

February 2011

Lots has happened with us in the last two years since I last wrote one of these letters. I will go chronological instead of by importance, just to make this more of a story. First, we still live in the same house. It is the second longest I have lived anywhere, and will become the first real soon.

We went to Rio de Janeiro for Carnival in February 2009. Gee went before I did so she could become one of the participants. She was part of the Salgeiro Samba school. Her costume was quite large and heavy, as she was just a minor member of the team. The night of the event, we took the subway to get to the starting point. Gee's costume was in a very large bag. We had to wait quite a while as everything was behind schedule. It was a hot and steamy night as I helped Gee put on her costume. The Samba Schools compete to be the best of the Carnival. They parade through the Sambadrome, which is a 700 meter long stadium with a road running through it, that holds 70,000 spectators. You have to buy a ticket to get in, which I had not done. I, therefore, walked around to the far end of the Sambadrome and waited for Gee to emerge. It was long wait. It was partly by chance that we did end up finding each other in the chaos. We hung around Rio for a couple of more days. On the television they had the judging of the competition. There were so many categories, and each judge called off their score for each team in each category. It took many hours to complete. In the end Gee's team won.

From Rio we flew to Curitiba, which is south-west about five hundred miles. Curitiba is a unique city in Brazil. It is very modern, with efficient public transportation and an advanced recycling program. It is called the green city of Brazil. We visited the Oscar Niemeyer Museum there. He is the most famous Brazilian architect. He helped design the new Capital, Brasilia, in the 1950s.

From there we took a bus one hundred and fifty miles south to Blumenau. Southern Brazil has had lots of German immigrants, so it has a different flavor than other regions. Blumenau hosts the second largest Oktoberfest in the world, after Munich, Germany.

From there we took a bus ninety miles to Florianopolis, which is on the coast, but is sheltered by an island. One of the days there we went to the other side of the island for a day on the beach.

From there we took a bus two hundred and seventy miles to the small town of Gramado. It is inland a ways, up in the hills. It is in a wine producing region. We rented a car and drove to some other near by towns, visiting a couple of wineries. Everyone we met in Gramado was of Italian descent. Also, nearly all the restaurants there were of the Italian persuasion. The town looked like a Swiss town, though, like a mountain resort. We enjoyed it there very much.

From there we took a bus seventy miles to Porto Alegre, but stayed just long enough to take the long overnight bus ride to Punta del Este, Uruguay, which is located on the south-east point of the country. It is a small town with lots of tourism. We didn't stay long, then jumped on a bus for the short ride to Montevideo, which is the capital. It is a major center for finance in the region. There were banks and ATMs everywhere.

From there we took a ferry to Buenos Aires. The first thing we noticed there is there are no banks, and no one would change money for us. Certainly not on the weekend, which is when we arrived. The other strange thing about money there is that coins are scarce. We needed them to pay for the bus, but everyone was hoarding them. I was a little disappointed with Buenos Aires. After all the stories about it being the Paris of South America, I thought it was more like Cairo. Sure, the buildings are nice, but it is all falling apart, especially the streets. We spent a few days in the city. Gee went

to the Mendoza region of Argentina, which is in the mountains west of Buenos Aires, while I flew home. I spent three weeks on this trip, while Gee's trip lasted two months.

I made a trip to Southern California in August to visit with friends and family for a week. Then I flew to Spokane and spent a week visiting with my Mom and Uncle. I made another week long trip to Spokane in early January 2010. We had lots of snow this winter, more than has ever been recorded in the DC area before.

The big news of this letter is that on 23 Mar 2010 our daughter Emma Sophie Kiefer was born. She was born a month early, but has certainly made up for it. She is now a larger than average ten month old. The tale of her birth is included on a separate enclosure of this letter.

In August Gee, Emma and I flew to Spokane to introduce Emma to her Grandmother and Great Uncle. We spent a week, having a great time. My mom is doing well.

In September I went to my 25 year college reunion. We live an hour drive away, so it was easy to attend. Gee and I went to a dinner one night and then Emma and I went to the football tailgater the next day.

In November Gee, Emma and I flew to Brasilia, Brazil for her side of the family to meet Emma. The tale of that trip is included on a separate enclosure of this letter.

Now, here is some stuff that is going on here in DC. The Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial is nearly done. It is on the Tidal Basin, right next to the FDR Memorial. One day I walked from our house to the Pentagon 9/11 memorial. There are pools of water with a bench cantilevered over the pool, one for each victim, with their name engraved on it. The benches facing the Pentagon are for the people who worked there, and the ones facing away are for the ones in the airplane. I found the bench of a classmate of mine from the Naval Academy. Emma and I went to the Jon Stewart/Stephen Colbert rally on the National Mall. It was really crowded and I could hear and see almost nothing. Nevertheless, it was quite an experience.

Photos from the 2009 Brazil trip are here:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/alex.kiefer/BrazilUruguayAndArgentina2009>

Photos from the 2010 Brazil trip are here: <https://picasaweb.google.com/alex.kiefer/Brazil2010>

Photos of Emma are here: <https://picasaweb.google.com/alex.kiefer/EmmaSFirstDays?authkey=Gv1sRgCLnUxqKNsPaWTQ>