

December 2008

I have been writing this letter for over four years now. I have changed the date at the top too many times for me to remember. Through that time we have kept ourselves busy. We made many trips, both alone and together. I got a Masters degree, and changed jobs. We did not move. We have been here in Georgetown for four and half years now, which is the longest I have lived anywhere since I was in high school.

At the end of the last letter (summer of 2004) my mother and uncle had just left to drive down to Mexico to get the house ready to sell and gather her stuff for her move to Spokane. They had quite an adventure due to other peoples efforts, which she really did not need. Due to the chaos and my mom's precarious health at the time I flew down to Mexico and drove her up to Southern California. She did not want to drive on the bad roads in Mexico. Her last few weeks there were chaotic and stressful, as all of her plans were thrown into disarray. She did survive alright and all the work of moving out of the house was done, more or less. This marked the end of twenty-two years in Baja California for my mother.

At the end of May 2005 Gisleide took a trip to visit a childhood friend in Davis, California (doing her PhD at UC Davis). While she was there she went to Lake Tahoe and Yosemite for a while. She had a wonderful time there hiking and enjoying nature. At the end of July Gee and I flew to Boise to visit with my friend Andy, from high school. The Basque Festival, which happens once every five years, was there then, so we went to it. Another two high school friends (Paul and John) came up from Southern California a few days after we arrived, so we had the whole gang back together for the visit. We did some hiking and canoeing there. From there Gee and I flew to Spokane for my Uncle's birthday and a visit with my Mother. In late August Gee went to Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park. She liked it there, but not nearly as much as Yosemite. In September we went to my twentieth reunion at the Naval Academy. I was saving my vacation time for a trip to Brazil, but things did not work out for that trip. As a result I had too much vacation time at the end of the year and had to use some or loose it. So, I flew to Spokane for Christmas with my Mom and Uncle. Gee was unable to go with me. A few other family members also went there for Christmas, so we had a big group and had a fun time. I went snowboarding on Mount Spokane with my cousin Scarlet. It was my first time snowboarding.

In early 2006 we went skiing with some friends in the mountains of Virginia. It was Gisleide's first time skiing and she did great. In the Summer I went to my 25 year high school reunion in Southern California. Gee did not want to go, as she had been to the 20 year reunion and that was enough for her. Soon after I returned, Gee and I went to Brazil for our big trip. I went for three weeks and Gee for five. We started our trip in Brasilia, visiting Gee's Mother and some of her siblings. We spent a week there, as we stayed to participate in her nephew's baptism. I really enjoyed the weather there, as it was warm and dry. We flew from there to Salvador, which is in the Northeast. We rented a car and drove down to Itacare. That drive was quite an adventure, as we ended up on a dirt road for the last 30 km of it. That poor little rental car had a bumpy ride. Itacare is a cute little town on the beach. It is the top surfing place in Brazil. Most of the tourists there are Brazilian, as foreigners don't know about it. When we drove back to Salvador we bypassed the dirt road. It was a longer trip, but much smoother. We spent a few days in Salvador, staying in the old section of town, called Pelourinho. Pelourinho means pillory in English, and that section of town has this name because of the slave trade that was done there. We flew to Recife, which is up the coast a ways from of Salvador. We stayed there a couple of days and then continued north, taking a bus to João Pessoa. We visited the brother of a friend of Gee's there. We spent longer than planned because he kept asking us to stay longer. We flew on to Fortaleza, the next city north, and spent a short time there. We had meant to go to a couple of other places in Northern Brazil, but ran out of time, so we flew back to Brasilia. I flew back home later the same day.

In the Fall we went to Boise for my friend Andy's wedding. Gisleide went back to Brazil at the end of the year and had an operation to repair her deviated septum. It was much cheaper to have it done there.

In May of 2007 my office building was sold, so we all had to move to another building. It became a longer commute for me, but more importantly I went from an office to a cubical. I finished my Masters degree in

Computer Science. I had been going part time in the evenings for two years. I enjoyed the classes very much, but it was good to be done.

In June Gisleide and I went to visit my mom and uncle in Spokane, Washington. We then went to visit some of Gee's fiends in Vancouver, British Columbia. At the Spokane airport I ran into an old friend named Raeleen, who I had not seen for twenty one years. We flew on the same flight to Seattle. We went on to Vancouver and she to France. Gee and I had a great time seeing the town and visiting with her friends. There is a big hill called Grouse Mountain on the north side of the city that we climbed. The climb is called the "Grouse Grind", and it sure was. I didn't think I would make it, but Gee flew up in about half the time I took. It is an official course, there is even a race that is run there once a year. It is 1.8 miles long and climbs 2800 feet. There was a wonderful view from the top. We hung out there for a while, then we took the gondola down.

In July we sold our old Audi and bought a Honda Civic. It is a nice car and gets great mileage. Gee took a week trip with a friend to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico late in August. She did not have a great time there, and she got Montezuma's revenge. It was too touristy for her there. Another big trip we took was to Scandinavia. We flew to Reykjavik, Iceland on September 1st, 2007 and spent a few days there. Gee's stomach was not feeling too well (left over from her Mexico trip), so we did not get out of town. We flew on to Oslo, Norway and spent a few days there. I got to see the ship that Amundsen took down to Antarctica when he went to the South Pole. We then took a packaged trip to Bergen, which is on the west coast. We took a train, then a boat on the fjords and then a bus to get there. It rained much of the time we were there in Bergen, but it was still quite nice. From there we took a boat down the coast to Stavanger. Just outside of the town is an incredible fjord which you can hike to a scenic overlook (Preikestolen) that is about 600 meters above the water. The hike up to it took about two hours each way. From Stavanger we took an overnight ship to the north part of Denmark, then caught a train to Århus which is about half way down the peninsula. We took a train to Odense, which is the birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen. From there we took another train on to Copenhagen. It is the largest city in Scandinavia by far. Gee flew to Helsinki, Finland on September 20th and I flew home three days later. Gee also went to Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Germany before flying home.

At the end of December of 2007 I changed jobs. I went from AOL to Comcast. AOL was going down hill and I wanted to leave before things got too ugly there. It turns out that many of my coworkers had the same thought. The funny part was that many of us ended up going to work for the same company. All in all, there have been seventeen persons that I know including vice presidents, directors, and managers who have made the transition. My commute is a little better than before, but not much. I took a week off between jobs and went to Spokane to visit my mom and uncle.

I took a week long trip to Southern California in June of 2008 to visit friends and family. I went surfing with my friends. Also, there was a big party put on by alumni of my High School. That was a fun time. In July Gee and I had the eighth anniversary of our marriage. Gee went on a month long trip to Mexico City and the areas around it in October. She had a good time there and met lots of interesting people.

Our last trip this year was to Southern California at the end of November. We went for two weeks, visiting friends and family and did some sight seeing. I got in another day of surfing. We had Thanksgiving dinner with my cousins in Costa Mesa. There was a pretty large group of family there. I got to see a set of cousins that I had not seen in over eighteen years. The weather was great, so we ate on a large table outside.

We are getting ready for the Presidential Inauguration next month. I have lived here through three previous ones, but did not go to any of them. I think I will have to go to this one. With everyone coming from all over the world to participate, I would be negligent to throw away this opportunity.

OK, now for some DC trivia. The World War II memorial was built on the Mall. There was lots of controversy whether it would block the view down the Mall from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol, but it all worked out fine, it looks great. A couple of years ago they built the Air Force monument near the Pentagon. It tries to

represent the con-trails of jets going up into the air. It is quite large and is pretty impressive. A 9/11 memorial was built this year at the Pentagon for the people who died there. The Ronald Reagan funeral brought a lot of people here. It was a very large event. Our new mayor (took office in January 2007) is only the fifth elected mayor in DC history. It took a long time for Washingtonians to be allowed to vote for mayor. Maybe some day will be have a vote in Congress too. Last December was the warmest ever recorded in DC. But, then the first half of February was the fourth coldest on record. Then this October was the warmest ever, the weather here is quite crazy. I have been going to the Navy home football games over the last few years. My class has some pretty good tailgaters, and the team has been pretty successful on the field. I went to the Bowl Game this year as it was here in DC on December 20th. We lost, but not by much.

Well, that is about all for now. Here are some photos from the last four years. An online version of this letter is here: <http://kiefer.dnsalias.com/letters/> and if you want to see many more photos you can go here: <http://picasaweb.google.com/alex.kiefer>



My mom after our drive up from Mexico



World War II Memorial



A Fall Day in Georgetown - 2004



Our House in the Snow
(the yellow one)



Springtime at the Tidal Basin, 2005



Gee in Yosemite



On top of Half Dome, Yosemite



Central Park, New York City



Canoeing in Idaho



Manito Park in Spokane, WA



At dinner with Mom and Vern



Hiking near Spokane



20 year USNA reunion



Hiking in central Virginia



Surfing in Southern California



Metropolitan Cathedral of Brasilia



Congressional Buildings, Brasilia



Gee, her niece and sister



Juscelino Kubitschek Bridge - Brasilia



View of Brasilia



Resende Beach, Itacare



Itacarezinho Beach, Itacare



Pelourinho, Salvador



Elevador Lacerda and view of the harbor, Salvador



Pelourinho, Salvador



The furthest east point of the Americas



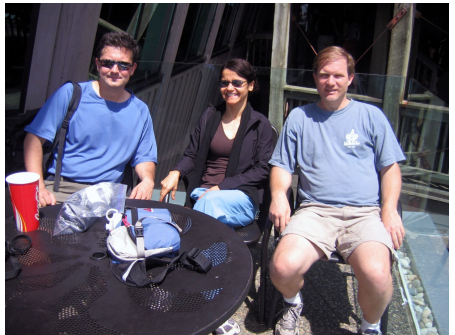
Springtime at the Tidal Basin, 2007



Hiking near Spokane



On the Grouse Grind



At the top of Grouse Mountain



Reykjavik, Iceland



Hallgrímskirkja Church in Reykjavik



Viking Ship, Oslo



Oslo Harbor



On train from Oslo to Flam



Houses along the Aurlandsfjord



Alex at Stalheimskleiva



Bergen, Norway



Bergen



Stavanger, Norway



Hike to Preikestolen



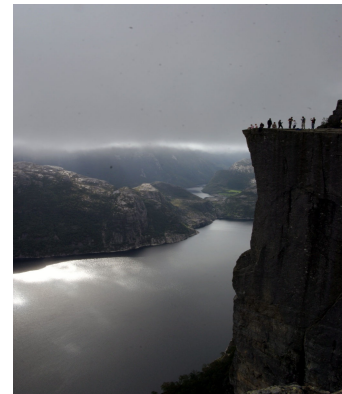
Gee above the Lysefjorden



On the trail to Preikestolen



Looking down on Preikestolen, with Alex in the foreground



Preikestolen in Profile



Overlooking the Lysefjorden



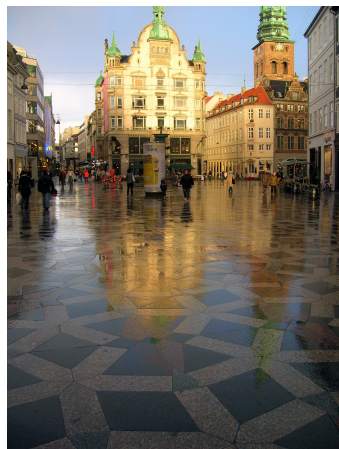
Catching the ship to Denmark



Århus Domkirke - Århus, Denmark



Catholic Church -
Odense, Denmark



Copenhagen, Denmark



The Little Mermaid - Copenhagen



Canal in Copenhagen



Riverfront Park - Spokane



Dia de Los Muertos in Mexico



Fall 2008 in Georgetown



Sun on the Santa Monica Pier



Hotel del Coronado