

Christmas, 2010

Wow, what a busy year we had! I'll have to expand to two pages to get it all in.

February brought one of our frequent camping trips to the Oregon coast, where we enjoyed the ocean beaches and a trip to Mo's diner in Newport for their famous clam chowder.

In April, John had to pack up some test equipment and make a rush business trip to New London, Ct. in an effort to save a \$100 million dollar contract for a major Intel customer. Fortunately, he came through and found a resolution for the problem. Unfortunately, in these cases you don't get a cut of the money ☺

After 14 years with Intel, John was due his second sabbatical this year. This time we planned to get the most out of his 8 weeks off. John selected May and June, with June set aside for a month long tour of areas of Europe we had never seen.

The first day of sabbatical saw John on an airplane for New Orleans, where he rented a car and drove to Brandon, Ms. to visit with sister Sudie and her family. Then he drove to Memphis to visit with brother David and his family, and to spend time with his mom, now safely ensconced in a nursing home in Southaven, Ms. just south of Memphis. After a few days of visiting with mom, David and his daughters, John drove on to Tupelo to see his sister Nancy and her family (including her new grandson and new house). After that he went back to Brandon to see Sudie and family again, and then finished the trip by spending time with friends in Covington, La.

The next two weeks saw John spending time around the house trying to work on various projects, including some remodel efforts. The last week before we left for Europe, our niece Becky Spain came to visit and prepare to house sit for us while we were out of the country. It was great visiting with Becky as we showed her around tourist spots and familiarized her with the places she would need to know for shopping and the like. Becky also had the use of Janet's car while we were gone to explore around Oregon and Washington State. Her sister Susan flew into Portland while we were in Europe, and Becky gave her a ride down to Ashland Oregon where she is spending time working toward her master's degree in conducting.

Early in June, we boarded a plane for Rome to start our European vacation. Arriving there on Sunday the 6th, we found our hotel within sight of the Coliseum. We spent a few days taking in Rome, Vatican City, St. Peters Basilica and the Sistine Chapel. We enjoyed the Italian food, and in all the heat of the Italian sun we consumed quite a bit of delicious cold Gelato, which is sold everywhere. One day was spent on an all day excursion to Pompeii, an adventure we both found to be a stunning introduction to daily Roman life two millennia ago.

After leaving Rome, our next stop was Florence. Florence is a beautiful city full of art, and is also the largest leather market in Europe. Janet enjoyed shopping the leather markets, both in shops and in the street markets. We had a great hotel room overlooking the markets, where we would sit out on the balcony in the evenings and sip some wine after spending the day visiting grand cathedrals and art galleries full of the world's great paintings and sculptures. John visited the Institute and Museum of the History of Science where many of Galileo's original telescope components are on display.

Our next destination was Padua (Padova it's called there). While Padua is an historic city in its own right, we used it mainly as a place to stay while we traveled by train a short distance into Venice each day. Venice is romantic and completely different from any other place on earth. While we didn't take the traditional gondola ride, we did take the water taxis around the Grand Canal, stopping at all the historic sites. Just walking around Venice is an adventure, as there are no streets exactly, just a huge irregular maze of alleyways.

From Padua, we took a train to Milan, where we picked up a rental car and drove to Lake Como in the Italian Alps. The lake is surrounded by steep mountains, and the scenery can only be described as breathtakingly beautiful. We stayed in the town of Como, but visited the historic town of Bellagio as well.

After a stay in Como, we continued our drive across the Alps to Interlaken, Switzerland. It rained most of the time we were there, but the town was in the middle of festival so we enjoyed ourselves, plus we visited historic castles nearby. On our last day on our way back to Lake Como we took the Jungfrau railroad to the 11,388 foot
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“Jungfrauojch”, where we had close up views of some of the highest peaks in the Alps.

After an overnight stay in Como, we returned the car at the Milan train station, and took the train to Verona. We arrived in Verona mid-day, but our train to Munich did not leave until after mid-night, so we spent our time touring Verona. Verona is another art and cathedral filled city, with a Roman amphitheater similar to, but much smaller, than the Coliseum in Rome. It is also the setting for Romeo and Juliet, supposedly based on a true story from this city’s history. We visited “Juliet’s balcony” in the courtyard of the Capulet’s home. The entryway is an arched tunnel, and inside it is wall-papered over with letters to Juliet from lovers and the love-struck.

We arrived in Munich the next morning after traveling through northern Italy and Austria. Munich was a wonderful blur of activity for us. We sampled the great food, walked the huge pedestrian mall in the city center (a.k.a. “the Marienplatz”), and attended a festival at the “residence”, the Munich residence of King Ludwig. There were wonderful outdoor concerts being put on by one of the city orchestras, street musicians everywhere (not like New Orleans; these were string quartets, Piano concerts, etc.), and the occasional impromptu parade. We enjoyed the great food and beer at the Hofbräuhaus almost every night, while watching world cup soccer among the raucous crowd, and again at the Andechs monastery, where the monks have been brewing some of the world’s best beer for centuries.

A side trip from Munich was the Neuschwanstein castle, another of King Ludwig’s residences. This magnificent castle is among the most beautiful in the world, in a stunning setting among mountains and lakes. This is the castle on which Disney based the “Sleeping Beauty” castle. Just search for it in Google for an unlimited number of photos, as it is among the most photographed in the world.

After Munich, it was time to take an overnight train to Janet’s ancestral home, Hungary. We found a nice hotel in Budapest, and started enjoying this beautiful city (two cities, actually; Buda on one side of the Danube, and Pest on the other). A friend and co-worker of Johns, who works from his home in Budapest, went with us to dinner and then treated us a personal driving tour of the city. We not only took a bus tour, but took a nice cruise on the Danube and got some shopping in at the magnificent Budapest Great Market Hall. Janet’s family name, Sandor, was common, and in fact, the office of the President of the Republic of Hungary is named Sandor Palace, which we visited. Budapest is beautiful, but tatters of the old communist bloc days still show. However, it more than makes up for it with fabulous Hungarian food at great prices. In fact, it was the least expensive place we visited in Europe.

Finally, we boarded a flight to Frankfurt, where we spent the night and then headed to the airport for our flight home, and bid farewell to Europe. As much as we enjoyed Europe, after a month of travel it was nice to return to our own bed.

Our niece Becky took good care of the house while we were gone. We visited with her a bit more, and then a day after she left her sister Susan arrived having finished her classes and projects in Ashland. We spent a long weekend visiting with her and showing her the local sites before she too left for home.

After some time to recuperate from all our travel, we launched into our next project, remodeling the guest bathroom. John started by demolishing the old bathroom, tearing out the fixtures, bathtub and shower, and the drywall. We purchased a two-sink vanity from Costco that we admired, and then hired a contractor to handle all the hard work. After the plumbing and wiring changes were done and the new garden tub installed, the walls were closed in. John did the painting, and then the contractor completed the floor and wall tiles. The plumber returned to hook up the vanity, and the electricians finished up with the new fixtures and lighted ceiling exhaust fan. The results are beautiful and we are well pleased.

Now we are counting down until the New Year. Here’s wishing you and yours a merry Christmas, and may the new year bring you joy and happiness.

Pictures of our adventures are on our web site, www.majorspain.com, and please note our new email addresses below.

Here’s wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Please keep in touch.

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