

First Sunday in Advent, 2023



Dear Friends,

This year did not go as expected. We started the year happily retired and setting out on a world cruise and ended it working more than full time running Raven Radio.

We flew out of Sitka New Year's Day and set sail on Holland America's Zuiderdam. The cruise started well enough until Tahiti, where Rich started sneezing. We thought it was allergies from all the blooming flowers. It was COVID. Rich missed snorkeling in Morea, then Suzi got COVID and missed Tonga. We are glad we got a balcony room because we spent about 10 days quarantined there. By New Zealand we were both healthy. We enjoyed Australia as well. But in the middle of the Indian Ocean Rich started internal bleeding and ended up in the ship's ICU getting transfusions because of the kindness of our cruise mates. We were put off in Mauritius, and Rich was 14 more days in the hospital. Suzi was in the hospital too, not as a patient, but as a guest because there were no hotels near the clinic. They only woke her up once in the middle of the night to take vitals. They have a different idea on healing than American hospitals so after a week, they gave Rich furlough to travel around the island. The first day was with an orderly at his elbow, after that they would drop us off and say, "There's a waterfall 100 meters that way, walk to it and back." The distance increased daily as they taped up the IV on Rich's hand, covered it with a surgical glove, and taped that down. We were off, to volcanic craters, a crocodile farm, the botanical garden, the shopping mall, a tea plantation, a walk on the beach. Each day a little further until Rich was "Fit to Fly." The insurance sent us home business class on Emirates.

We were home two months early, just in time for Rich to get appointed to the City's tourism taskforce while Suzi was put on the board of the Sitka Legacy Fund. When Raven Radio had financial and management problems we were both recruited to take over managing the station after a 30 year absence. It was not an easy adjustment. Everything is on computer and there are no filing cabinets. What are Google Docs anyway?

A condition of our taking the job was that we could take time to travel with the kids before we stated. We flew to New Jersey to see family, and got on the Queen Mary II to sail for England with Brian, and grandkids Liam and Fiona. Liz met us in England and Kevin, Shannon and Elias on the Isle of Mann. Together we went to Ireland to pay tribute to our legendary ancestor Manannan MacLir, the Celtic Sea God, who's statue looks across Lough Foyle at Greencastle, where Rich's grandfather was born. We climbed on the Giant's Causeway, had beach time, stayed at a farm where the sheep dog was afraid of sheep and enjoyed the Greencastle Regatta, where they tried to recruit Kevin into the Causeway Shantymen because of his knowledge of sea shanties.

After a quick trip to Denmark to see Lise, Suzi's AFS Sister from years ago, a visit to a friend in Germany and a stopover in Iceland it was back to Sitka and to work. Intensive work it is. The docs found and plugged the source of Rich's bleeding, and we are both healthy, although we both have our share of senior aches and pains. If it wasn't for Rich's illness, we would never have been tapped to work at Raven or for the boards we both sit on. Fate's plans were not ours, but they were good plans. This Christmas the kids will be with their other families so we will be on our own, or as "on our own" as possible in our active Sitka community.



Merry Christmas, Suzi and Rich McClear suzi@mcclear.net, rich@mcclear.net.