

November 29, 2020,
First Sunday in Advent

Dear Friends,

We woke up on January first about to set off on an adventure, we just didn't know the kind of adventure it would be. We flew out of Sitka heading for an around the world cruise on the MS Amsterdam. When we left no one had heard of the Novel Coronavirus 19. It wasn't named until a few days after we set sail. For the first month the virus was something we occasionally caught on the news. In Rio we were more concerned about catching some Bosa Nova at Ipanema, walking Copacabana Beach and catching a plane to Iguassu Falls. Then it was on to Buenos Aires for tango and a visit to Rich's favorite opulent bookstore before rejoining the ship.



The first time the virus affected us was in Antarctica, of all places, when we couldn't call on the Palmer Station because the scientists didn't want anyone potentially exposed to the virus. We continued to cruise Antarctica's icebergs and Chile's fjords, then west to Easter Island and Pitcairn. By the time we got to Tahiti there were temperature checks for people getting on the ship and each time someone used a pen it was put into a bin to be sanitized. To land in Tonga took an act of parliament, after lobbying by the tourist industry. We were met by people wearing masks. By now there was a betting pool on which ports we would skip, or if we would even finish the cruise.

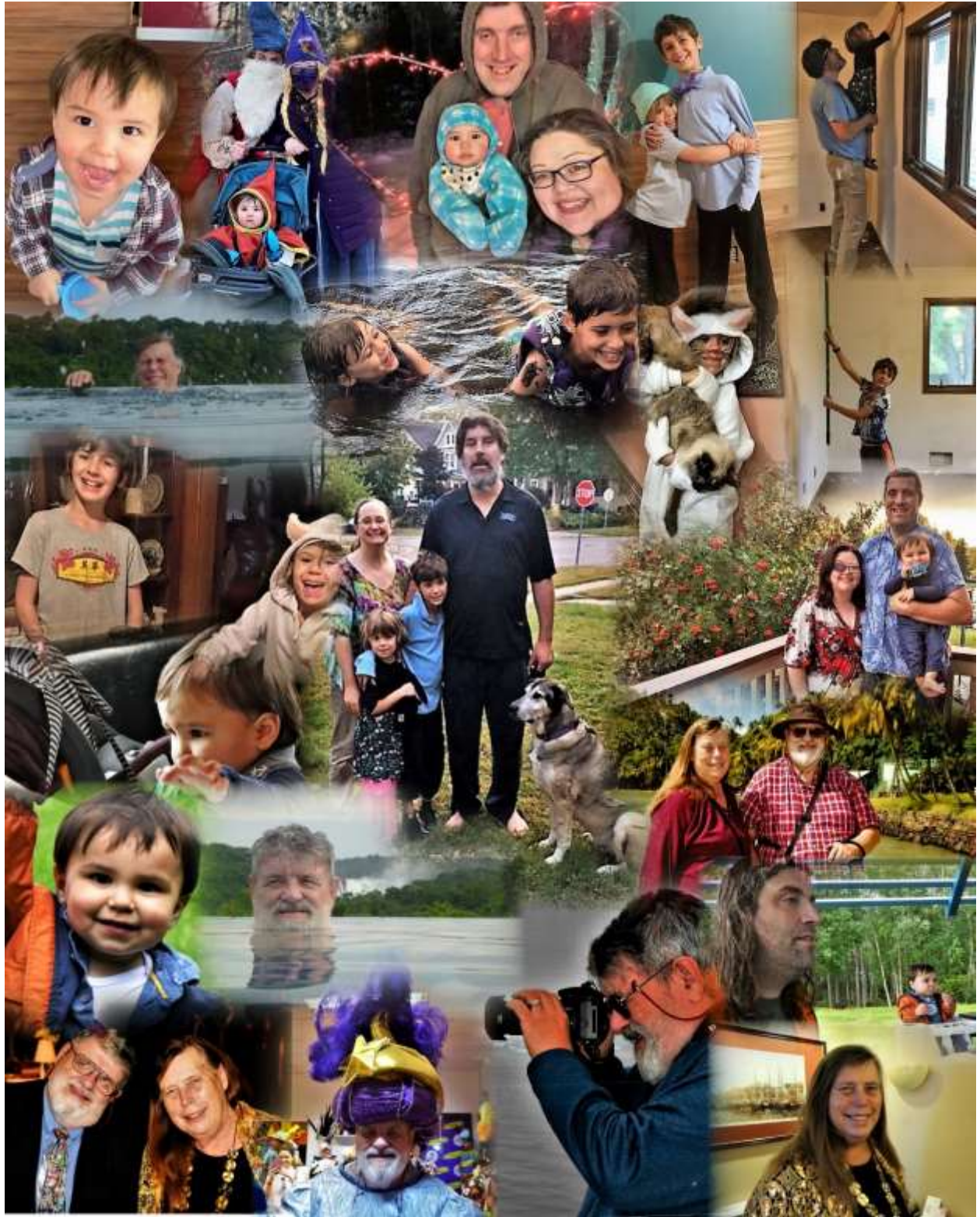
We docked in Sydney the day before the Ruby Princess, one of the "plague ships" that, we all learned later, had carried the virus to Australia. That day, as if in anticipation, the Aussie run on toilet paper started. But on the ferries to the beaches people were still greeting each other with hugs. After we left Sydney Tom Hanks announced that he had the disease. He was at the Sydney Opera House the same day we were. On March 14 the Captain announced that our cruise would end on March 24th in Fremantle, the port for Perth. It ended sooner than that. He sped up the ship because international air transport was shutting down. We arrived on March 21. There was controversy over whether we would be allowed to get off and confusion about air flights home. We were in luxurious limbo while bureaucrats negotiated and argued. On March 24 we were off the ship, flying home by way of Dubai. Read about it on Rich's Blog <https://www.rich.mcclear.net/2020/01/04/2020-ms-amsterdam-grand-world-voyage/>

And then we sat, mostly sheltering in place. When COVID took my Aunt Janice in New Jersey we couldn't join with family to mourn so we set up a Facebook wake, which brought the extended family together in a new way. We're glad we could see her one last time a year ago, just before Christmas. We settled into social activities that we could do at a distance. Suzi has joined Sitka Mask Makers and sewed masks for Sitka schools so they could open safely. She is also acting volunteer coordinator at Raven Radio. Rich and Suzi are both on the air, solo in the studio, and Rich is serving on the board of an international radio development organization, on zoom of course, and joined Rotary. We made three medical trips to Anchorage for what turned out to be minor ailments and visited, at a social distance, with Kevin and Shannon, who are working from home, and grandson Elias. It's tough not to be able to hug your grandson.

Brian, Liz and Liam in Minnesota all got COVID-19 but have recovered without permanent affects, Fiona seems to have escaped the disease and was frustrated by quarantine. Liz continues to work as a recreational therapist at a care home. Brian is not finding much work as a stagehand but is remodeling a house in Minneapolis that they hope to move into soon.

Thanksgiving was at home without family: Christmas will be the same. We hope that however you spend the holidays you have a safe and happy season and the new year sees us all return to hugging each other and breaking bread together. Happy Holidays.

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Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, Blessed Solstice, Happy Chanukah, or whatever season you celebrate!