

Greetings!

Once again, I am sending out a brief Christmas letter. I do plan to try to also write a long version this year¹. In the meantime, I am getting ready for the holidays—there are only 23 days left until Christmas, and 19 until my annual tree viewing and holiday party. It has been snowing, frequent flurries, for the past two weeks, and this morning it snowed and snowed and snowed. There is now a blanket of snow covering the barren fall landscape—no more sullen browns and grays, only pure, beautiful white! We may indeed have a white Christmas (and Solstice, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, too)! This is a rare occurrence in Michigan, where winter is generally gray and miserable, but not consistently cold. Often we get a bit of snow before the holidays, and then a warm spell, and end up celebrating the aggregate holidays in the mud. But this year it is very cold, much colder than any winter in recent memory, with little prospect of balmy weather ahead. Our highs have been in the 20s, and low in the teens and single digits²—“Brrrr!!!” kind of weather, the sort that necessitates generous utilization of hot chocolate and fireplaces.

Politically, the wins have been few and the losses many this year. The only candidate I ever gave money to died in a plane crash³, and one of the few principled men in the Congress is gone. The Republicans have decided that 2% constitutes a mandate, and have decided to roll back all environmental laws (after all, who needs clean air and water or national parks?), make the tax cuts permanent (why shouldn't the poor and the middle class pay for everything?), and let the religious right control this country's social agenda (I don't even want to think about this one). The Democrats have learned, or should have, that Truman was right when he said “*If voters have the choice of voting for a real Republican or a fake Republican, they will choose the real one every time.*”

Our civil liberties are rapidly disappearing. Between the so-called “Patriot” Act and the Homeland Security Bill, Congress and the pResident have launched a wholesale attack on many of our rights and most of our freedoms. Privacy has been sacrificed for expediency—they have given government bureaus the right to spy on anyone, anytime, for any reason, all in the name of security. They claim to be protecting the “American Way of Life,” but are actually destroying it. “*They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.*” Benjamin Franklin said this in 1759. He was—and is—right.

But enough doom and gloom. In happier news, our family continues to grow. There are now eleven member of our third generation, my various nieces, nephews, and first-cousins-once-removed. The two most recent additions are Matthew (b. 2001), brother to Roman and son to Andy and Laurie, and Lucas (b. 2002), brother to Dmitria and son of Alex and Wendy. Kalyna, Nick and Fuzz (aka Maria) keep growing, and only Fuzz is still readily liftable. They are all in school now (Grades 4, 2 and kindergarten), giving their mother a bit of respite during the day, and all play on soccer teams, keeping her busy running around the rest of the time. Kalyna remains studious, Nick is Mr. Sports, and Fuzz is five going on fifteen—she has a touch of the devil in her. My parents continue to be relatively healthy into their golden years. In sadder news, my Uncle John Jaryniuk died this year. He lived in his home until the end, as he had always wanted. His love of books helped inculcate in me a love of reading and learning. I will miss him.

I continue to work at Huron Valley Hospital on the Labor and Delivery unit. We keep pretty busy, although the work is not as easy as it was in the old days when I was younger and our unit was so much smaller. I am no longer the new kid, though, but one of the seasoned pros. Obstetrics is still long stretches of boredom interspersed with moments of sheer terror. That's not necessarily a bad thing.....

My health is now much better than it was a year ago. I became severely thyrotoxic earlier this year. I'd probably been hyperthyroid for quite a while, blaming the symptoms on old age and being out of shape. My energy levels declined, exercise tolerance was practically nil, and I began to have tremors and heat intolerance. It wasn't until my heart began

¹ I really mean to do so this year. I said I would last year, but health problems (see later) kept me from finishing much of anything. I plan to write about my travels in 2001 and 2002, and will have it available for anyone who wants it by e-mail. I will sent hard copies to those I promised last year (as well as anyone else who asks. We authors are vain—we love to have people read our work.)

If I don't already have your e-mail, or if you're not sure if I do, and especially if it has changed recently, send me a short note at lubap@earthlink.net so I can add you to my address book.

² For my metric friends, that would be highs of approximately -5°C, and lows of approximately -10°C to -15°C.

³ Paul Wellstone, Democratic senator from Minnesota, was one of the few liberal voices left in the government. He put the interests of people ahead of those of big corporations, spoke for those who rarely had a voice in the halls of power. He was a righteous man, a man of integrity and conviction, of conscience and compassion. He stood up to the big corporations and the rich and powerful. He will be missed.

racing and I couldn't sleep that I finally saw my internist, and a diagnosis of severe hyperthyroidism (Grave's Disease) was made. I was treated with radioactive iodine, which completely wiped out my thyroid, and have been hypothyroid since, despite the best efforts of my internist and endocrinologist. We've finally gotten the dosage of my medication just about right, and I look forward to returning to my usual hypomanic energy level soon.

I did a fair bit of traveling this year, despite being very tired much of the time⁴. I spent the late winter in **Chile**, where it was the height of summer. (It's that crossing the equator thing. And yes, water does swirl the other way around the drain.) I spent a week cruising the **Straits of Magellan and Beagle Channel** on board the Terra Australis⁵ with the Nature Conservancy. It is a beautiful place, the southernmost tip of South America, the wildest part of Patagonia. I followed in the footsteps of (albeit in much more comfort than) Magellan and Darwin (my personal hero). On our small ship we visited fjords, waterfalls, and pristine forests: we watched condors soar, sea lions frolic, and glaciers calve. Despite it being high summer, we were often cold and wet; there was lots of rain, sleet and snow. I mad many new friends, both American and Chilean. My Spanish improved, as I often sat at the Spanish-speaking table, with the staff and guides. The ship's doctor, his wife and I became quite good friends: I got him interested in birding, and they took me out to dinner in Santiago on my return there.

During that week, we visited quite a few places, both in Chile and Argentina. We left out of Punta Arenas, and first stopped at **Magdalena Island**, a lump of rock with some grass, a lighthouse, and half a million Magellanic penguins on it. This is a major penguin rookery; there were penguins of all ages wandering about. The molting penguins hung out on the beach; the adults frolicked in the surf; and the young hid out in their nests. It was one vast expanse of penguins. Large skuas flew overhead, keeping an eye out for the weak and the stragglers, which they dispatched as part of the "Circle of Life". We came ashore briefly in **Porvenir**, gawked at a few guanacos along the road, and visited a working sheep ranch/estancia. We didn't find any of the promised Chilean flamingos, but saw lots of black-necked swans, including a large concrete one in the playground in town.

Then we sailed into the **Beagle Channel** and into unspoilt wilderness. Here it was colder and mistier; snow-capped mountains rose one after another from crystal clear water and faded off into the distance. Rocky islets dotted the water, and dense green forests mantled the mountain slopes. Birds flew overhead, penguins and dolphins swam alongside us. We stopped at Condor Bay, walked the cobbled shores, and explored the icy blue expanse of Serrano Glacier at its head. We warmed ourselves with hot chocolate before heading back onto the ship.

We crossed over to the **Strait of Magellan** during the night, across the not very aptly named Pacific Ocean, which tossed our little boat severely. There we sailed through the "**Avenue of Glaciers**," six separate glaciers that descend from the Darwin Mountains, and one of which has a waterfall at its base. We spent a morning at **Yendegaia**; it was once a ranch (the oldest and most remote estacion in the Tierra del Fuego), and before that a Yagan Indian campsite. Today it is an ecological reserve, with hills to climb and gorgeous riverine vistas to gaze upon. That afternoon we reached **Puerto Williams**, the southernmost city in the world, at latitude S 54° 56'. We wandered through the village--some visited the anthropological museum; the birders among us visited the town dump instead, where we saw, simultaneously, three different species of caracara (a beautiful hawk).

We crossed the invisible border into Argentina, where we spent a day in **Ushuaia**, the city at the end of the world. It is a rather large city, with lots of big ships in the port and wonderful ice cream in the shops in town. Pam Baglien (my roommate) and I had fun wandering through the nooks and crannies of the town, including the grocery store.

We then doubled back, retracing our route, with a few small detours, and stops at more glaciers. We had a chance to see huge elephant seals and much smaller sea lions. We watched condors soar, gulls swoop, and albatrosses glide. We tramped over rocky beaches, muddy slopes, springy sphagnum bogs, green forest trails and well-built beaver dams. We sampled prickly heath berries and drank fine aged whiskey over ancient glacial ice. And best of all, in the misty rain, to the tune of "Stardust" played on a saxophone, we watched a huge calving of a glacier, masses of ice crashing thunderously down into the bay.

It was a wonderful trip.

⁴ The interesting thing about thyroid disease is that, whether your levels are high or low, the end result seems to be fatigue. If thyroid levels are low, your body can't get moving, and you feel sluggish. If your thyroid levels are high, the metabolism races and tires you out. You can't win.

⁵ This was to have been the last season for the Terra Australis ("Southern Land"); a replacement ship had been ordered and was being built for the next cruising season. Interestingly, when the Terra Australis was traveling to Valdivia for the winter, it caught fire. Several crewmen were injured, and one died.

I next traveled to **Torres del Paine National Park**, also in southern Patagonia. It is an ecological island of mountains and lakes surrounded by grassland steppes. There I experienced the joys of camping in a tent during a storm while febrile. I climbed the lower bits of the mountains, and traveled around the park to view the gorgeous landscapes. I saw herds of guanacos and flocks of flamingos and emus. I went owling with Enrique, and “cocktail birding” and stargazing with Keller, Jaime and Fernando. Due to the unseasonable heat, the glaciers began to melt (I could hear them cracking and groaning throughout the day and night—it was an eerie sound), and the rivers flooded.

I traveled north to Chile’s mid-section, the beautiful **Lake District**. I hired a car with an automatic transmission (no easy feat!), and drove around Lago Llanquihue and to the top of Mt Osorno. The latter is a beautiful volcanic cone of a mountain, as pretty as Mt. Fuji (but without clouds of toxic pollution obscuring it). From the top I had gorgeous views of the countryside, as well as close-up looks at the lava fields and blue, blue ice and snow. I then headed south to the island of **Chiloe**, with its rains, dairy farms and wild fuschias. It is a pretty place, with old wooden churches and small fishing villages. I went out to see the penguins here; they live on several little islets, and are of two varieties, Humbolt’s and Magellenic. I rode with a fisherman in a small, rickety fishing boat, in the cold water, rough sea and rain. It was only mildly terrifying.

I finished my trip in **Santiago**, a very pleasant capitol city. There had been some changes since my last trip in 1994—Chile is finally beginning to deal with its recent past, and in the square of La Moneda there now stands a statue of Salvador Allende, in front of the building where he died, under fire by Pinochet’s troops, on 9-11-1973⁶. I visited three of Pablo Neruda’s houses⁷, one in Santiago, and the others in near by Valparaiso and Isla Negra. They were fantastical constructs, full of his many collections and his sense of whimsy. Then, after those few hot, hot days in Santiago, I flew back to the cold, gray skies of Michigan in the winter.

In May I visited the UP; the weather was very cold and wet and the winds northerly. It has been a long time since I’ve needed my long underwear in May, but they came in handy. I spent a bit of time birding in **Paradise**, then visited friends in the **Keweenaw**. There were few raptors this year—the winds were wrong. I had a nice time catching up with friends there, and then stopped in **Traverse City** on the way home (where I visited friends, cherry orchards and wineries).

Summer didn’t begin in Michigan until July, and I missed much of it traveling to **Ukraine**. I went to my friend Alla’s wedding in Mykolaiv (where I took lots of photos), visited the kids in Tsyurupinsk (orphans with disabilities), and then attended summer camp in the Carpathian Mountains (where I was medical director and camp doctor, taught pysanka making, and photographed 140+ kids). Afterwards I spent some time in Lviv and Kiev, visiting family and bonding with my godchildren (both of whom are wild and unmanageable, which reflects a bit on me, I should think).

In October I visited Australia again. I flew into **Brisbane**, where I stayed with Jane and her cats, Margeaux and Petrus. Ian and Minako had a lovely barbecue at their house for us—lots of pork products⁸. Jane and I then visited Greg in Buderim, on the Sunshine Coast. There we visited wineries and shops, stopped in at the ginger factory and the “loo with a view,” and waded in the Pacific Ocean. I visited Jane’s breast imaging center in Ipswich, and then borrowed her car to visit various subtropical rain forests nearby. It was quite dry, there were brushfires about, and no water in the waterfalls I trekked to see. There were lots of gum trees and kookaburras, though.

I flew on to Adelaide, then bussed and ferried it down to **Kangaroo Island**. I stayed with Ken and Jenny Grinter, who I had met in 1997. They run a tour company there, and specialize in night tours (the only way to see the fairy penguins). I had a lovely time with them; Ken took me around the island, birding and sightseeing. We visited forests and shores and lagoons; saw koalas, wallabies, kangaroos, seals, sea lions and lots and lots of birds. The three of us visited the botanical garden and other spots on the north shore—cliffs and beaches, towns and estuaries. The wildflowers were in bloom, including all sorts of tiny orchids. It was chilly here, though—the electric blanket was much appreciated at night—the winds off the Southern Ocean are quite cold. KI is one of those special places in the world—remote and small, undeveloped, and preternaturally beautiful. It is one of my favorite places.

⁶ Allende was a doctor and a socialist who was democratically elected to the presidency. Pinochet was a right wing general who was aided and abetted in his actions by Henry Kissinger, noted war criminal and friend of W’s. Before Pinochet’s regime, Chile was the most democratic nation in South America, never having experienced a coup.

⁷ Neruda was a poet and leftist, and won a Nobel prize. He was among the victims of the coup—the military destroyed his manuscripts and his home in Isla Negra; he died broken-hearted later that same month.

⁸ Ian and Minako, upon their return to Australia from Japan, have opened a piggery in Byron Bay, further south on the Pacific coast. We had Japanese-style pork belly appetizers, barbecued pork ribs, and a caesar salad with bacon. Mino was looking forward to their trip to Japan, where she planned to eat lots and lots of fish. Interestingly, Byron Bay is best known for being a second home to lots of jet setters.

I spent another day in **Adelaide** proper, visiting with Jiji, Prasad and their son Avinash, friends of mine from Vellore (Christian Medical College). Jiji and Prasad were both on work-study leave, doing advanced training in Australia, and will return to India this January. I visited Jiji's hospital, where I attended obstetric morning report, and then toured a bit of the Fleurieu peninsula, with its pastoral hills and streams, white sand beaches, and windswept coast. We also had a chance to catch up a bit, share some great South Indian food (Jiji is a great cook), and talk a lot of politics⁹.

From there I flew west to Perth, stopping only very briefly in **Fremantle** before Christobel, Tom and I began our epic trek through central Western Australia. Christobel had finally gotten herself a 4WD vehicle—a Toyota Pajero—and felt it needed a coating of red Pilbara dust. We packed it full of camping gear and jerricans of drinking water, and set off to the north. There was a lot of driving; Tom (who is now eight) sat in the back, listening to books on CD, while Christobel and I shared the driving¹⁰. After a visit to the **Pinnacles** (Nambung NP), a landscape straight out of a science fiction movie¹¹, and a night in Geraldton, we headed to **Gnaraloo**, a sheep station located on the Coral Coast, at the very southern tip of the Ningaloo reef. We spent a few nights at the sheep shearer's quarters. Christobel learned how to use the 4WD on her vehicle, and we had a lovely time snorkeling and just lazing on the beach, where we became friends with Graham and his dog Flipy.

Then it was north to **Exmouth**, a much hotter place, where we visited Cape Ranges NP, with its rock canyons, more coral reefs, and a riverine estuary with rock wallabies. I rode in a glass bottom boat and went whale watching, and Tom and I went bird watching at a mangrove swamp. We kept heading north, stopping overnight at another sheep station, and in Karratha, where we visited the **Burrup Peninsula** to view aboriginal rock engravings (there are said to be more than 10,000 of them on the jumbled rocks here) and the "Staircase to the Moon." Then we turned south, into the Pilbara, and into an ancient landscape of weathered mountains and gorges 2.5 billion year old.

The **Pilbara** is beautiful, but very, very hot. Marble Bar, the hottest town on earth, is located here. In the summer it often gets into the 50s C, and even mad dogs and Englishmen stay put. Spring is supposed to be the best time to visit, but this was an unseasonably hot spring. We camped at **Millstream-Chichester NP**, a landscape of spiky spinifex, white-barked gum trees and deep rock pools ringed with palm trees. There were flocks of white corellas congregating in the trees and rising in huge clouds at the slightest provocation. During the day it was innervatingly hot, and a swim in the pool excruciatingly pleasant; at night it was cold enough to require blankets. The crystal clear sky was a remarkable starry field, the Milky Way and Magellenic clouds beautiful to behold.

Further south was **Wittenoom**, once a booming center of blue asbestos mining, and now a ghost town, and **Karijini NP**, a series of chasms and gorges in a tropical semi-desert studded with huge termite mounds. The views were spectacular—sheer cliffs and streams, waterfalls and pools. We swam in one of the pools, but otherwise the heat was too overwhelming to really explore the canyons. We continued on to **Newman**, the site of the world's largest open-cut iron ore mine, where we watched huge equipment extracting iron ore from the depths of the earth. Then we headed home through the desert, through the old outback towns of Meekathara, Cue and Mt. Magnet. We stopped for lunch and a brief tour in New Norcia, a former monastic town, and then it was on home to Fremantle. It was nice to cool down; Tom went back to school, Chris back to work, and I wandered a bit among the tall trees, wineries, and cold, wind-swept beaches of southwestern WA before heading back home to autumnal Michigan.

Anyway, that's it for this year—for now. Have a wonderful holiday season, a fantastic new year, and do keep in touch! Ciao!

Luba (December 2, 2002)

⁹ Prasad knows more about American politics than most Americans do. It is a hobby with him, but also a necessity—America is the big gorilla, and other nations are affected by our behavior, whether they want to be or not. In much of the rest of the world, Clinton is sorely missed and Bush reviled. But then again, the majority of Americans voted for Gore.....

¹⁰ Although I must admit that Christobel did most of, while I navigated. Christobel's vehicle has a standard transmission, which I don't really know how to drive. Chris taught me on this trip, but I'm not the smoothest driver yet, and often stall out when slowing down, so I was mostly given the long, dusty stretches in the outback, while she drove in towns and traffic.

¹¹ It is an eerie looking place. Thousands of huge limestone pillars rise out of a desert landscape of yellow sand against a cobalt sky. Some are jagged, sharp-edged columns rising to a point; others resemble tombstones. They reach up to 3.5 meters (over ten feet) tall.