

MERRY CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR

Dear Friends and Family,

Since 1972, the nation of Bhutan has monitored their "Gross National Happiness" as an indicator of success. We are pleased to report our "Gross Domestic Happiness" index is up. Hope you can say the same.

We started 2008 with the Kuna Indians. We were sailing in the Kuna Indian-owned San Blas Islands on the Caribbean coast of Panama. This required us to have a skipper on board. Our skipper, Nino, was a big asset in the shallow waters where the charts aren't all that accurate. Our first night on board was fresh lobster and crab, cooked by Nino – not a bad way to start a sailing trip. The background photo is just one of the beautiful spots where we anchored. As you see, local sailing craft used all sorts of material for their sails. We were warmed by the welcome we received on each island.

In April we boarded our first BIG cruise boat for the standard "eastern Caribbean" route. Less personal but fun and with less work and worry than our usual bareboating. In May we had a grand time taking the train to Santa Barbara with Bruce and Sue. Hugh has enjoyed flying adventures all year long.

Becky's parents celebrated their 86 and 89th birthdays this year. A nice visit this summer assured us they were ok. Becky's sister and brother, Peggy and Doug, visited them over Thanksgiving finding Mom needing more help than Dad could provide. Thankfully, Peggy will be staying with them for awhile. Hugh's family is doing fine. Hugh is looking forward to showing his brother, Dick, around the Netherlands in March.

We were really lucky that Pat and Pete Aiello, Hugh's friends from grad school, showed us around Japan. Without them we would have gotten lost on the Tokyo subway, never to be heard from again. We loved every minute of our visit with them. One of the photos from our trip to Kyoto shows you our happy faces at a ryokan, a traditional inn, wearing yukata and enjoying the multi course keisaki meal. This was only one of the varied and delicious meals we experienced with Pete and Pat. A special treat was attending a sumo tournament. We learned about ancient sumo rituals and followed the daily matches, as well as reports of the latest sumo scandal.

Watching the US economy in full meltdown while we were in Japan was really different. Thank goodness our failed bank did not bounce the check we wrote the Aiellos! Hopefully our new president can turn things around.

As an indicator of economic troubles our Lab had its first layoff in 34 years. Thankfully, we are still there doing valuable work. Hugh is working three assignments, long hours, and having pretty good job satisfaction. He continues to work with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, making several trips to the Netherlands. Becky's job as "Special Projects Manager" has been just that, odd and ends, bits and pieces.

Over Christmas we are looking forward to two weeks in Vietnam. We look forward to seeing this beautiful country in current peaceful era. We hope you will have a relaxing holiday, too. We wish you health and happiness at this holiday time and throughout the coming year.

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