodness of his heart, but out of his desire to take his guests on shooting sprees; they would bag as many as 4000 birds a day. In 1964, hunting was banned, and the birders began coming. Leah and I spent an evening and a morning birding here; even she, who is not a birder, was entranced. There were so many birds (even though we were there late in the season), so many different species, and such beautiful ones . We saw more than sixty different species, including gorgeous blue Kashmiri moorhens, a steppe eagle, painted storks, and really cute spotted owlets.

Rajasthan was both wonderful and a disappointment. We saw camels along the roads, fantastic forts, a bleak, rugged, mountainous landscape, and the incredibly vivid saris of the women. Unfortunately, as a tourist, you are

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[33] The snake girl and dismembered man were done with mirrors and had mandatory very loud and acoustically imperfect loudspeakers (with the emphasis on loud). The Well of Death was a large wooden pit, around whose interior walls rode a very attractive, young female motorcyclist. Once she got circling, she did all sorts of tricks: no hands, no feet, head covered, laying back, etc. Quite cool.

considered a resource to be maximally exploited; I guess repeat visitors are not expected. Anywhere we went, we were pestered for baksheesh (tips); hordes of peddlers would descend upon us and push their wares at us, pleading for us to buy. Guides, taxi drivers, everyone would try to get us to go shopping at their "friend's" shop. It was impossible to just wander the streets, gaze at the sights, and poke into shops without being mobbed. Inside shops, it was the hard sell; we stopped once just to look at rugs, and left, having seen hundreds, when Leah got a headache from all the pressure to buy.

Amber Fort is built, as most proper forts are, on a hill. We ascended the hill on an elephant, after queuing for a very long time at the elephant booking office. There was a shortage of elephants because of the holidays, so Leah and I were crammed onto a gaily painted elephant with two other tourists. Rather than riding like a maharani (as promised by the travel agent), I found myself clinging for dear life. The ride was bumpy and terrifying, and the entire route was lined with touts trying to sell souvenirs; even the driver tried to sell us an elephant prod. The elephant, non-plussed, kept spitting and, at the top of the hill, and to the distress of several nearby Japanese tourists, urinated quite forceful and voluminously.

Exploring the fort, pleasant as it was, seemed almost anticlimactic. There were lots of buildings, many decorated with bits of convex mirror (which was once as valuable as gold). There was the exquisite white marble temple of Kali, and its many resident monkeys, and, of course, a palace. This maharajah had twelve wives, all the daughters of his allies, and built his palace to accommodate them. Each wife had a separate apartment, beautifully painted, and there were hidden staircases throughout, so that none of them would know which wife he was "visiting". The most beautiful feature of the palace, though, was the main courtyard,with its fabulous porcelain peacock gates.

Jaipur, down in the valley below Amber, is known as the "Pink City" because the old walled town is painted pink. It was not always pink, but was painted that color to impress a visiting British dignitary some hundred years ago. We visited Jantar Mantar (the astronomical observatory), the city palace, and the Hawa Mahal (Palace of the winds). The latter, with its delicately honeycombed sandstone windows, is now pretty much just a five-story facade; it was built to enable the women of the royal household to look out on the city without being seen. There are many shops and some great shopping here. We bought beautiful Jaipur blue pottery, and I bought lots of old textiles[34].

We returned to **Delhi** ahead of schedule, to avoid being on the road during Holi, the "Festival of Colors". Celebrated largely in the north, it is one of Hinduism's most exuberant festivals, with celebrants marking the end of winter by throwing colored water and powder (gulal) at one another. The colors, I was told, are now largely chemical dyes, and do not wash out very easily[35]. Major, our driver, said it was also a custom for men to set up roadblocks all along the roads, and extort money from drivers for Holi drink, and he wanted to try and avoid them if possible. We spent Holi visiting Indra's friends and family, having long discussions, and exchanging recipes. The next day, when the danger had passed, Leah and I toured Delhi. We spent time at the **Red Fort**; also built by Shah Jahan, it is on the banks of the Yamuna River, and once had a water-filled moat around it. It was the center of British military control; when the Indians regained it, this was a major symbolic step to Independence. **Chandhi Chowk**, Delhi's main street, had hundreds of small shops selling everything you could want, and a parade with elephants to boot. Next we visited the mosque, **Jama Masjid**, an odd structure with a huge central courtyard, and a very shallow building with a huge dome. We then toured **New Delhi**, with its European shops and cafes, and stopped in to Cottage Industries, the tourist shopping mecca of India. It is in an ultramodern building, with seven floors of everything India has to offer the tourist–silks, furniture, carvings, brassware, clothing, books and lots of elephants. We came, we saw, we shopped.

I had a wonderful time in India. I made lots of new friend while at CMC, too many to even begin to list. I got to be especially good friends with Jiji Mathew, one of the junior staff in OG3. She brought me home for lunch most days, we shopped together, we cooked together, and we even went to an OB/GYN conference[36] together in Madras. I got to

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[34] Our driver, Major Singh, had taken us out on our own, to places we had found in the guide book. The next day, our official guide was upset with us because we didn't want to go shopping with him. We learned that shopkeepers kick back some 30% of prices charged to guides who steer the shoppers in.

[35] My friends told me that it was mostly just "naughty" children who throw the dyes. I saw the results throughout the city–people, cars, even dogs with purple or green dye markings on them. Most did not seem pleased.

[36] Indian conferences are interesting, and even more formal than American ones. The talks began, with an initial oration, introduction of moderators, introduction of speakers, talks, more thanks, and then presentation of mementoes, all repeated several times. The Indian physicians almost all used computer-projected slides. Unfortunately, the power kept going out, and then everything would have to stop until it came back on and then until Windows slowly rebooted. They were really keen on flowers, and floating and rotating words and images.

know her family well: her husband Prasad (a major Clinton supporter[37]), her three year old son Avinash (who called me "Auntie" and would play with me), and her parents and in-laws in Madras, who took care of me whenever I passed through. I became friends with lots of others in OG, including Abi, Jesse, Mathai and, of course, Ma'am (Dr. Padmini), as well as the docs at CHAD and RUSHA. I also got to know a lot of my fellow volunteers well. Jens (Germany), Asrat (Ethiopia), and I got to be good friends, and have kept in touch. I enjoyed the tine I spent with Regine, especially screening her childbirth video for all the dais (lay midwives) at CHAD, and Michael, her husband with the wicked sense of humor. I still try and keep in touch with Keith and Bill, fellow docs from the US, and hope to see them there again. As for Bill, the dentist I went to the state fair with, no one has heard from him...perhaps he really was with the CIA, as Jens had suggested. And Phil, Willie, Leah....too many to mention. I miss them all.

The UP

I spent the first week of May in the UP, Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It is, in my opinion, the prettiest part of the state, especially the Keweenaw Peninsula, which is that little bit that juts off the top into Lake Superior, a bit like a duck's wing. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I drove up, which is about the only way to get there from here. The Mackinac Bridge, which connects Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas, used to be a five hour drive, before the speed limit was raised to 70. I made it in four plus, but would have made it in under four, if it hadn't been for all the construction. Oy vey, the construction!...I'm so glad I hadn't planned a driving vacation in the state of Michigan this summer; trying to get around Detroit was bad enough.

Nine years ago, John Engler got himself elected governor of the state of Michigan during the "Republican revolution", and ran on a platform of no new taxes or spending increases. In the ensuing years, he cut back spending of state funds on such wasteful projects as highway maintenance and mental hospitals, preferring those give millions of dollars of taxpayer's money to his cronies, to stop their despoiling the natural resources of our state[38]. In the nine years since, the roads have deteriorated to such a degree, that they are easily the worst in the nation, and rival those of many third world nations. Engler spent eight years blaming the condition of the roads on the "freeze-thaw cycle", which is apparently unique to the state of Michigan, and not found anywhere else in the Midwest (it must not snow in Minnesota!) In the last election, when he came face to face with the ire of the people, and changed his tune, promising to fix the roads. Now he is doing it, all at once. Every major highway in the state of Michigan is under construction; you can't get from here to there without delays and detours, and you just can't get to the airport at all. Our new state motto should be "Michigan–Expect Delays!" Alternatively, we could go with "Michigan–Seek Alternate Routes[39]", as that seems to be posted about every half mile or so on the highways.

But back to the UP. For the second year in a row, spring has come early. Normally, in early May, there would still be lots of snow on the ground, lots of ice left on lake Superior, and the seasonal roads would still be closed. But this was not a usual year–it was quite balmy out. This made birdwatching pleasant, and I didn't need all the long underwear I'd packed. I spent two nights in the town of Paradise, near Whitefish Point. The Point is a finger of land that reaches out into Lake Superior, funnelling migrating birds into a stream that then crosses over to Canada. There are major migrations of raptors (hawks and eagles), water birds (ducks, geese, loons), passerines (songbirds) and owls

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[37] He would watch CNN each night to keep up on the impeachment process, and update me as needed. He had never been much of a fan of Clinton's before all this; he felt our President was being unjustly persecuted by his political enemies, and took particular glee in each Republican setback.

[38] This was to settle lawsuits with, among others, the company that wanted to mine the Nordhouse Dunes, even though state's lawyers were sure they could win that suit. It comes down to the radical republican view that any sort of zoning or restriction on the use of private property is a "taking", and should be massively compensated. This is, of course, because individual property rights are absolute and take precedence over any environmental or societal needs. Want to make a fortune? Buy an environmentally fragile piece of property, try to build a huge development on it, and when you're not allowed to, sue for your maximal potential profit. Big John will give it, and more, to you. If it means closing all the mental health facilities in the state to raise the money, so be it. The insane are much happier out on the streets than in some "institution".

[39] But then again, the religious right might object, on the assumption that this motto encourages the "gay lifestyle". After all, they claim Tinky-Winky is gay....

here in the spring and fall. There are two observation points and, during the migrations, counters (who count raptors and waterbirds), as well as an owl banding program.

I'd forgotten how busy it gets at the observatory on the weekends. The Whitefish Point Bird Observatory is high on the list of prime birding spots in the Midwest, and there were tour groups here from Illinois and Canada, as well as travellers from many other places, including a few English twitchers. During the days, I saw lots and lots of raptors (14 species) and some waterfowl and sparrows, as well as a few migrating tundra swans. The nights were busy, too. One evening, William Clark, the author of the Peterson field guide to hawks, gave a talk/slide show on the raptors of Africa (he's working on a book). Another night I did some owl watching. I also met a lot of really nice people, including Gary and Mary Anne Hansen from Traverse City; we discussed nature, Alaska, travel, the joys of working part time, birds, and volunteer medical work in India. I hope to see them again soon.

I then moved on to the Keweenaw, which was absolutely wonderful! I got there just before the fire near Champion cut off all highway travel on US-41, and then had to pray for rain so I could get home again without having to take a really long detour through either Escanaba or Chicago. I came for two reasons–to visit with old friends, and watch birds. I've been coming up to the UP pretty much annually since 1981[40], when I first spent time in Calumet as a medical student, and my friends there are some of my oldest ones. Going up to Copper Country is a bit like going home again, to my other family. I really enjoy it. I stayed with Doctor Baron (who's retired from general practice and now works in his son Rick's sawmill) and his family, and visited with the Oikarinens, the Klemps, and Ginger. I even attended a Houghton County medical society meeting. I also spent a good bit of time cooking–it's great to have an appreciative audience. This year I cooked Indian; I brought some spices with me, and made my own cheese (paneer) and garam masala (a spice blend). It was fun, and I learned a bit myself. Henry and Maddy both loved the food; if only I could get my nieces or nephew to eat anything besides macaroni and cheese or chocolate milk.

This year I hit the weather just right. Not only was it warm and sunny, but there were southerly winds. Last year the winds had all been northerly, and, despite five trips up Brockway Mountain[41], I hadn't seen a single raptor. This year I spent two full days up on Brockway Mountain. I spent the time with the local master birder, Laurie (a biology professor from Louisiana who spends his summers up here), who chain smoked and talked about the local birding while he kept his (unofficial) count, and a couple, Rod and Marlene Planck, from Paradise, with whom I had briefly talked at the WPBO the previous Saturday. They have a photography business in Paradise, and travel around the country teaching nature photography classes. This was their first time birding on Brockway.

They and I were amazed by the raptors we saw. We saw fourteen different species, and all up close. Since we were standing on top of the mountain, the hawks, eagles and such flew either just over us or at or below eye level on either side. It was great. Unlike WPBO, you didn't need a spotting scope at all, and, quite often, didn't even need binoculars. In one day I got a good look at twelve bald eagles, including one almost fully mature one.

There were lots and lots of birds, and they just kept coming. I know we got a count of about a thousand each day, and these were all individuals and small groups, as there weren't any kettles[42], except an occasional one way off in the distance. The four of us decided to keep our experience vaguely secret, as we didn't want the same sort of crowd scene and carnival atmosphere that you get on weekends at WPBO (e.g. dogs and kids running up and down the boardwalk, SRO on the platform, no room at the inn). But I'm telling you....Shhhh! It's a secret!

One more nature note. It is really beautiful up on Brockway Mountain; you can look out over Lake Superior, out across a few valleys, down the shoreline, and off to the Huron Mountains in the distance. The view is quite breathtaking. While we were there, the temperatures got up into the high seventies, and we could actually watch the mountains grow greener by the hour. The leaves were growing and unfurling before our eyes, and their flowers blooming. The palette changed by the hour. It was magnificent!

So, if you want to see some raptors and some scenery, my recommendation is that, next year, first week of May,

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[40] When I first came up, a green third year medical student, my friend Emmy was just a baby; she has now graduated high school with honors, and amazes her parents by being a champion biathelete (a sport which combines cross country skiing and shooting.)

[41] The highest mountain in Michigan. There is a paved road to the top, but it is a seasonal road, and is often still iced and snowed over this time of year. I heard that several years ago, when a spring bird count was done here, the counter had to get up by snowmobile or on foot.

[42] A kettle is an airborne flock of hawks which circles, like water around a drain. A kettle can consist of a few dozen birds, or a few thousand.

you should go on up to Brockway Mountain. Call ahead and check on the winds (if they're northerlies[43], don't bother) and road conditions. Of course, now that I've sold you on the Keweenaw, you'll go up next year, it will be cold and rainy, there will be snow everywhere, and the winds will be wrong. You will be wet and cold and cursing my name....unless, of course, Al Gore is right about this global warming business.

Ukraine

I flew from Detroit to **Lviv**, Ukraine in late July. The flight was not particularly eventful, except for the Air Ukraine representative in Warsaw who (incorrectly) pulled my bags off the plane and wouldn't put them back on until I paid for overweight baggage. At the Lviv airport there was the usual headache of paperwork and extortion, and then my cousin Myrosia, her husband Ruslan and my goddaughter Daryna found me and took me home. It was great to see them; staying with them is like home away from home. I was fed little Ukrainian sandwiches, given life-sustaining vodka (called **horilka** in Ukraine), and allowed to rest.

I also learned that, as happens almost every time I visit Ukraine, there was a crisis on. Several years ago, we watched on live TV, as Yeltsin bombed the Russian Parliament. Last year, the ruble collapsed, causing major panic on all the markets, and dragged the Ukrainian hrivna down with it. This year it was a gasoline crisis. The supply of gasoline had mysteriously dried up, and prices had skyrocketed. Gas, which had been going for about HR 1.50/liter ($1.30/gallon) was now up to HR 6/liter ($5.50/gallon). While this is not out of line with Western European prices, it's outrageously expensive in a country where few people make even $100 per month[44].

I spent much of the next day trying to register with the Ministry of the Interior, another example of the tourist-friendly policies of the Ukrainian government.....not. All visitors have to register within either 48 or 72 hours (nobody was quite sure which); penalties for not doing so can be steep (up to $1200). The only other country where I have ever had to deal with such a requirement was Ghana, and, as there, photos were necessary and the government functionaries unhelpful and rude. Myrosia and I spent the day wandering around Lviv, trying to figure out where to register....everywhere we went, we got sent somewhere else. We finally gave up.

I flew on to **KIEV**, the capitol, where I stayed with my cousin Tamara. She ended up registering me, but not without some difficulty, as I was on a humanitarian aid visa, and not a tourist visa, so the local authorities wanted to know why I wasn't registering in the town where I was supposed to be giving aid? It finally got sorted out, sort of... They gave me a five day stamp, but, as long as I had a stamp of some sort, I was told it would be OK[45].

I spent the next few days suffering in the stultifying heat, and catching up with my Dad's side of the family. We had a christening. Inka, my niece, had given birth to little Zhenya (Eugene) in January[46], and had asked me to be the godmother. Since little Zhenya had grown in the last seven months, he was no longer very little, but rather a hefty and quite active young man. This is not a problem, except that a traditional orthodox christening ceremony runs about two hours, and entails holding the child the entire time.

The christening was held at the Church of the Kazanska Icon of the Holy Mother, the only one in the area belonging to the Kiev patriarchate [47]. When the church was built, it was located out in the fields beyond town. The

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[43] i.e. from the north; winds are named for their direction of origin. You want southerlies to get good birding on Brockway.

[44] By the time I left, gas was once more plentiful, but the price was now much higher than it had been before, about HR 2.50/liter=$2.26/gallon.

[45] Last year, I and several other people at camp came early and didn't know about this registration thing.....it proved to be a problem, as the authorities in Vorohta tried to fine our organization $25,000. After several hours of negotiations, they settled on HR10.40–about five dollars.

[46] In Ukraine, the custom of naming children based on their birth date is still pretty prevalent. Almost every day of the calendar is a saint's day. Zhenya was born on January 6th, which is St. Eugene's day. My brother, Bill, was christened Vasyl (Basil), because he was born on January 14th, and both grandmothers were insistent . My mother had wanted to name him Andrew, but you can't fight the grandmothers.....

[47] Despite being the capitol of Ukraine, Kiev is still highly Russified, and a majority of the churches belong to the Moscow patriarchate, which is loathe to give them up. Interestingly, while the Ukrainian church conducts its services in Ukrainian, the Russian church does so in Old Church Slavonic, the language of Saints Cyril and

town had since grown and encroached upon it, and then the communists had done their best to destroy it. It is now a shell, surrounded by horrible crumbling concrete apartment buildings. The vestibule has been restored, and the rest of the church is slowly being rebuilt. It was in this vestibule, a small room with no open windows, that the christening was held. There were a dozen children and one adult being christened that day. Procedures had to be followed; religion here is form as much as substance, with a lot of seemingly petty rules. All the women had to cover their heads in church and wear modest dresses. The mother was not allowed into the ceremony, only the godparents and other adults. The ceremony was conducted, in Ukrainian, by a young Ukrainian priest. It went on and on, and Zhenya squirmed in my arms and gained weight every minute. Luckily, he didn't scream or cry like a lot of the kids, even when he was smeared on the forehead, chest, hands and feet with holy oil, when a bit of his hair was cut, and when he was doused with holy water. He took it all in stride, and evinced a healthy curiosity throughout.

I returned to **LVIV** to begin a period of bad "car"ma. Ruslan's company car kept breaking down whenever he tried to take me anywhere. First it was as we were getting ready to drive out to my Mom's village–debris in the fuel line. Then it was when he was supposed to come and get us from the village–major overhaul of the engine. Next it was as we were on our way to the airport. Despite that, we had a good time. In my Mom's village, **KNIAJE**, I visited with her family (and there's plenty of them), with yet another goddaughter, and introduced the town to the wonders of a laptop Macintosh computer[48].

Myrosia and I had one nice, sunny day in Lviv, where we wandered around downtown, ate pizza, and did a bit of shopping. Lviv, with lots of cobbled streets and baroque buildings, is one of the prettiest cities in Eastern Europe. If the government ever begins encouraging tourism rather that frightening it off, should become immensely popular, much as Prague is now. We wandered around the old market square (Rynok), through narrow streets, past the old fort, through some beautiful old churches and the lovely, green central park with its huge new statue of Shevchenko, our national poet and hero[49].

Then I was off to camp. This was no ordinary summer camp; it was a camp for the children of the internaty, the orphanage-schools, of Ukraine. There are more that a hundred such schools in Ukraine, and thousands of children in them. Some are orphans due to the death of their parents; many more have ended up there either abandoned or taken away from their parents (due to abuse, alcoholism or drug use on the part of the parents). Help Us Help the Children holds a camp annually; this was our fourth year, my second, and the largest camp ever–350 kids (aged 12 to 17) on three campuses.

The camp was held in the town of **VOROHTA**, in the **CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS**, some 240 kilometers (or six hours by bus) from Lviv. It is a beautiful setting, and the highest mountain in Ukraine, Hoverla, is nearby, as is the resort town of Yaremche. I was assigned to Basa Avanthard, which is a youth hostel type building two kilometers from the town, but near the spring . It is the home of the Ukrainian National Ski Jump team; they practice jumping here every day, on the summer ski jump they call a "trampoline". There is a ski lift which goes up the hill, and is fun to ride; or was, until the other big lift in town broke down with forty people on board. After that I became a bit apprehensive. Others were assigned either to Basa Ukraina (conveniently located near the city center and pubs, but in much worse shape, and with no open areas for the kids to run around) or Mahora (a barracks up on the mountain, for the older kids, serviced by the broken ski lift; half way through camp they were evacuated out, due to lack or running water, to a nearby sanitorium).

Last year, I was practically the token American at my camp; this year there were four of us, Lisa, Lara, Luba and Olenka (who is actually of Canadian origin, but now lives in San Francisco). We had a great time. Cousin Lisa, who is a nuclear engineer by training, and a connoisseur of fine art and designer clothing, was sports director. Lara, a lawyer, was a group counsellor for 13 largely ADD (attention deficit disorder) kids. Olenka, who is studying for her master's degree in art therapy, did a psychological workshop with the kids. And what did I, a board certified OB/GYN who can barely carry a tune do? Why, I taught the kids how to make *pysanky* (Ukrainian Easter eggs) and

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Methodius, which is actually old Bulgarian. Its equivalent to the Latin used by the Catholic church until just a few decades ago. They're really up to date in Moscow.

[48] It was quite the hit, especially some kiddie demos I had loaded–*Freddie the Fish* and *Putt-Putt*–which the kids called multiky/cartoons and just loved, and the solitaire, to which Myrosia became addicted. Her brother-in-law, Ihor, became particularly enamored of the *Deer Avenger* demo, where deer hunt the hunters, and everyone enjoyed the pinball.

[49] There used to be a huge statue of Lenin in the park, right in front of the Opera Theatre; it was torn down with quite a bit glee eight years ago, right after Independence. I missed the event; my cousin Vera, who has spent only a few hours in Lviv during the many times she's visited Ukraine, was there to help.

sing Ukrainian wedding songs. I also doctored the kids after hours, when the regular doctor often couldn't be found. (He enjoyed the night life of Vorohta.) It was an interesting time.

We had a busy two weeks. The kids arrived late on Saturday, sometime after midnight, on the train. We waited up for them in town, at the pub, as delay mounted on delay. Our wait was nothing, though–many of these kids had travelled two or three days to get here. Once they arrived, it was mass confusion mixed with joy, as we recognized our kids from last year. We then all walked to our camps, some two kilometers in the pitch dark, along a rutted road, doing our best to avoid the drunken Hutzul drivers, and got the kids settled into rooms. As always, this was a problem, as there were more than there were supposed to be. Some internaty just ignore the guidelines, and send along a few extra, knowing we wouldn't turn them away.

On our first day, the other docs and I did physicals on all 350 kids. They were remarkably healthy, although we did find some lice, a lot of skin infections and bad feet, and, for some reason, lots of earaches and stuffy noses. One entire group was afflicted with turista, from having eaten something bad on the train.

I spent the rest of the first week teaching the kids the fine art of pysanka making. Amazingly, very few of them had ever made them before, whereas almost all Ukrainian-Americans have. Real eggs, white, are used. Designs are drawn on the egg with hot beeswax, using a special instrument/stylus called a "pysaltse", and the eggs are put through a series of successively darker dyebaths. It is a form of batik; whatever color an area was when the wax was applied, it will remain that color. In the end, the wax is removed by holding the egg next to a candle flame, and allowing the wax to melt.

Our first problem was eggs. There were virtually no white eggs in Vorohta; the few chickens there seemed to lay only very dark brown eggs. Ruslana, the head of the camp and of HUHTC of Canada, spent a good part of the first week going door-to-door looking for white eggs. One of the kitchen ladies, Katia, collected them from her neighbors for us, and we got by on an hour to hour basis. By the end of the week, word had gotten out that we were offering premium prices for white eggs, and we had them practically coming out of our ears.

Our second problem was candles; the ones sent from Canada burned up quickly, and a scramble was on to find more. In the end, Ruslana bought out all the local churches. Then there was the matter of the pyromaniacs of Group Five.....somehow, only **their** pysaltsy caught fire, only **their** candles went out frequently requiring the use of lots of matches to relight them, and only **their** paper towels mysteriously caught on fire. We were lucky they didn't burn the camp down. (I must admit, that a few days later, during an outdoor ceremony involving candles, I did catch a few of them trying to light the grass on fire. Luckily, it was wet.)

I was amazed at how much the kids enjoyed making the eggs. I've taught groups of kids in the States, but none seemed as enthralled as these kids. Even the ones who didn't participate in much of anything else, and the worst of the ADD kids, really got into it[50]. One guy, who seemed to have little interest in anything but the band Prodigy, came several times after hours (and skipped other scheduled activities) to make extra eggs (including, I must add, a PRODIGY egg). Others would come when they were free and help me out, teaching other kids, minding the dyes, even sharpening pencils.

On our first weekend, we celebrated Easter. Last year we had done Christmas, and it had been a big hit, as most of the kids had never experienced a traditional Christmas before. This year we chose Easter. The kids spent all week preparing. Besides the *pysanky*, they learned how to weave baskets (and a few even completed them, although many were left with what can charitably only be referred to as coasters), learned *haivky* (spring/easter songs), learned about the traditions, and baked Easter bread. We had an outdoor Good Friday evening service (involving lots of candles), and then the kids took turns in shifts guarding the *plashchanytsya* (shroud of Christ) around the clock. On Saturday we ate only Lenten meals, mostly fish. On Sunday we had a full church service and blessing of the baskets.

The kitchen had prepared traditional non-Lenten Easter foods–sausage, hard-boiled eggs, beets, butter, cheese, other meats–and the kids put these in their baskets, along with their pysanky and bread. We all walked some three (or more) kilometers to the church, where the village priest (along with our two) held a regular Easter service. Ruslana must really have some pull in this town. She got the church to cancel its regular Sunday service, and then got all the parishioners involved in our service. They sang the Easter service, then marched around the church singing, as the priests blessed the baskets. It was an odd sight to see in August, although I must say the weather was much more amenable to an outside service than April, when it often snows or rains. After, there was a big party at Basa Ukraina, where the kids ate the food from their baskets, sang songs, played games, and hung out on a pleasant afternoon.

There were also lots of non-Easter-related activities. Our kids hiked up the mountains (twice), often in fairly horrible rain, had many discos (with lots of truly horrible Russian and European pop music), and a masquerade ball. There were several *vatry* (campfires), one huge fire, and a few smaller, individual ones, where we roasted

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[50] Olenka told me that, as a part of her degree in art therapy, she had done a small study of how ADD kids respond to making Pysanky. She found that the kids did really well, as they had a small thing to concentrate on, and did not get distracted by other tasks and activities. My experience surely bore this out.

marshmallows (imported from Canada) and sang songs. The kids put on shows for us; among them were talented singers, dancers, comedians, jugglers, and acrobats. There was also boy who had a particularly interesting skill–he would lay on broken glass, then have someone walk on him, and emerge unscathed.

By pure chance, a solar eclipse occurred while we were in camp, and we were in one of the better viewing areas of Europe, getting to about 95% of totality. There was much ignorance of such things among the populace, with all sorts of wild stories being repeated in newspapers and on the radio. The local people were scared for their lives, and most hid inside during the eclipse. One of our Canadian counsellors had brought eight pairs of mylar eclipse glasses, and we brought the kids out in groups of eight to view the event. Lisa guarded the door, then they were allowed a brief look at the sun, then I showed them how a pinhole camera worked, and then they were quickly herded back inside to protect their eyes.

Lisa and I took advantage of the eclipse to, what else, go shopping. We'd been shopping once before, taking a car and spending Saturday morning at the weekly market in Kosiv. It is a huge market, selling everything one could possibly want, from auto parts to plumbing supplies to livestock, and selling it for dollars or hrivny. We spent our time in the crafts section of the market, and bought some very nice embroidered pieces and wooden items[51]. A few days later, we received a letter from Vera, asking us to buy some items for our fall charity auction, so we had to go shopping again. We went to Yaremche, some twenty kilometers down the road, the local tourist hub.

The roads were eerily empty, with even the roadside mushroom sellers having taken cover. It was not fully dark out, but rather dusk-like. At the tourist market we were the only buyers, and got lots of (unwanted) attention from all the vendors. With Lisa's expertise, we bought several nice wooden items for the auction, and I bought little gifts for the kids at camp–butterfly hair clips and super balls. It clouded up a bit while we were there, not enough to block the view of the eclipse, but just enough to let me view it safely with my bare eyes. It was truly awesome– I'd never seen one before, and seeing the sun all black like that, with the flaming corona, was simply amazing!

Because of the national elections this fall in Ukraine, it was decided to teach the kids about the electoral process. We had a camp election for "hetman" (the title of Ukrainian leaders in the eighteenth century). One of Lara's kids, Yura, was nominated, and her other Yura became his campaign manager (both were from the same internat, as were both of her Mykolas[52]). Yura 1 got off to a bad start. On Candidate's Night, he faltered rather badly: he hadn't known he would be expected to give a speech, and wasn't prepared. He did a relatively good job of answering questions, though. As he was a really nice kid, who thought a lot about things and really cared, we (the American contingent) decided to help him out. We helped him make posters. I donated my hundreds of stickers to the cause–Garfield, jungle animals and puppies–and the kids wrote his name on them in permanent marker, and plastered the camp with them (they were quite popular–Ukrainian kids <u>love</u> stickers). Lara taught the kids how to do the hand jive, renaming it the Yura dance. Yura 2 shmoozed the other campers. In the end he won, with a margin of twenty votes (out of 140 cast) in a field of six candidates. In the process, Yura 1 Came out of his shell and attracted a lot of girls, and Yura 2 realized his ability to influence people.

We got to know the kids quite well. They loved to come to our rooms, and to sit, talk, and learn a bit about the outside world. We, in turn, learned about them. My room became kid central, and there were always at least two around. The kids were quite generous; whatever they were given, they would share, including the candies and chocolates they got for dessert and stickers and trading cards they might acquire. Little Irina told me I was her best friend in camp, and gave me an icon she had made and a lollipop. Natasha fed me chocolates, and Vadim made us all baskets. Yura gave me a picture of himself from last year's camp, ran all sorts of errands, and generally took good care of me. One little girl, Katia, even gave me her teddy bear, Misha.

The second week I helped out Vertep, the singers. We taught the kids how to sing all sorts of wedding songs. Ukraine is a very musical nation; it is often said that when God was handing out gifts to the nations of the earth, Ukraine was given the gift of song. All Ukrainians sing, whether they can or not, and know lots and lots of folk songs. Any holiday has its associated songs (many of them pagan ones being adapted to Christian holidays), as does any ceremony. Weddings are no exception; there are songs to accompany every stage of the process. And I learned about every stage of the process, as I got so sit through that lecture nine times. We had decided to stage a wedding at the end of the second week, with the bride coming from our camp, and the groom from Basa Ukraina.

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[51] The Hutzuls, Ukraine's mountain people, are masters of the arts or *marquetry* (wood inlay using different colors of wood), *rizba* (engraving on a wooden surface) and *encrustation* (inlay of beads, copper wire and mother-of-pearl). Lisa is an expert on the subject. I am proud to say I learned from the master and, following her advice, bought some beautiful pieces, most given away as gifts since.

[52] Many of the children were named by the workers at the internat, and many seemed to lack imagination (sort of like that nurse in Cider House Rules). I suppose it makes it easier if all the girls are Sveta, and the boys Ivan...

The teaching of the songs was quite pleasant. We would take the kids, in groups, on the chair lifts up the mountain, and then settle with them in a shady spot and sing. It was quiet up there, away from the hubbub of all the other activities, and far from the baseballs that had been hitting us down below.

We carried out the many stages of the wedding. First there was the ***Svatanya***, when the young man would come to girl's house with two friends, and discuss the possibility of marriage with her parents. The girl had the final say, though; if she didn't wish to marry him, she would give him a pumpkin, symbolizing her rejection. It took a brave girl, though, to do this, especially if it meant going against the wishes of her parents. Rejected suitors were known to vandalize homes and spread rumors about girls.

The there was the ***Vinkopletanya*** (Wreath-Making); the girl and her friends would get together to make her wedding wreath (for her head) for the wedding, accompanied, of course, by song. This was usually combined with the ***Divych Vechir*** (Maiden's Night), the last night she would spend with her single friends. Once a girl married, she would have to cover her head with a scarf, and only associate with other married women. In our case, the event was almost rained out, although some floral work did get done in the sports hall.

Lastly there was the wedding itself. Our bride had been chosen from among the candidates (one selected form each of the twelve groups), who met the following criteria:

1. long hair
2. Ukrainian-speaking[53]
3. looks old enough to be a bride

The girls pulled straws at morning zbirka, and Olya won. She was dressed up in wedding finery, and the others became her bridesmaids. The groom came to our gate (which had been erected the day before to lots of singing), while her "brothers" tried to extort money from him for her. A deal was struck, and then a fake bride (Mark, our head cook, in drag) was brought out. More arguing ensued, another deal was struck, and the real bride was produced. There was more singing. They the rode off on horses to the chapel; once they came back, they went to her house, where the parents greeted them with bread and salt (the traditional Ukrainian welcome). A wedding tree had been erected (branches covered with ribbons and other gifts) and carried in a procession. The bride and groom then drank together, to singing, but not before tossing the contents of the first two glasses they were offered. (Right onto me, I might add. This, I learned later from Lisa, was the Ukrainian equivalent of throwing the bouquet– I'm meant to be married soon!)

Then the real party began–food, (non-alcoholic) drink, and lots of music. The kids, in their groups, had prepared the cold course (canapes, devilled eggs and salads), and then our cooks provided the hot (potatoes and lots of meats, including eleven roasted pigs[54].) There was a traditional band, and a display of horsemanship by the expert horsemen and their horses, who had come all the way from Kiev.

And then it was all over. We spent the rest of the evening packing and saying our goodbyes. The kids all told me they didn't want to leave, they wanted to stay another month or even longer. For many of them, this camp was the best thing that had ever happened to them, something they would look back upon for years to come. Some might return the following year, but most wouldn't. The train took them all away much later that night. We all cried together; and, tired though I was, I didn't want to leave either. I loved my kids and, the next morning, in the quiet halls and the almost empty building I really missed them. It was like being a mother for two weeks. I still have dreams about them at night.

Spain

When I had talked to Christobel in the spring, she told me that she would probably be emigrating to Australia later in the year. I realized that this summer might be my last chance to see her and Tom without travelling way down under, so I decided to stop in and see them on my way home from Ukraine. As it turned out, that was when Chris would be spending her summer holidays visiting her mother in Mallorca, Spain, so I flew there instead.

For those of you who've never heard of **Mallorca**, it is an island in the Mediterranean, off the Spanish coast. It has a climate like much of the rest of Riviera–warm, pleasant summers (except August, which can get incredibly hot), and mild winters. The Mallorcans speak a form to Catalan, which is a melange of Spanish and French. In recent years they have sold off most of their land to Germans, who summer here in large numbers Tourists also come from England and other cold places, for a total of five million visitors annually, all here for the "sun, sand and sea". (I wonder if

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[53] One of the goals of camp was to promote Ukrainian language usage. Because of the Russification policies of the Soviet government, and the settlement of ethic Russians in Eastern Ukraine during Soviet times, there are many people in Ukraine that do not speak Ukrainian or speak it poorly.

[54] The twelfth one had escaped from the car as it was being driven back to camp from the market. I like to think it is still wandering, free, up in the mountains.

that's nearly as alliterative in German?) Most are here on package tours, and stay in the many huge concrete complexes which have disfigured the island. There are still many beautiful places left–the mountains, the old monasteries and castles, the almond and olive groves, the rare undeveloped cala[55] and the windmills. There are lots and lots of windmills. One almost expects Don Quixote to come charging at any minute.

It had been eleven years since I'd last visited Mallorca, so I was eager to go. Much has changed since my last visit. Spain has become fully integrated into the EU, and is a net importer of Eurodollars, fueling all sorts of construction projects. The airport has been upgraded, and is modern andsurprisingly efficient[56], and there are lots more paved roads and roundabouts (traffic circles).

LOT Airlines, in an effort to prove itself the absolute worst airline in all of Europe, if not the world, had managed to lose my luggage[57]. I spent my first three days on the phone trying to locate my bags, and then another two awaiting their arrival. They finally arrived the afternoon before I left for home. In the meantime, I had only my carry-on bag (which contained my nightgown , camera equipment, and a big box of pysanky) and my "customs" outfit[58]. Luckily, Barbara, Chris's mum, has lots of extra toiletries, and a house full of used clothing and shoes of all sizes and colors. She fitted me out, although I must say I looked as if dressed by a mad, colorblind tramp. Then again, no one on Mallorca ever really dresses up; it's not a "no shirt, no shoes, no service" kind of place.

I stayed in the town of **Cala D'Or**, across the street from Barbara's house, with her friends Cor and Mieke. They're Dutch, very sweet, and have lived in Mallorca forever, in a lovely house with a beautiful garden full of cactuses, sculptures and succulents. Cor is a sculptor, and has a small studio out back, were she sculpts biomorphic shapes out of stone. She displays them in their upstairs office/guest apartment, where I stayed. It was a beautiful set of rooms, with views of the Mediterranean, and pleasant sea breezes.

The latter were quite important, and it was very hot out. We all walked down to the cala at least once a day, for a cooling dip. Tom, who is now five, and I shared an air mattress, on which we ventured out into the deeper water. He built me lots of castles in the sand, and I took lots of photos–Tom can be quite the ham.

I saw a bit more of the island on this visit. Barbara took be to **Valldemossa**, in the western mountains. It is the town where Chopin and George Sand spent a winter[59], and about which she wrote her venomous if not entirely inaccurate book. The Valldemossans have, in turn, venerated the two of them . Their rooms in the monastery[60] have

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[55] A Mallorquin term for the long, narrow inlets that are characteristic of the island. There are no rivers on the island, only these mini-fjords. They generally have steep cliffs along the sides, and a white sand beach at the base.

[56] And, in the summer, quite busy. Mallorca is the Florida of Europe, and fills up with summer visitors, mostly Germans looking for a tan and a good game of volleyball. There is a week in summer, according to Barbara, Chris's mum, when it is the busiest airport in all of Europe!

[57] They tried much harder with cousin Lisa, whose luggage they "misplaced" both coming and going. LOT, I later learned from my cousins in Lviv, after improperly charging me for overweight luggage in Lviv ("pay cash money or leave one suitcase behind" was the choice I was given), had decided to leave my bags behind, anyway, because there wasn't enough room on the plane. Since LOT is computerized only in theory, my bags couldn't really be tracked, and their eventual arrival in Mallorca came as a surprise to everyone.

[58] Because of my travel in many third-world countries, I apparently fit the profile of some sort of terrorist or narcotics trafficker. In order to avoid being strip-searched, I now dress very conservatively when going through customs, so I look the physician I claim to be when I fill out the forms.

[59] 1838-39. They had thought it might be good for Chopin's health. He was suffering from consumption (what we now call tuberculosis). It wasn't; he died a short time later.

[60] The Cartuja de Valldemossa. The monks were expelled in 1835, and the monastery was turned into rental accommodation. It is now a museum, with the other rooms being given over to a gallery of paintings and furniture, and a local museum. There are lovely gardens and nice views over the valley. An adjoining chapel has been turned into a recital hall, and concerts of Chopin's work are performed several times

become a museum, and their furniture, clothing, and other odd bits, including the piano Chopin had lugged up the mountain, repatriated and proudly diplayed. The town, with its tree-lined streets and old stone houses, has been prettified and turned into a series of gift shops and little restaurants. It's all quite twee.

Much nicer, though, was **Palma**, the capitol and main city of Mallorca, which I explored with Chris, Tom, and Jana on an incredibly hot day. (Why does anyone purposely choose to visit Mallorca in August? It's mad!) It is a big city, but with a traditional old quarter filled with wide tree-lined boulevards and narrow cobbled lanes, with Gothic churches, baroque palaces, and Arab baths, and with designer bars and chic boutiques. There are also lots of tourists and tacky tourist shops. The cathedral, a huge Gothic monstrosity built in 1600, is said to be beautiful inside, with parts of it redone by Gaudí in 1900; I'll have to take their word for it, as it was closed once more. (It's supposed to be open from 10 am to 6 pm, but has been closed every time I've been by. That's one of the interesting things about Spanish tourism–everything in Palma shuts down for siesta at midday, just about the time the tourist buses from outlying towns arrive, and reopens in early afternoon, when the tourist buses leave. Go figure.)

We spent a lot of time in restaurants, eating out on a nightly basis, and enjoying some great seafood; I finally got my fill of calamare. I dined in an English pub and many local Spanish places. The nicest dinner out was the night we all went out with Cor and Mieke. We spent the evening way out in the country, at an old windmill that had been converted to a really nice restaurant. There were stars in the sky, fairy lights in the trees and candles on the tables, a scent of flowers in the air, and warm evening breezes. The wine and conversation flowed. It's perfect nights like this that make me understand the attraction of Mallorca, and might even tempt me to stay.

SoCal

After an eleven year absence (and a quite intentional one at that), I once again visited the land of the lotus eaters, Southern California. Since my last visit, I've accumulated more friends from that region[61], and since none of them ever seem to end up in Michigan, I decided to stop in on my way to Japan and visit them.

I stayed with Niall and Lavinia[62], whom I hadn't seen in eleven years, but had kept in touch with by mail, phone and updates from Christobel (Niall's sister). Niall is an architect, and his firm is doing well; Lavinia is a board certified plastic surgeon, and she's certainly located in the right area to practice her craft[63]. Since I last saw them, they have reproduced twice and acquired Maria, a Honduran housekeeper/nanny. Callan and Pippa, son and daughter, respectively, soon became my friends. Callan, aged seven, is definitely an expert on Pokemon, and watches more Cartoon Network than any child I have ever met. Pippa, aged five (going on fifteen, according to her father) is tough and feisty and bright. She loves her schoolwork, and is "puzzlingly large and strong" (unlike either of her parents), and can easily beat up her brother. I enjoyed getting to know them, taking them swimming and to the playground, and watching Pokemon and other horrible cartoons with them.

I also had a chance to catch up with a few other friends–Jeff, who I'd met on my Easter Island trip, and Mike Miles, with whom I'd gone to high school. I hadn't seen him since his graduation some twenty years ago, but it was like no time had really passed–Mike was as sweet and sentimental as ever. I may have to go back so I can spend some more time with them all.

Japan

I'm still not sure what possessed me to travel to Japan, the world's most expensive country. I'm generally a budget traveller, and really enjoy third world travel. Although I enjoy Kurosawa films, I'd never been particularly fascinated with Japan, read much about it, or even sampled the cuisine beyond ramen noodles. Japan was totally out of

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daily.

[61] Amazingly, they're all quite nice and fairly rational people. It's not true that everyone in Socal is blonde and vapid or totally nuts–only about 90% of them are that way. The rest keep the place running.

[62] aka Karen/Cudgie/Vinnie/Livonia

[63] I think that about 90% of the population has some sort of plastic surgery done, but I may be wrong, and the figure may actually be higher. Plastic surgeons in SoCal advertise on billboards, bus stops, and the sides of buildings. There are just pages and pages of ads in the local magazines and newspapers. Some even run chains of discount clinics. Niall showed me a few ads, and pointed out that they're not totally honest–a few of Lavinia's patients have appeared in other people's ads, and some of the "patients" pictured are just models for hire.

character for me. Still, there I was!

Back in 1997, while in Brisbane, I got to be good friends with Minako Taniguchi, my friend Jane's then-roommate and current sister-in-law. Minako had invited me to visit her in Japan, and had repeated the invitation a few times since. I decide to take her up on her offer, and was soon jetting on JAL (my current favorite airline) to **Nagoya**, the Detroit of Japan.

Nagoya is an industrial city, with not much to really recommend it. It is, however, the perfect base of operations for the Australian trade consul, which is what Ian Brazier, Minako's husband, is. They live in a really nice flat in the gai-jin (foreigner) part of town, courtesy of Her Majesty's government ; I suppose I should be thanking Betty Windsor (who managed to keep her job in the last Australian referendum) for her hospitality. I was given a nice room all to myself, and got to sample the joys of high-tech Japanese life–electronic toilets[64] and highly complicated irons and rice cookers. I also got to enjoy Minako's cooking and learned a lot about Japanese cuisine in the process. Ian is a fellow Macophile, and I was able to plug into his ethernet and have access to the Net and to my e-mail. Most importantly, I had friends to talk through things with, and to explain things to me.

Language: Japan has to be one of the most foreign places I have ever visited, in large part due to the language. It bears not the slightest resemblance to any language I know, and even the syntax is totally alien (word order is totally different from English, and there is no difference between the singular and plural of nouns). Learning to *speak* Japanese is hard enough, "but learning to *read* it is insanely difficult. Start with the fact that, for some malevolent reason, the Japanese use *four different writing systems*[65], which are often intermixed, in addition to characters sometimes arranged vertically, in which case you read right to left, but sometimes arranged horizontally, in which case you read left to right....Also, sometimes there's a mixture of horizontal and vertical writing, using several different character systems.

"That's not the hard part. The hard part is that the major Japanese writing system consists of–why not?–*Chinese* characters, which represent words, not sounds. So for each word you need a different character, which means to be moderately literate you have to memorize thousands and thousands of characters. This wouldn't be so bad if the characters looked like what they're supposed to represent....But the Japanese/Chinese characters didn't look anything like the concepts they're supposed to represent. They all look approximately like this:

And *every one of those marks is important.* If you put one teensy little line in there wrong, you could change the entire meaning of the character, from something like 'man holding broom' to 'sex with ostriches'."[66]

English is, however, both omnipresent and meaningless. Ads, billboards, magazines all are full of English words, and the clothing covered with them, but they are often imbued with meanings unheard of in the West, and more often than not serve only as design elements. I have never felt so illiterate before in my life, unable to read even menus or food packaging, much less a newspaper. Luckily, Japan Rail uses romanji on its signs in the major stations, so I was able to get around pretty well.

Transportation: Japan is fairly easy to get around, as it has a good transport infrastructure. This comes at least in part from it having a small landmass, so the distances aren't prohibitive. I had bought a Japan Rail pass, and used the hell out of it. Train travel in Japan is remarkable—the trains are so punctual, that you can set your watch by them, and are scrupulously clean and quite comfortable. Unfortunately, all this comes at a great cost, and train travel in Japan is as expensive as air travel elsewhere. The Shinkansen, or bullet trains, do zip along amazingly quickly, but there is not much to see from their windows. The landscape that goes by is dreary and industrial.

Every train station seems to have a TI, tourist information booth, and almost all are staffed with english

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[64] The toilets of Japan are quite amazing, ranging from squalid holes n the floor to super high tech computerized models with remote controls (I don't even want to think about that!) Ours had buttons to push for warm and cool squirts of water, another for warm stream of warm air, and yet another to flush. I certainly hope they're Y2K compliant.....

[65] These four systems are **kanji** (Chinese ideograms), **hiragana** (japanese syllabary), **katakana** (syllabary for representing foreign words) and **romanji** (Japanese words transliterated into the Latin alphabet).

[66] A quote from Dave Barry's *Dave Barry Does Japan*. I reread the book recently for kicks, and found, to my surprise, how incredibly insightful he was about many aspects of Japan, especially the plastic food industry. I guess that's why they gave him the Pulitzer Prize, and not for his booger jokes. Any further quotes will be labelled DB.

speakers. They provide maps and advice for the city, will usually help the traveller book a room for the night, and will help decipher the train schedules and plan itineraries. They are invaluable.

In town, the subways are good, and there is extensive bus service. Lots and lots of people also own cars, a good 90% of which are white and almost all of which are relatively new. Japanese car licensure depends on passing an annual inspection, which is quite rigorous. Few cars can pass after the first few years, and these are replaced. The old cars are shipped to third-world countries[67]. Cars are fairly useless in the cities, though. Parking is exorbitantly expensive[68], if available, and the weekends are one huge traffic jam as everyone tries to go shopping and ties up the streets. You can end up waiting hours to get in and out of a shopping center parking structure. Parking technology is amazing–all sorts of lifts to stack cars, and a lazy susan to turn them around so they can be driven right out. Once on the road, it remains expensive to keep going–five dollars or more a gallon for gasoline, all of which has to be imported.

Ecology: After WWII, Japan made a pact with the devil—quality of life was sacrificed to the god of industrialization. It shows. Japan is incredibly crowded, incredibly built-up, and incredibly polluted. The rivers, like many of those in southern California, are concrete. The buildings are concrete. The land is intensely cultivated[69], so, in the more populated regions, there are few natural green areas left. Mount Fuji can rarely be seen because of the haze. The Japanese garden, as we think of it, is not really very Japanese. Most people live in flats with perhaps a balcony and a few potted plants. Those that have yards have very small ones; in the country, most free land is given over to growing useful things. There are some parks in the towns, but they are uncommon.

Construction: The building industry is Japan's equivalent of our military-industrial complex. Prohibited by their post-war constitution from having a standing army, government spending has instead been channeled into construction. A good part of the money is graft and overruns, favors for friends of politicians.

Nagoya epitomizes this; it was heavily bombed during WWII because, even then, it was a major industrial center. It has since been rebuilt, and then rebuilt again–the average life expectancy of a building in Japan is only twenty years; the land beneath it is much more valuable than any structure. Buildings are generally built to be functional rather than attractive. Like our MIC, many projects are built for political reasons rather than because an actual need exists. Ian pointed out to me a huge new highway being built to the Nagoya airport, costing millions of dollars. This would be good, except the airport itself, although fairly new, and much nicer than most airports in the US (particularly Detroit Metro), is just a temporary one; someone has determined that an even newer and bigger airport is needed. The newer airport will be open shortly after completion of the highway to the older one. It makes the B-2 bomber look like a wise investment.

Antiquities: Japan is such an ancient land; I expected, naturally that there would be lots of fascinating old places to visit and enjoy. Not so. Very little that is old remains. This is due in part to ancient building techniques. Until recently, almost all the buildings in Japan were constructed of wood, not stone. Most rotted or burned, and were rebuilt; few truly old buildings remain.

In **Ise**, necessity has become ritual. It is one of the most important shrines in Japan and one of the major

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[67] e.g. Bolivia, where the steering column is moved over to the left, instruments remain where they were on the right, and they are put into use as taxis. I've ridden in them. American schoolbuses, in contrast, get a second life in Guatemala, where they become public buses, often with the original yellow paint job and the name of the school of origin intact.

[68] I was told of a man who tore down a restaurant that had been in the family for several generations, and put up a parking structure in its place. He went from just getting by to being rich.

[69] It seems as though every spare inch of Japan's land is cultivated with rice. Wherever I went by train, there was always rice. I had thought that this had something to do with Japan's perceived need for self-sufficiency, but Ian told me it had more to do with government subsidies. Japan's electoral system has always favored rural areas, and the farmers have disproportionate influence in the government. Their inefficiencies are subsidized by the taxpayers, who pay several times the world market rate for rice and other produce. (Much like American consumers pay five times the world rate for sugar, because of an incredibly strong sugar lobby in the South; sugar farming has, unfortunately, also devastated the Everglades.)

pilgrimage sites of Japan[70]. Naiku-Jingu, the Inner Shrine, holds the sacred mirror, one of the three sacred symbols of the emperor [71], and dates back to the third century. All of the buildings have been completely rebuilt of local cypress wood every twenty years since then; originally, this was because of rot, but now it has become ritual. The shrine is in an ancient forest by the river, nestled in the mountains; the forest was originally planted to provide the wood, but now the wood is imported to preserve the beauty of the forest.

There is a castle in Nagoya. Castles date back to more feudal times, when there were hundreds; under the Shogunate, most were razed, to discourage internecine warfare. More were razed during the Meiji Restoration. Many of those that had survived into this century burned during WWII; by its end only 12 remained. The castle in Nagoya is not one of them; like many castles in Japan, **Nagoya Castle** is made of ferro-concrete, a facsimile only, and not a very accurate one. It has elevators, electric lights, and a large gift shop.

Religion: The official religions of Japan are Shintoism (a sort of animism, with the worship of numerous local gods or kami), which has shrines or jingu, and Buddhism, which was imported from China, and has temples.

Jingu are closed to the public, not just non-believers, but to everyone except the priests. One approaches through a tori (gate), and past a ritual cleansing area (a covered fountain with lots of bamboo dippers for scooping up water to cleanse one's hands and mouth before entering). Within the grounds you will pass kiosks selling amulets, or *omamori*[72], and votive plaques, or *ema* . The ema are made of wood, with a picture on one side and room on the other to write a wish. These are attached to special boards. Also for sale are fortunes, *omikuji.* on white slips of paper. These are selected at random; if you like your fortune, you take it home; if not, you tie it to the branch of a tree or bush on the shrine grounds. Then there is the shrine itself. Worshippers approach it, throw down some money, clap their hands, pray and bow. At the entrance believers throw down money, bow and clap. It's an efficient ritual, and includes a pleasant walk through the landscaped shrine grounds. One could do worse.

Temples are much more open. Most have a pair of lions at the gate (statues), one with the mouth open,and one with mouth shut. There is usually a bell on the grounds, and one can enter the temples and pray to the representations of the Buddha. There is much variation on the theme, as there are many different types of Buddhism, from the austere Zen to more exuberant sects.

"Religion is a fairly casual thing in Japan. The major religions are Shintoism and Buddhism, which coexist cheerfully, with most people choosing to believe elements of each as the need arises. There doesn't seem to be much in the way of rigorous dogma or strict priestly authority; it's more of a hang-loose, do-it-yourself deal, wherein if you want to do well on an exam, or heal an illness, you go and make an offering, or waft some incense smoke over the afflicted area....There's nothing preachy about Buddhism. I was in a lot of temples, and I still don't know what Buddhists believe, except: 'If you do bad things, you will be reborn as an ox.'-DB"

Both Buddhism and Shintoism are very non-structured when compared to Western religions—no masses, no sabbath, no large group activities. Most Japanese consider themselves both Shinto and Buddhist, and shrines and temples are jumbled together in many complexes . Not many seem to take either religion very seriously, except perhaps at holidays. This, of course, leaves the weekend free for shopping!

Shopping: That last item is the most important. Japan is a nation of shoppers. Its religion is not Shintoism or Buddhism, but Consumerism. Japan has more shopping opportunities than any country I have ever visited, the US included. The train stations resemble huge malls. Downtowns are crowded on the weekend, with everybody out shopping. Sundays are just another day to shop. Every temple or shrine has a few shops selling religious souvenirs. All tourist destinations have huge shopping districts. Even Meiji-Mura[73], a historical village I visited, had converted a

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[70] According to the local tourist bureau, most Japanese make the pilgrimage here once in their lives. Some six million Japanese visit the shrine each year, or more than sixteen thousand a day. Most of these are schoolchildren, bused in, in large, rowdy groups; the rest are older Japanese, the men in ugly suits and ties, and the women in Gilligan hats and dressy shoes.

[71] The other two are the sword, which is hidden away in Atsuta-Jingo Shrine in Nagoya, and the jewel.

[72] These come ready for any occasion. I bought one for traffic safety which I've hung in the Jeep, and also have one for easy childbirth tucked away. I've seen special ones for success in school exams, good health, fertility and luck in love. Most are brocade with embroidered kanji, but I've even seen some with a Hello, Kitty! motif.

[73] Meiji-Mura is a theme park near Nagoya. It reminded me a bit of Greenfield Village, where Henry Ford tried to recreate the America of his youth by bringing many

good half of its historical buildings into shops which had no similarity to their original uses. I am truly convinced that it is impossible to find a place in Japan where you can't shop.

Let us not forget that presentation is paramount. Even the smallest purchase is wrapped in several layers of paper and plastic. Gifts are exquisitely wrapped, and the wrapping is often considered by both the giver and receiver to be more important than the actual item being wrapped.

Fashion/Fads: These exist in most countries, but they seem so much more prevalent here. This is the land of Pokemon and Hello, Kitty! Fashion is particularly interesting; when I was there, "elephant socks"(baggy white socks worn by all the schoolgirls, and held up on their legs by special sock glue) were all the rage, as were huge platform shoes[74] and little red cowboy hats. Fads here have staying power; long after she'd run her course elsewhere, Hello Kitty! remains incredibly popular with adult women in Japan. Any gift shop will have hundreds of HK! items, including, for the year of the rabbit (now just ending), HK! wearing a bunny suit.

With few exceptions, though, clothing in Japan is expensive and not horribly nice. I would occasionally see women in traditional kimono and clogs, but they were the rare exception. The Japanese have accepted Western dress, but haven't really mastered it. Most of the clothing I saw was drab, in browns and grays. Men wore suits with ties almost everywhere, and the women wore dresses or pant suits, with dress shoes and their funny-looking "Gilligan" hats. Most of the kids wore their school uniforms, even on Sundays, because they think they're "cool".

Prices: These are really as horrible as you've heard. Although the $80 melon is an anomaly (it's a special gift melon, grown on a cotton bed so as to be completely unblemished), food is not cheap. I had sticker shock the first time I walked into a grocery store[75], and saw potatoes, two small ones for a dollar, and beef sold by the ounce. Restaurants are not much better; most travellers, myself included, ate lots of noodles, and bento boxes (beautifully packaged take-away food) from the 7-11. I avoided Tokyo, so I can't speak for it, but I found hotel rooms to be reasonable, comparable to the US, but not a budget traveller's delight.

Schoolchildren: To the casual observer, Japan would seem a country under siege by a very young army. Not so. It is just the school children (particularly the boys) in their very militaristic uniforms. School is a very full time occupation for Japanese children. They go to regular school, and then to cram school at night and on weekends, to study so as to get into a good school. So they tell me. How does this jibe with the fact that, almost everywhere I went in my travels, there were inevitably hundreds of school children around? Every historical sight was inundated with them, as were all the parks and other attractions, even on school days. On weekends there were thousands of them downtown, with their cute little cell phones and shopping bags. Ian tells me that the Japanese school curriculum is very rigid, with much teaching of the importance of emperor and nation. There are certain places that each child must visit before graduation, as part of his cultural education/indoctrination. They include Ise, Kyoto, Nara, and the A-bomb museums, all of which were also on my itinerary.

Photography: Everyone in Japan seems to own a camera, anything from a cheap disposable to a fancy high-tech model with all the bells and whistles. None the less, it's hard to find any nice postcards of Japan; most are boring, not well focused, often unattractive, and seem to feature flowers and snow. This is because the Japanese don't photograph

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historical buildings together. The buildings here are all Meiji-era, 1868-1912, during which time Japan opened itself to the West. There are shops, churches, train stations, schools, banks, and even a theatre, from all over the country. Although restored well on the outside, many of the buildings are being used for commercial purposes that have nothing to do with their original function: the butcher's shop is a restaurant, the bank serves ice cream, the school is a games arcade and the church some sort of children's play area, and many others sell sake and tacky souvenirs.

[74] In November in Tokyo, a passenger was killed in a car accident that occurred when the driver, Ms. Tomomi Okawa, 25, rammed a concrete pole; according to police, she lost control when she missed the brake pedal because of her trendy but clunky platform shoes. And in September, schoolteacher Misayo Shimizu, 25, died several hours after fracturing her skull on a sidewalk after toppling over in her 5-inch-heel platform shoes.

[75] Suzanne, an American woman living in Nagoya,says she returned home from her first shopping trip in Japan with no groceries, and told her husband "Honey, we're just not going to eat any more".

scenery, preferring to photograph each other in front of the scenery[76]. Most important sites even have special platforms available for groups to pose on, and there are usually lot of groups queued up, waiting to pose.

Food: A Japanese-American friend once said, when speaking of Japanese food, "We don't care how it tastes, as long as it looks good." This, I discovered, was not entirely true. The Japanese have lots of different and tasty foods, although they seem a bit strange to our Western palates. I enjoyed the variety–crisp little roasted fish, tangy pickles, miso, crunchy persimmons, all sorts of noodles, rice, and even sashimi (raw fish). Presentation was important, but only as a part of the total experience of eating. The best non-home-cooked meal I had in Japan was the one I had in a ryokan (traditional Japanese Inn) in Takayama. It was served at a small table in my room, by a woman in kimono. Bowl after tiny bowl was bought in: pickles, fish, meat, dipping sauces, soups, vegetables. Lots of little things, and all were wonderful. Food is an important gift item in Japan. When people go away on trips, the traditionally bring back souvenirs of food. Every town , and especially tourist town, has some local delicacy that you just must buy for the folks back home. In Hakodate, it was the seafood; in Takayama, the pickles, miso, and persimmon cookies.

I travelled around a good bit of Japan, and saw many of the mandatory sights[77]. I viewed Mount Fuji only from my train window; I was told I was lucky at that, as most days it's not visible at all. These are some of the places I visited:

HOKKAIDO: the island of Hokkaido, the northern island, is Japan's Wild West. It did not even officially become a part of Japan until the last century. The natives of Hokkaido, the Ainu, had their land stolen, and have been largely wiped out as a race; the few that remain are mixed-blood, and the language and culture are in danger of dying out. Sound familiar?

Hokkaido is beautiful It has wild places including, rumor has is, and river that is not dammed anywhere along its entire length. I went to Hokkaido to see the nature of Japan, and to get away from the concrete for a few days. I took the train north to Hakodate, where I spent a day. **Hakodate** is an old port town, which is becoming a tourist destination. The old Meiji buildings have been restored, and the old warehouses on the waterfront turned into cute little shops. There is an huge early morning fish market attended by merchants and tourists, and an old Russian church. A ropeway takes you to a hill with a dramatic overlook of the city and the bays on either side. It is particularly beautiful at night, with the lights of town sparkling like jewels.

Sapporo was less interesting. I spent my time there at the botanical gardens, which were nice and past their fall peak, and at a small but interesting Ainu museum. I spent the evening wandering through the town, and found a restaurant that makes really good okonomiyaki, "Japanese pizza", cooked on my table.

Kushiro was quite good. It is a port down, rather dreary, but located in a beautiful area of marshlands and near volcanic mountains. I had come here to see the Japanese crane, a bird that is quite beautiful and graceful, but endangered here in Japan. Unlike most TIs in Japan, the one at Kushiro station had no English-speakers. By using sign language, pointing at maps and muttering a few names, I made them aware that I wanted to visit the marshlands at Kushiro Shitsugen NP, and to see the cranes. They found a train that would take me to the park, and a bus tour that would take me to see the cranes. I motioned to show that I wanted a long, inclusive bus tour, and they pointed out the one in the brochure which they felt would meet my criteria.

The marshlands were beautiful. I went to an overlook, and stared for a long time—a huge expanse of golden grasses, marred only by a sinuous river. No buildings, no roads, no people, no noise. I breathed it in.

The bus tour the next day was quite amazing. It was a Japanese bus tour, led by a perky young tour guide. Our itinerary was interesting: a marsh viewing site, a crane viewing site, and then a cow-viewing site[78]. We then visited

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[76] Several year ago, I met a man told me that wife's hobby was taking photos of Japanese taking photos of each other. We spotted quite a few of them that day in Prague. Since then, I've noticed them everywhere I travel, with the largest concentration being, for some unfathomable reason, in Canterbury, England.

[77] With the exception of Tokyo, although I did view it from my train many times. It just seemed as though it would be more of the same old concrete and crowding, only on a much vaster scale. Couldn't see the point of it, as I figured the hassle factor would outweigh any pleasure received. Anyway, what do you expect from someone who went to Australia and completely missed Sydney?

[78] Really! Someone had built an observation tower here in the grasslands so tourists could watch cows graze!

Lake Mashu, a gorgeous pure blue volcanic lake, Mt. Io-zan, with it's sulfurous steam vents[79], and finally Lake Kusshаro, fed by warm springs and the wintering ground for thousands of whooper swans. Our guide chattered continuously and sweetly for the entire time we were on the bus, telling stories and leading a quiz, even trying to get everyone singing. I had an advantage—I couldn't understand a word the guide said, and so it became just background noise.

NARA: This city has what tourists expect to see in Japan: gardens, carp ponds, and lots of temples and shrines. It was established as the first permanent capitol of Japan in 710; before that, the capitol moved with the passing of each emperor, because of Shinto taboos about death. Permanent status lasted only 75 years, but in that time Buddhism flourished and many great temples were built here. The most famous is the Todai-ji, with the world's largest wooden building and a huge Great Buddha.

Much of historic Nara is within the confines of a large park, Nara-Koen, which also contains huge numbers of spotted deer. They roam the park, and are not subtle about begging for hand-outs. If you buy an ice cream or a bun, they will try to eat it out of your hands. There are many vendors who sell "deer cookys" for feeding to the deer. I fed the deer, but they can be scary, especially when a large number of them sense that you have cookies; they will mob you, pushing their faces at you. I saw one deer head-butt a schoolgirl; he knocked her down, scattering her cookies, and then proceeded, insolently, to eat them. Once a year, I read, there is a festival where they cut off the deer's antlers; this is done to protect the human visitors, no doubt.

I enjoyed wandering about the city. I particularly liked the Kasuga Taisha Shrine—a long road leads up to it, lined with hundreds of stone lanterns, with even more lanterns within the shrine grounds. It must be fantastic, when they are all lit. During the day, trainloads of schoolchildren wander about the city in large, noisy groups. At night there is no one around. Many of the buildings are beautifully lit up. It was at night that I enjoyed the splendor of the huge Nandaimon Gate, viewed Daibutsuden Hall reflected in its ponds, and gazed up at many the tall pagodas.

KYOTO: This is the one city in Japan that every tourist, it seems, must visit. It is the old capitol, the site of the Imperial Palace. It is a huge, modern, industrial city : tucked away within it are several dozen UNESCO World Heritage Sites. I took Minako's advice, and booked an English bus tour of Kyoto; getting around Kyoto is difficult, and the sites quite scattered.

In the **Higashi-hongan-ji Temple**, besides the world's second largest wooden building, there is a huge rope made entirely out of the hair of female devotees; it was used to haul timber for the reconstruction of the temple in 1895 after a fire. Regular ropes were not strong enough to haul the huge timbers needed, so this one was created. **Nijo-jo Castle**, the seat of the Shogun, was meant to be every bit as fantastic as the Imperial Palace. It is filled with wonderful paintings and carved screens, and has "nightingale floors" which "chirp" when walked upon. The shogun, was afraid of assassins, and did not want anyone sneaking up on him.

Also impressive was **Kinka-ju Temple**, the famed "Golden Pavilion". As with most of the sites in fire-prone Kyoto, this is not the original structure; it is a recent recreation. As opposed to the others, which burned down due to natural causes, this was burnt in 1950 by a young monk gone mad. It was built in the 1220s as a villa. Yoshimitsu, the shogun who had abdicated in 1394 and devoted the rest of his life to quiet contemplation in this serene setting, willed it to the temple. He had made it quite spectacular, covering the top two stories in gold leaf over lacquer. The current pavilion is lovely, built on an island in a small lake, in which it is beautifully reflected.

At the **Heian-jingu Shrine**, we saw lots of little girls in full kimono. It was the 3-5-7 holiday, and 3 and 7 year old girls, as well as 5 year old boys, were dressed in traditional outfits and brought to a shrine to be blessed, and then photographed by western tourists. The **Sanju-Sangen-do Temple** was perhaps the most amazing; within it are 1001 statues of the "Thousand Armed Kannon". They are spectacular—one huge statue in he middle, and five hundred smaller ones, all covered in gold leaf, on either side, arrayed in rows. No two statues look exactly alike, and each statue has forty extra arms, and many additional heads. They are called 1000-armed because, as the Buddhists count, each arm can save 25 worlds.

Our last stop was **Kiyoomisu-dera Temple**, which appeared be on the itinerary of every tourist in Kyoto. The temple is high up on a hill, and to get near it the buses had to go up a hill to the parking lot. This took some time, because the lights were poorly timed, and two large buses could not pass each other on the hill. We then had to walk up along a narrow street absolutely lined with tourist shop, known as Teapot Hill. The temple was quite garishly painted in orange and green. The claim to fame of this temple is its huge wooden verandah overlooking the concrete and construction sites of modern Kyoto. Just below the verandah is a waterfall, which has been redirected into three small streams; visitors can drink or bathe in the waters, which are said to have therapeutic powers.

I returned to Kyoto a second time to see the **Ryoan-ji Temple**. It was difficult to get to, but worthwhile. The grounds were lovely, as was the Kyoyo-chi pond, with its little islands and boathouses. The main attraction was the

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[79] At the base of the mountain are several older women selling eggs that have been cooked in the steam vents. They put the eggs in plastic crates, and set these over the vents. We had some, with a bit of salt.

temple garden, a bed of sand with 15 rocks in it, surrounded by a wall. That's it. The Zen monk who designed it provided no explanation. I stared a while, but then found that the more interesting sight was watching the visitors try to puzzle it out and, even more so, try to get a nice photo of the garden.

But perhaps the most interesting structure in Kyoto , and more representative of Japan, was the train station. It was huge, a small city rather than a large building, with a multistory atrium which held a garishly lit up multistory Christmas tree, and a huge Santa in his sleigh rode along the long glass wall.

CASTLES: I saw three altogether, the concrete one in Nagoya, and two of the remaining wooden ones in Inuyama and Himeji. **Inuyama Castle** is located on a small hill near a river, in the Rhineland of Japan; it was originally built in 1537, partially destroyed in earthquake of 1891, and rebuilt a few times since. The dojon, or central tower, is narrow and tall. It is all wood, and the ceilings are fairly low. One proceeds up a series of staircases which are practically ladders–narrow steps, and widely spaced. There are four levels, reached by narrow staircases; from the top, one can see the countryside all around. The grounds were forested, with nice, quiet places to sit and watch birds.

Himeji Castle is much more spectacular. It is called the White Egret, rises high above town, and is quite lovely. The grounds are beautifully landscaped,and most of the original wooden castle still exists intact; it was built in 1580, and then never involved in any wars. There is one large dojon (five stories on the outside and six inside), three smaller ones, and lots of moats and defensive walls. It's a great place to spend a day wandering about.

NAGASAKI: What comes to mind for most people is the thought of nuclear devastation, not the sort of place that you'd think would belong on a travel itinerary. You'd be wrong. Nagasaki is a lovely city, with a long history, of which the A-bomb was just a small but prominent part. Because of its geography—a natural port in the south of Japan, Nagasaki had much contact with the outside world, and was a major center of trade with China and Korea.

In 1542, an off-course Portuguese ship arrived in Japan, and opened trade to the west. With the traders came the missionaries. In 1560, St Francis Xavier visited, and Portuguese Catholic missionaries from Goa and Macau soon converted many Japanese. Nagasaki was established in 1571 by the local daimyo (regional lord), and became the main arrival point for Portuguese ships. A Christian church was flourishing in the south. Japanese lords began to fear the growing influence of Christianity and, in 1597, 26 European and Japanese Christians were crucified in Nagasaki; in 1614 Christianity was banned, all foreigners deported, and the country closed. There was a loophole—the small, closely-watched Dutch enclave of Dejima Island near Nagasaki. Here trade continued, and western science and progress continued to filter into Japan.

Nagasaki is a pretty city. It is built on hills, around a harbor, and has streetcars. There was a lot to see and do. Many of the more interesting sites were related to Nagasaki's history. **GloverGarden**, on the side of a hill, and with great views across Nagasaki, has a collection of old European houses. There are also fountains, moving stairways, a statue to Madame Butterfly, and an incredible number of schoolchildren. Nearby are the **Dutch Slopes**, flagstone streets which are still lined, in areas, with old Dutch houses. **Dejima**, which is no longer an island, has lovely museums and a model of the original settlement. Running through town is the **Nakajima-gawa** Stream, which is crossed by a series of picturesque bridges. At one time, each bridge led to a separate temple. The best known bridge is Megane-bashi (Spectacles Bridge); a mandatory photo-posing site. The arches and their reflection in the water come together to create a "spectacles" effect.

There is a lovely memorial to the 26 martyrs, and several nice temples. There is even a nice harbor cruise, with views of huge ship-building factories, and a ropeway up the mountain, for gorgeous night views of the city. But the most important sight, is of course, the A-Bomb site. In **Hypocentre Park**, a black stone column marks the exact point above which the Bomb exploded. Nearby is a section of **Urakami Cathedral**, which was destroyed in the blast, and **Peace Park** , which has a huge, aesthetically-challenged statue. The A-Bomb museum is quite moving. It depicts the results of the bombing—twisted metal, charred stone, photos of the landscape and the victims. As Dave Barry said of the similar museum in Hiroshima, "Some of the exhibits are scientific, explaining how big the atomic fireball was, how big the blast area was, how radiation sickness advanced, how many people died. But the most powerful exhibits are intensely personal: charred clothing; twisted eyeglass frames; a dark human shape on some granite steps, caused when a person's body blocked the blast rays, a shadow of death. I found myself weeping, out of sorrow and helplessness and guilt. But I also felt anger. Because the way the museum presents it, the atomic bomb was like a lightning bolt—something nobody could foresee, and nobody could prevent. It was as though one day, for no reason, the Americans came along, literally out of the blue, and did this horrible thing to these innocent people." He's right. My despair turned to outrage at the lack of historical context to this all. No mention of the War in the Pacific, the Bataan Death March, the Rape of Nanking (where more civilians died than in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Tokyo combined). No mention of the Battle of Okinawa, where more than 100,000 Japanese civilians, not all willingly, committed mass suicide rather than surrender to American forces. Only a comment that, after suffering from 15 years of war (which Japan instigated), this horrible tragedy happened to the Japanese. The museum frequently expresses the hope that such an event will never happen again; but how can it be avoided, if they don't understand why it happened in the first place?

TAKAYAMA: Up in the mountains above Nagoya, in the ancient Hida district, among the Japanese alps, is the

city of Takayama. It is a town of traditional inns, shops and sake breweries, and many, many museums. Takayama has managed to retain some of its traditional charm by preserving its old wooden buildings.

I stayed in a *ryokan*, a traditional inn. It was a sweet place, full of antiques, with an *irori*, traditional hearth. My room was floored with tatami mats, and had a *kotatsu* in the center. This is a small table, low to the ground, surrounded with a quilt and with an electric heater underneath It is the way the Japanese keep warm in the winter, tucking their legs inside and drinking green tea. There was a garden with a view of the river and the old town. At meal times, several trays of all sorts of delicacies would be brought in to my table. At night, a kimonoed lady would bring in a futon and lot of warm blankets, and I would sleep. As in all Japanese homes, shoes were left at the door, and only slippers worn inside[80]. There was a huge bath[81], big enough to do laps in; in the evening it would be filled with scalding hot water, and soaking was an indescribable pleasure.

There was lots to see and do in Takayama, even in the pouring rain. In the morning was the early market, where al sorts of wonderful pickles could be sampled and bought. There were lot of museums to visit. In the old town, several old merchant's houses had been restored, and you could wander through them and see how people here lived a hundred years ago—the central irori, the shop in front, living quarters in back. There were many sake shops, with the traditional sycamore ball to mark them, but no free tastings. There were several wonderful folk museums, displaying lion masks, children's toys, and *yatai*, the floats used in the spring and fall harvest festivals. There were, of course, lots and lots of shops selling all sorts of souvenirs, including *sarubobo*(small red "monkey baby"), bunnies(it was the year of the rabbit), Hello Kitty!, and traditional foods: persimmon cookies, hoba miso, and vacuum-packed pickles.

Most interesting, though, was Hida Folk Village, a large open air museum with dozens of traditional Hida homes in the *gassho-zukuri* style. The roofs of the houses were sharply angled to prevent snow accumulation; the name "gassho" comes from the Japanese word for praying, because the shape of the roofs was thought to resemble hands in prayer. The buildings were huge A-frames, four and five stories tall, and big. They would house an entire extended family and their livestock. The main floor would have stable, shop, kitchen and hearth. The upper floors were often given over to industry; in one house they had been used for raising silkworms.

.....There is so much more I could write about Japan, so many things that I learned there. I know its history, the significance of the tea ceremony, rules for pouring sake, how to spot a yakuza[82], the importance of business cards and their proper presentation, why Japan's streets ar e so safe, and how individuality is suppressed. I've seen temples, shrines and bonsai chrysanthemums to last a lifetime. I hope I imparted at least a little bit of it to you.

I'm done for this year....although it's already the next. I hope you are all well, survived the Y2K bug without any major problems, and will have a good year ahead. As for me, I'm off to India in February and the Ethiopia in March. I plan to go back to Ukraine this summer, to work with the orphans[83]. This fall I hope to go to Bolivia again, but I'm not entirely sure yet. I'm applying to Doctors Without Borders, and perhaps something will come of that.

One final travel thought: Heaven is French chefs, English policemen, German engineers, Italian lovers, organized by the Swiss. Hell is English chefs, German policemen, French engineers, Swiss lovers, organized by Italians.

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[80] In some inns, there were even special gai-jin slippers, as we foreigners, of course, have such big feet. Regular slippers, though, could not be worn into the toilet; for this there were special,and often bright red, toilet slippers.

[81] Part of the Japanese onsen tradition is the large communal bath. Although the tubs I saw were big enough, there was no public group bathing. Times were allotted; families would bathe together, but not strangers. I think I must have stayed at fairly westernized places, though.

[82] A yakuza is a Japanese gangster. They wear suits with wide lapels and dark glasses, drive large American cars, and lop off the ends of their pinkies.

[83] If any of you want to help us at Help Us Help the Children, you can do so by sponsoring an orphan, or by contributing used clothes, toys, and sporting goods. For more information, write or call me, or write to

HUHTC
4511 Bernice
Warren, MI 48091

Have a Great Year, and Keep In Touch!

Luba / Люба (or, in Japanese, Ru-Ba)