

Greetings!

It's Christmastime again....already! The snow is falling, and the sound of CNN tinkles in the background (the radio reception in the hospital is nonexistent, and, besides, WQRS¹ is history anyway). As the children sing on the Charlie Brown Christmas special,

"Christmas time is here,
La di da and cheer,
La di da, Di da di da
Di da di daaaa, di da...."

(I sure wish those kids would enunciate!) I'm looking forward to a fire on the hearth and a hot cup of Christmas tea, but for now² I've got the warm glow of a VDT and a Diet Coke. I'm doing my best to get into the spirit of the season and emulate good, old-fashioned Christmas Cheer.

It seems just yesterday I was struggling to put out last year's letter, having installed a new OS (7.6) that was incompatible with the driver on my printer, and having the usual "good" help from the technical support people. (Despite what I may have been told by HP tech support, the line from the computer to the printer can't get plugged up.) It was really frustrating to have written the entire letter, and then been unable to get it out of the computer. Now it's December in Michigan and, thanks to El Niño (come to think of it, is there any recent event that hasn't been blamed on el Niño?), it's grey and damp and overcast... time to relax in front of my gorgeous tree and open a bottle of wine. Failing that, it's time to look back on the past year and reminisce (or cringe, as the case may be). I must say, it has been an eventful year. Having, Picard-like, broken free of the Borg....er, Ford, I've had much more time to travel and generally enjoy life. Any day now, I hope to be able to get caught up on putting my photos into albums; I think the last set I did properly were those from Argentina in 1992. I'll get around to it right after I upgrade the computer, reshelve all my books, clean out the garage, and put the finishing touches on the Unified Field Theory.

So it goes.

First, the family. It's grown. Last May a rather tardy stork delivered a 7#7oz. female infant to Laurie (who now believes the epidural was one of the great leaps forward in medicine of our century) and Bill. Maria, who also answers to "Baby Maria", "Marijka", "Fuzz", and "Hey you" is thriving in the usual Petrusha baby fashion, and is currently about 25 inches in diameter, with a Magoo-like pate. Her hobbies are smiling and regurgitation (she comes with a spit-up rag as standard equipment), and she's almost got the art of rolling over mastered. Nick and Kalyna are also quite pleased with the baby. Nick really loves babies, so he's always hugging and kissing her; so far she's escaped with only minor bruising. Kalyna is much more welcoming of her than she was of Nick; I think that is because she views her as a subordinate rather than as competition.

Nick (the Child formerly known as Destructor) is growing up. He's no longer a baby, or so he frequently informs me, and will turn three this January 10th. He has somehow managed to get through his terrible twos without any major disfigurement. Nick has also developed some measure of coordination, and no longer looks like Macauley Caulkin's stunt double. He can even jump! Nick has adopted his Uncle Andy as a role model, and has adopted his devil-may-care swagger and laid-back manner as well. He has also taken up, at his father's encouragement, the game of golf. For Christmas, he wants Santa to bring him "golf clubs, a ball, and a hole".

¹ The former local profitable classical music station. It was bought up by a large multimedia conglomerate for way too much money; they then changed the format to "modern rock" to increase revenue so they could service their debt.

² Keep in mind that this was written more than two weeks ago, when I began this massive endeavor. I was on the road twelve weeks this year, three times the usual amount, so I've ended up with so much more to write about. Try as I might, I just can't seem to edit it down anymore than this without losing all the witty and interesting bits, and ending up with mere soulless travelogue. I want this to be Luba's travels, not Baedeker's

Kalyna is quite the big girl now, having turned five this past October, while I was away in Australia. She's in kindergarten now, and doing quite well. She can socialize, tie her shoes, recite her alphabet, and even tell me what sounds most of the letters make. Kalyna can spell all of our names, and is on the cusp of actually reading. She is also the Boss. She commands, and Nick scurries to obey. It must be great to wield such power. Kalyna has developed a penchant for Barbies; this year she's asking Santa for Hula Barbie and the Barbie motorhome for Christmas. All is not lost; she still has a relatively healthy attitude toward Barbies. Hers are generally laying around semi-nude, although the torsos are still essentially intact. She and I do have a game we play called flying Barbies, where, from a distance, we try to toss the Barbies into their wardrobe. Then, there's Ninja Barbies, and Contortionist Gymnast Barbies.....such fun we have!

My Mom and Dad are healthy; Bill and Laurie are doing well, except for the expected sleep deprivation. I am also doing well.....now , although it's been a year of changes, an Annus Mutabilis. I had a particularly horrible winter and spring--lots of call and not enough sleep, numerous viral infections, the worst bronchitis I've had in twenty years, unremitting plantar fasciitis, high blood pressure, worsening carpal tunnel syndrome, an abscessed tooth, a torqued crown, and lots and lots of "sinus". Did I mention depression? Come April, I'd had enough. I had endoscopic carpal tunnel reduction done, and my hands got better immediately. I quit my job at Henry Ford, and that seems to have taken care of all the rest. (Most recent BP 124/74!) I definitely recommend voluntary underemployment and frequent travel as a cure for whatever ails you.

At this point I'm sure all you gardeners out there are saying, enough about you, how's the garden doing? The garden has had a good, vigorous year. The weather in Michigan this summer was good for plants and molds, but not necessarily for people. Summer came quite late; although there was no frost after May 1st, there was also no heat. Plants put into the ground early in the season didn't freeze and die, but just sat there. When it finally got warm, the rains came and came. The plants grew profusely, but everything was a bit out of sync, with lots of perennials blooming at really odd times and in odd combinations. Then fall refused to come...summer dragged on and on, and the colors came really late. We finally had some nice sunny summer weather...in October.

I broke ground on a new garden last year, but only really got it planted this year. I had planted a perimeter of gooseberries and blackcurrants last year, as well as propagating lots of alpine strawberries (small, intensely sweet, and producing fruit from June to October). These took off in an incredible growth spurt this summer, due to the foot-thick layer of compost and cow manure I put in to enrich the soil³. The wee tiny little sprigs of buddleia I planted also grew into six-foot monsters. It was all quite amazing. What was most amazing, though, was returning from a month-long trip to find a jungle out back. Annuals that had been mere three foot flowers in past years had grown into behemoths that towered above me. Mutant cosmos, Mexican mega-sunflowers.....incredible. I'll have to sprinkle some of that magic bovine dust onto all my beds next year....in moderation.

Back to me. This is my newsletter, after all. After seven years, I've come to the conclusion that I was not meant for the corporate world, especially corporate medicine. Although I grew up with the Marcus Welby ideal, even I knew better than to expect that sort of reality. I knew I'd have to see more than one patient a week, deal with insurance companies and their obnoxious clerks, stay up nights and work weekends, and occasionally have less-than-wonderful outcomes. That I could deal with. What I couldn't deal with was the continual encroachment of administrators and insurance company shills, few of whom are practicing physicians or have medical training, into the actual practice of medicine. When I am told that my post-partum moms need to be discharged within 24 hours, not for their benefit, but for the benefit of the HMO's bottom line, I get upset. When I am told that my failure to implement this early-discharge policy adequately may result in my dismissal, I quit.

As of July 1, 1997, I am no longer an employee of the Henry Ford Medical System. I am now well-rested, generally cheerful, and often told how much better I look. I feel great, and haven't had a serious depressive episode or

³ Soil is a relative term. I live in the glacial moraine of Michigan, near a glacial lake. What I have on the ground is colored dust overlaying sand. This provides excellent drainage, but little nourishment. I've given up on growing any but the hardiest old roses, and I lust after the gardens of people who can actually grow lavender, or not have to water practically every day. I don't mind frequent rain, actually; why, though, does it always seem to fall on weekends? Michigan joke: What do you call a sunny day preceded by two rainy days? Monday.

infection since then. I spent July getting caught up on long-delayed dental care and clearing out my offices; since then, I have been working part-time at Huron Valley Hospital (providing in-house obstetric coverage), watching my nieces and nephew grow, becoming reacquainted with my family and friends, and travelling. Sure, the money's not as good, but I'm happy. I may keep doing this for a while.

This, of course, leaves me more time to travel. I've often told people that I work so I can afford to travel, and that's not far from the truth. Although I love my home and my family, I'd go crazy without my travel. For me is another form of education; I think I learn more about the world by travelling than I could any other way (including reading National Geographic). This year I learned a lot:

- piranhas really do bite;
- the Amazon in one damn big river, even in times of drought;
- only mad dogs, Englishmen, and travel medicine conference participants hike in the midday sun;
- Southern belles always have perfect hair and make-up;
- llamas spit;
- that I really hate large tour groups and perky group leaders;
- what a fiddlers' rally is and why this is not necessarily a good idea;
- what gorse is (Spanish broom);
- what a midge is (NOT Barbie's best friend);
- what vegemite really is (you don't want to know);
- all the words to Waltzing Matilda
- the joys of bird-watching;
- how to repel leaches (insect repellent applied thickly to shoes and socks);
- that I am a minor rain goddess;
- that I have really bad karma/ am an agent of destruction.

Do those last two sound a bitodd? I would have thought so, too, at one time, but I believe the evidence is now incontrovertible. Let me expound.

The Rain goddess bit may seem a bit outlandish, but let me tell you about my experience in Australia. When I arrived, I constantly read in the papers and heard on the radio and TV that Australia was in major period of drought (due, of course, to el Niño). The landscape was parched. People were making references to the Ash Wednesday fires of the 1980s, when climatic conditions were similar, and there were massive fires in the south of Australia that destroyed much property and vegetation, and killed quite a few people. (One needs to keep in mind that much of the Australian landscape, like the jack pine forests of Michigan, depends on fire as part of its normal life cycle. Without fire, many plants cannot germinate and reproduce.) Things seemed dire.

Then I arrived. Everywhere I went, it rained. I visited the Little Desert in Victoria, and was told they hadn't had any significant rainfall since spring of 1996; within twelve hours of my arrival, the rains began. By the time I left, there were pools of standing water all around the lodge. I drove to the caves in Narracort; the rain came down in sheets. By the time I arrived in Adelaide, they were having the biggest storm they'd had in years. There were trees down throughout the city, and flooding. Several days later I proceeded to the desert--Ayers Rock. It was sunny as I drove North, but as I turned off onto the Lassiter Highway, I could see ominous-looking clouds on the horizon. I checked in, then went out to see the Rock. While I was at the interpretive center, a huge sandstorm blew up, followed by thunder, lightning and rain. It poured like crazy the rest of the day and all night. I got to watch lightning over Ayers Rock. The following morning it slowly cleared up, but there were rainfalls on the rock, the pools around it were all full of water, and the bullfrogs were croaking lustily. I was told that few people ever get to see it rain on the Rock.

I drove on Alice Springs. It rained. I drove through the outback to Mt. Isa, driving through standing water on the roads (unheard-of this time of year); there was a lightning storm over the town, and massive flooding, according to the radio. I continued on to Brisbane; within a few hours of my arrival, a storm blew up and blew our drying laundry off the terrace. Jane and I drove to the Sunshine Coast; it rained. I drove to Binna Burra in the Lamington Range; it was wet and foggy, and I didn't realize how high up in the mountains I was until the following day, when the fog and rain finally lifted. Back in Melbourne, I learned that they'd had rainy weather since I had left, and it was overcast while I was there. And, lastly, the only major areas I didn't visit--Sydney & West Australia--are currently being scourged by wildfires because of the drought. I now regret my decision not to visit--think of the lives and property I could have saved!

As for that bad karma/ Angel of Death thing...consider the following:

1. December 1996--I book my flight to Peru for the Travel Medicine course. One day later, the Tupac Amaru guerrillas take several hundred people hostage at the Japanese embassy in Lima.
2. September 1997--I arrive in England for a long-needed vacation. That month, Diana, princess of Wales, dies while speeding through Paris with an Egyptian playboy and a drunk chauffeur. Millions mourn, for no apparent reason. The entire country shuts down. No news coverage except Di in all the media for weeks. Shops (and whiskey distilleries!) are closed as a sign of respect. The funeral is telecast live throughout the world.
3. November 1997--I visit Australia, and am minding my own business, when the minimally-talented Michael Hutchence commits suicide in a hotel room in Sydney. The world's interest is piqued. Australia goes into mourning, all other news coverage is suspended. The shops stay open (including the drive-through liquor stores they call bottle shops--a much saner society). The funeral is telecast live nationally.
4. November 1997--I return to Detroit. After hanging on to life by a thread for weeks, Hizzoner, former Detroit mayor Coleman Young, dies. The city goes into mourning, coverage of his life and death dominates the local media, and even gets a passing mention on CNN. The shops stay open. The funeral is broadcast live locally.

And all this is just within the past twelve months. I used to blame the bad karma on Christobel, since we often travelled together, and most of these bad things happened on the trips we took together or she took alone. She visited Sri Lanka in the late 80s, just before the civil war there really blew up; she moved to the Docklands just before the big IRA bomb at Canary Wharf; she vacationed in Nicaragua during the height of the Contra war and blockade; huge religious riots broke out after we visited Bombay. It all seemed so obvious. But now all this...it can't just be coincidence. I visited Assisi, and a year later the Basilica is in ruins; the boat on which I cruised the Galapagos Islands sank the following year; it rained in the Atacama desert of Chile, the driest spot on earth, after my visit; and as for Hong Kong, it finally fell to Red China!

And my streak continues. Jane and I are going to a travel medicine conference in Madras, India this coming February. We had made tentative plans when I visited her in November. Just last week I called her to finalize our plans (dates of arrival and departure, places we want to visit, mode of transport), and then sat down and read several travel guides. I had pretty much decided which cities I wanted to visit in Tamil Nadu, the southern state that Madras is located in; the next morning, while listening to NPR, I heard that muslim extremists had bombed three train stations in southern India. Two were in towns I'd selected to visit; the other was in the neighboring state of Kerala. Is this spooky or what? I feel like an X-file⁴!

But enough spooky speculation. What of my travels this year? This year I took several trips, three large and one small; all were fun. I saw a lot of new places, got exposed to some pretty strange cultures (surfers in Torquay;; Di worshippers in England) , met a lot of interesting people, made a bunch of new friends and got reacquainted with old ones. It was a very good year.

Peru : Amazonas and the Kingdom of the Inka

Peru is one of those places I've always wanted to visit, so when the opportunity came up to go to a conference

⁴ Speaking of which..I was out of town during the season premiere of the X-Files. I didn't tape the episode, to my regret, and now can't find out what happened. Time and Newsweek, for some reason, didn't carry the story of Mulder's survival (although they devoted a lot of newsprint to JR and Di, both of which I find to be much less compelling or important stories), and I can't find anyone else who watched it. Since I'm not yet on-line, I remain in the dark as to how he made it. If you watched this show, please call me at 248-360-4929 and leave a concise plot summary on my answering machine. I will be eternally grateful, and will once more be able to sleep nights.

there, I jumped at the chance. I signed up, then watched the news intensely to find out what was going on there. My take on the situation: Peru was in a state of civil war for many years, with the government fighting on several fronts. One front was with the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrillas, led by the marxist former professor Abimael Guzman. This group was fanatical; they followed the Khmer Rouge philosophy of revolution, killing everyone who came in their way (mostly the peasants of the altiplano). The other group was the Tupac Amaru Movement (MTA--named after the last Inka), which was less militant and much less lethal. It was a political movement, but was marginalized in a society which did not allow dissent. The government did not distinguish between the two; under president Alberto Fujimori (a Peruvian of Japanese ancestry), there was a crackdown against both; military trials were held, even though the MTA were dissidents rather than active revolutionaries. Those convicted were jailed in conditions that do not even begin to meet the Geneva convention, high in the mountains, with no appropriate shelter or food. This was done for security reasons, but it was inhumane none-the-less.

In December, the remnants of the Tupac Amaru movement decided to try to help their jailed colleagues. They took over the inadequately-guarded residence of the Japanese ambassador and took the guests to the annual Christmas party hostage. By all accounts, they treated their hostages humanely; they released all the women and everyone with health problems. They also released the nationals of Guatemala on the day that the government of that nation signed a peace treaty with its opposition movement, in a show of solidarity. Eventually, they had released everyone but the nationals of Japan and Peru (including the president's relatives).

The stand-off lasted for four months. It went on when I was there. Eventually, it stopped being news. The guerrillas did not harm any of their hostages, and did their best to keep them healthy and occupied. Initially they had threatened to kill hostages, but didn't have the nerve for it, and soon withdrew the threat. The government refused to bargain, even though several countries offered to take the guerrillas. Finally, in the spring, shortly before our Easter, the Peruvian army attacked. Tunnels had been dug under the residence, and the troops broke in. The guerrillas did not harm their captives, although they had ample opportunity. They surrendered peaceably; they were shot in cold blood. Thus it ended.

But this sad ending was still in the future when I was there. Most of the Peruvians I spoke to at the time supported Fujimori, because he was the first president they had that wasn't a member of the ruling oligarchy, and didn't consider his position a for-profit proposal. All the previous presidents had left office as millionaires, and other government officers didn't fair that poorly, either. At least 50% of each government contract, and oft-times 90% or more, slipped away into their pockets before it got to the final destination. Fujimori was lauded for cracking down on corruption, and for actually spending tax money on public works. Under him the road system was greatly improved, and their safety guaranteed, allowing the peasants of the altiplano greater contact with the rest of society. But back to my travels.

Lima: One thing is evident about Lima as soon as one arrives--it is not an Inka city, but a city of the conquistadors. It was founded in 1535 by Francisco Pizarro, after his conquest of the Inka. He built it on the hot desert plains on the shores of the Pacific. The Spanish had no use for Qosqo, the Inka capitol, once they had conquered it; the Spanish were a sea-faring people, and needed a coastal capital for their new territory, the Viceroyship of Peru. The city grew over the years and sprawled; it now has eight million inhabitants, most of them in pueblos juvenes ('young towns'), shanty slums that ring the city, lacking water, electricity or adequate sanitation. The location and overcrowding of Lima give it a environment best described as dismal. Much of the year, the guará, coastal fog, blankets the city in a fine gray mist and blocks out the sun. Luckily, we were there in January, when the fog lifts and the sun shines.

Not that I had much time to enjoy the sunshine; most of my time, and that of the rest of the conference participants, was spent in the lecture hall of our hotel, sitting in the dark, watching slides and listening to lectures. Our hotel was in Miraflores, a rich new suburb of Lima. It is near the coast, and the prime modern shopping district. In the evenings, we would wander out about town in the soft tropical air, along the main street, and down to the park. Here artists displayed their works, and the street artists performed. Occasionally there was a small market, with all sorts of crafts and gee-gaws. The shops were open late into the evening; I spent one evening shopping with my roommate, Zinnah, whose luggage had not arrived with her, and who needed clothing. It was good that we did, as her suitcase finally caught up with her about the time she left for home.

Most of our non-lecture activities seemed to center around food--a massive seafood buffet, a game restaurant, floor shows and such. The best official activity was our trip to the Museo del Oro--the Gold Museum. In the basement vault of the museum building are thousands of gold pieces, ranging from ear plugs to ponchos embroidered with hundreds of gold plates, and also lots of non-gold objects, including, silver, lapis lazuli and trepanned skulls. It is one of the most amazing museums I have ever visited; if only the captions and guidebook were a match for its contents. I had a lovely Spanish-language guidebook, but it was not much help, as someone had rearranged the displays, so the descriptions rarely matched the displayed objects. Upstairs was the display of textiles and pottery; once more, the exhibits were numerous and quite crowded, but here it was to the extent that it was hard to actually move around. There were all sorts of indigenous weavings on the walls, and case after case of pottery. Laurie M. From Chicago seemed quite impressed by the Moche pottery, which she pointed out to me; lets just say the anatomical contortions were mind-boggling.

I also wandered about Lima a bit on my own, giving some of the scheduled suburban activities a pass. The National Museum had wonderful archeological displays and reconstructions, and a fantastic display of retablos--fanciful dioramas and nativity scenes. The monastery of San Francisco is blue, facing a cobbled, pigeon-filled square and has one of the best preserved colonial churches. It was rebuilt after the earthquake of 1687; because of its deep catacombs, it was able to withstand later temblors with minimal damage. It is quite magnificent, in a baroque moorish style, and has a beautiful alabaster cross, which used to be out in front of the church; lit up at night, the cross could be seen for miles. The most interesting, though, were the catacombs, which are the site of some 70,000 burials. There are thousands of bones and skulls stored in a network of chambers, often in quite lovely patterns. The old town center, the Plaza de Armas, was quite traditional--a square filled with people, surrounded by shops, many still with all their Christmas finery about. The crush of people in the evening was exhilarating. Wandering about, peeking into the shops, churches and restaurants, I felt myself well and truly in South America.

Iquitos: A fascinating city, originally a Jesuit Mission, it was founded in the 1750s. It was a small backwater town until the rubber boom of the late 1800s, when the population boomed to 24,000. Huge fortunes were made by the rubber barons, and the Indian and mestizo tappers were virtually enslaved. Thirty years later, the bottom fell out of the market; a British entrepreneur had smuggled rubber-tree seeds out of the country, and huge plantations were planted in Malaysia. In the 1960s, oil was discovered, and the population one more boomed; it is now half a million, all on a virtual island. Iquitos can only be reached by air or by water; it is in the heart of Amazonia, and the surrounding land is flooded for several months of the year. There is a section of town, Belén, along the waterfront, that is built on rafts. During the dry months, these rafts sit on river mud; for most of the rest of the year, they float on the river. It is said to be a colorful and exotic sight; it wasn't floating when I was there, because like everywhere else I visited this year, Iquitos was deep into a major drought.

Iquitos doesn't have much in the way of tourist attractions otherwise. In the main square there is a metal building which was designed by Eiffel (and imported piece by piece during the boom years), but nobody is absolutely sure which one it is; in either case, the most likely candidate is a serious state of disrepair. There is a nice little square with a fountain, a statue of a pink dolphin in its center, decked out in a Santa hat for Christmas. The Malecon, or waterfront walk, has a series of statues of Amazonian Indians, and a lot of litter. The most interesting things the trappings of everyday life: scribes (letter-writers) seated at their typewriters on the sidewalk, along the street of scribes; produce vendors at the indoor market; the numerous batada (smoothie) shops, consisting of a smiling woman, a pile of fruit, and a blender; the beautiful tiles (azulejos, hand made tiles imported from Portugal by the barons) on the walls of all the buildings; children playing on the monkey bars in the playground; riding around town in motocarros, two-passenger motorcycle rickshaws. I think the highlight of our time in Iquitos was the evening Jane, Laurie and I attended a concert on the plaza just outside our hotel. The organizers of the concert recognized us for the gringas that we were, and invited us to sit at the VIP table. We were feted with chilled sangria, and introduced to the quite large crowd as honored guests from abroad. The music was good, popular criolla--coastal music, without a single pipe or chorus of "El Condor Pasa"⁵.

¹ Don't get me wrong, I like "El Condor Pasa". It is a lovely traditional Andean song, written by a Bolivian composer and quite popular in the Andean regions of South America since. In the 1960s, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkle recorded it, adding English lyrics. Since, its popularity has skyrocketed; every Andean band in Peru includes it in its repertoire. And, since no matter where

Amazonas: Iquitos, though interesting and pleasant, is a foreign growth. Beyond its borders is the land of Amazonas, which has changed very little over time. The local Yagua Indians have become less nomadic but still live much as their ancestors did, in small primitive villages, with little in the way of medical services or anything that most of us would consider civilization. Life is hard here.

To get to our lodge, we travelled down Amazon in small boats. It is a huge river; even here, 2000 miles from where it empties into the sea in Brazil, it still at least a mile wide. It flows in a huge, flat plain, which back in the days of the supercontinent of Gondwanaland (100 million years ago), was a huge inland sea. The river has a water flow twelve times that of the Mississippi river, 200,00 cubic meters per second. It is 6470 km (4044 mi) long, and is navigable for 3720 km (2325 mi). The movie-inspired visions I had of the Amazon were wholly inaccurate--a sluggish tropical stream, surrounded by dense vegetation on both sides and over top. Many of its tributaries were like this; I know, as I travelled on several of them on small boats. The Amazon itself is a huge waterway, a highway to the center of the continent. When Francisco de Orellana, the first European to travel its length, travelled here, there were hundreds of towns and villages along its length. Now there are very few, and the jungle has reclaimed their sites. The white man brought with him new viruses and bacteria, and these decimated the native populations of the Americas. Between smallpox and measles, tuberculosis and syphilis, it is estimated that the population of the Americas dropped by 95% by **one hundred fifty years** after Columbus' first landfall. And the native populations continue to decline. Their lands are encroached upon by an unmanaged influx of peasants from the Andes and the coast, displacing the indigenous tribes. The previous governments have attempted to develop this region to provide a politically painless solution to land hunger in the Andes and migration of the rural poor to coastal cities. Unfortunately, this has resulted in deforestation, and worsening poverty, as the land often proves unfit for agriculture once cleared.

The river has significant seasonal changes, and is subject to seasonal flooding. The water level can rise up to 15 meters, and remain for up to eight months. The flora and fauna of this region have adapted. The trees have well-developed buttress or stilt roots. There are few shrubs, and lots of epiphytes up in the branches of the trees. Fishes enter the forests during the flood, and many have adapted by becoming fruit-eaters. We were there during what should have been the wet season; because of the drought, the floods were delayed, and river levels were low. Our boats couldn't get up the small tributaries to the lodges, so we ended up doing quite a few unplanned hikes under the hot tropical sun. Towards the end of our visit, the torrential rains began, and navigation improved considerably.

The Amazon has incredible biodiversity; one acre in the Amazon may have as many different species as the state of Michigan. Lowland Amazonia has

- 2500 bromeliad species
- 1000 bird species
- 270 reptiles
- 300 amphibians
- 3000 fishes
- possibly several million insect species.

Knowing this, I expected an incredible variety of plants and animals. They are there, but it's hard for a novice to appreciate them. The difference between different species of plants can be very subtle, needing a trained botanist to tell them apart. As for the birds and animals--there may be lots of species, but not lots of numbers of each species, and those few are often hidden deep in the jungle or high up in the canopy. It can take a lot of effort to see even a small percentage of these many species.

That being said, I had a wonderful experience. A large part of it was the getting away from civilization. We stayed in lodges which were primitive but quite comfortable. I had a room with a bed, mosquito netting, a wash stand and pitcher, and a kerosene lamp. It was very hot and very sticky, as I was constantly coated with a combination of

in Peru you are, the coast, the jungle, or the Andes, you are never more than a few hundred meters from an Andean band, and hear it constantly. It gets quite tiring; if, like Laurie C. of Chicago, you already hate the song, travel in Peru can be quite a horrific experience, liking being trapped for weeks at Walt Disney's "It's a Small, Small World" ride, my own personal vision of what Hell must be like.

sweat and DEET. The only time I wasn't sticky was those few minutes between when I took a shower and reapplied my DEET. The lodge abutted a small river, next to which was the bar/lounge, and then the dining room. We were surrounded by the jungle and its wildlife. There were flocks of oropendulas that nested nearby; monkeys that came by occasionally to satisfy their curiosity (and quite disrupted our bug lecture); a large snake that lived in the thatch of the dining hall and kept the rat population down; a tame tapir; several tame macaws, and a parrot that lived on premises. The tapir was as large as a grown hog, but quite friendly. He knew how to work the swinging doors, and wandered in and out of the dining hall and kitchen at will. He had a long, soft snout, and used to give little snuffly kisses. The parrot was particularly vile; once it got on your shoulder, it was hard to get it off. It liked taking little nips, especially of one's ears. In my case, not only did I get bitten a few times, but Pepe ate one of my earrings.

Bird watching was quite good. Although I've always enjoyed birds, and in my childhood had thought of becoming an ornithologist, it's not something I've done seriously in my adult years. This changed in Peru. Our guides were quite good, and the variety and colors of the birds were incredible. Bird-watching is not an avocation for laggards; the best viewing is usually right around dawn, meaning five am or so. And then there was Nikki Rothwell, a pediatrician from Kentucky, who was so good and dedicated, that she was an inspiration. I took up birding with vigor and enthusiasm.

The viewing at our base camp was good but not spectacular--you get a bunch of tourists tramping through the undergrowth together, and not many birds will hang around, even at five am. The oropendolas were constantly about, but otherwise you really had to get up into the canopy to get a good look. That's what we did at ACEER (Amazon Center for Environmental Education and Research), a biological research station, at which a canopy walkway has been built. It was a joy; walking up on a quaking walkway, among the flora and fauna of the canopy, 100 meters above the ground. Early in the morning, from the walkway, we could view lots and lots of birds, including the elusive white toucan (which was pointed out to me but I never saw, and still have my doubts about). My favorite was the small blue cotinga; but the kiskadees, parrots, trogons, and tanagers were also gorgeous.

There were other little field trips that we took that were lots of fun. We visited a natural medicine reserve, where Dr. Antonio showed us lots of rainforest plants and explained their medicinal uses. At the lily lake, there were huge water lilies, the leaves of which could support a small child. We travelled up and down small tributaries of the Amazon, and through its interstices; near our camp, we visited some of the local people and were exposed to their culture.

On our first day, we had an "Amazon Fair" of sorts. The people of the adjoining Yagua village demonstrated local crafts and skills for us (carving, beadwork, pottery, use of the machete, weaving of roofs and baskets, fishing, use of the blow gun), allowed us to sample rainforest foods (quite good juices and dumplings) and various products of the sugar cane (molasses and rum), and demonstrated dancing and singing. We were allowed to participate in some of these, and I may add that I was pretty good at the blow gun--I was the only one of my small group to hit the target. Poachers and trespassers take note--I brought a blow gun home with me!

We also visited a few of the nearby Yagua villages. The one that lies across a ravine from the camp held a crafts market for our benefit. I bought all sorts of cool things--jewelry made from berries, nuts and piranha jaws, masks, woven bags, maracas, a bow and arrow, and the afore-mentioned blow-gun. My fellow conferees also contributed generously to the local economy. Some of us also got a tour of the adjacent ranch; don Alejandro and his wife grow sugar cane, which they process into molasses and some fairly vile rum, and raise fish in numerous ponds. They also run a small tienda, shop, where they sell their own goods and imports from town, as well as the local equivalent of fast food. On land donated by the don stands a medical clinic, which was built by Kiwanis from the states, and is run by Linnea Smith, a family practitioner from Wisconsin. Linnea came to the Amazon a few years ago as a tourist, and decided to stay. She cooperates with state doctors in the area, and treats her patients using medications brought and donated by visitors to the lodges and her friends back in Wisconsin.

Further along the river we stopped in to Nuevo Sinai, a Yagua village with a school. The children walked with us, showing us natural face-painting and just fooling around. Pamela, the manager of the Explorama lodge, is involved in an Adopt-a-School program, where people or schools in the US adopt schools in the Amazon, providing funds for school supplies for the students. Although education is free, many children cannot afford even basic school supplies--paper, pencils, books. These are provided them, to encourage them to stay in school and become literate, and thus better fend for themselves and their people later in life.

Qosqo: When Columbus arrived in America, Qosqo (Cuzco) was the thriving, powerful capitol of the Inka⁶ Empire. It was founded in the twelfth century by Manco Capac, the first Inka and son of the sun, Inti. During his travels, Manco Capac plunged his gold walking stick into the ground, until it disappeared. This point was the *qosqo*, or navel, of the earth (in the Quechua language), and it was here that he built his city. Under later Inkas it became the center of their kingdom, *Tawantinsuyo* ("the four corners of the Earth").

In Peru, as in Mexico, and huge empire was brought down by a small party of Spaniards. Here, as there, they happened to come at an opportune time (at the end of a bloody and debilitating civil war), and had superior technology (gunpowder and horses). Here also was much of greater value destroyed in the search for gold. In the palace of the Inkas were magnificent gold objects, whole rooms of them. The Inka did not value gold as we do, for its value in commerce; to them it was the tears of god, Inti--the sun, and had purely religious significance. It was used decoratively, for the glory of god and his son, the Inka. Inka goldsmiths were greatly talented, and according to what records remained, created some truly magnificent works. All of it is gone, melted down and shipped to Spain, to fuel an inflationary cycle which ended in eventual bankruptcy for that empire.

Qosqo remains a wonderful city. After its fall to the Spaniards, it became first a regional capitol, and then a backwater, and thus has avoided industrialization and retained its ancient charm. Roman Catholic nuns now live in buildings once inhabited by the Vestal Virgins of the Inka. In the cathedral, Christ and the apostles are shown eating *cuyo*, guinea pig, at the last supper. The streets are one huge market--shops and sidewalk vendors will sell you goods and handcrafts from all over Peru. Walls and foundations are still those of the Inka, huge, heavy granite boulders, fit together tightly without any mortar. When earthquakes come, and they still do, with frequency, here in the mountains, modern and Spanish colonial buildings may crumble, but the Inka structures remain intact.

Qosqo is built around a central square, the Plaza de Armas, which, in Inka times, was the exact center of the empire. It was the spot where many important religious and military ceremonies were held, and much blood-letting was performed by the Spaniards, including the execution of the last Inka, Tupac Amaru I, who was drawn and quartered. Once it held samples of soil from all four corners of the empire; now it's full of shoeshine boys and watercolor peddlers.

Koricancha, the Temple of the Sun, was the most important place of worship in the Inka empire. Walls were covered with 700 hundred sheets of gold studded with emeralds and turquoise. The mummified bodies of the previous Inkas were kept here, on thrones of gold, tended to by women chosen for that honor. The patio was filled with life-sized gold and silver statues of llamas, trees, fruits, flowers, even butterflies. The earth was fine gold, planted with gold stalks of maize, and there were twenty gold sheep with their lambs and shepherds. All this is gone forever. The walls are of massive stones, intricately fitted together; these remain, and are now the foundation of the church of Santo Domingo.

The rest of the city is lovely, with its frequent small squares and fountains. There are many attractive colonial churches, in high hispano-baroque style. A school of art developed here in the early colonial day, the school of Cuzco (16th through 18th centuries). Its paintings are often violent and bloody; archangels are dressed as Spaniards and carry guns, but are surrounded by cherubs with Indian faces. Christ often appears with Indian apostles, and the Virgin Mary wears Indian clothes. There are fine examples of this style at the Museum of Religious Art; the building was once the palace of the Inka Roca, and in the wall just outside is the famous twelve angled rock, Hatunrimiyoc (which proves that no piece of granite was too irregular for the Inka masons to be fitted without mortar). Often we also see represented the Pachamama, a Virgin figure, who retains many earlier

⁶ The word Inka (Quechua spelling) does not refer to a people, in that way the word Maya does. The Inkas were originally the ruling class of the Quechua people; later, they expanded their holdings, ruling many different peoples. The Inka empire was united by a common set of laws, and Quechua became the official language of state. The word is also used to refer to the emperor. There were ___Inkas; schoolchildren in Peru can recite them, much as US children used to be able to recite the presidents. The killing of Atahualpa by Pizarro marked the end of the Inka empire. Subsequent Inkas ruled as puppets of the Spanish empire, although several did turn on the Spaniards and lead popular uprisings; the last Inka, Tupac Amaru, was beheaded by the Spanish in 1569. Tupac Amaru II was a later mestizo rebel, who took the title Inka upon himself.

prechristian earth mother goddess attributes. I bought several modern paintings which have much of this Cuzco influence; my favorite is La Virgen de la Leche (The Virgin of the Milk), who is shown holding the baby Jesus, as milk spurts out of her nipples. Quite appropriate in my line of work, I felt.

The Altiplano:

The area of plains and river valleys in which Qosqo lays, and in which the Inka built their empire, is called the altiplano, or highlands. It is here that I travelled to see the remains of the Inka, and the traditional peoples of Peru. One has a tendency to forget how high up Qosqo is, until you try to breathe or move. This is the place for altitude sickness--3326 meters (10,810 feet, or almost two miles) above sea level. Other towns are even higher, especially old Inka fortifications. The inhabitants have long acclimated to the thinness of the atmosphere; we did so chemically, with Diamox tablets, thanks to knowledge acquired at the travel medicine course. Having had altitude sickness in Quito, I quite appreciated being able to breathe and not have constant head and body aches. Coca tea is drunk locally, and the leaves are sold in all the markets, as it is said to have restorative effects, and to help with altitude sickness. We all drank it by the pot. I think it was the huge quantities of sugar and its warmth which produced its effects; the cocaine can't be released unless a strong alkaline agent is used, and certainly is not found in the tea.

The altiplano is quite beautiful, and is inhabited by camelids and Quechua. The camelids consist of four families of beasts in the Americas: guanaco (wild), llama, alpaca, and vicuña (rare). The Quechua culture, what is left of the Inka, is inextricably dependent on these creatures; they provide wool, and are pack animals. For holidays they are gaily decked out with bit of colored yarn on their ears. We visited a Quechua town, the **Willoq** community, in the Urubamba valley, reaching it by a long, tortuously winding dirt road through the mountains, with many switchbacks along the mountains, and along the shores of a river. The town was quite poor but very colorful--the women wore traditional outfits with wonderful hats of bright red, ornamented with flowers and safety pins, and chinstraps of intricate beadwork. The children were quiet but curious, grubby with runny noses. The houses were small and dark, and there were numerous guinea pigs (meat, not pets). The weavings these women produced were also intricate and colorful. A friend of mine, Patricia, an archaeologist who spent time working in the altiplano of Chile, says that the altitude and cold make you lose your sense of smell. We weren't high enough here.

We did learn quite a bit about the societal structure. The people have been Catholicized, to a degree. A couple will live together for years, but not marry, until the viability of the union can be proved by the production of a child. Often, several children may be born before enough is saved up for a proper church wedding, which is an elaborate and expensive affair. The church does not actively discourage this, for this is the way things have always been; however, children cannot be baptized until their parents formally marry. Christianity has just added another layer of ritual and ceremony to ancient tradition.

Another aspect of altiplano culture is the weekly market; all towns have their set market days, when people come from the entire region to shop and trade. In **Pisac**, a town 15 km north of Qosqo, at the base of the mountains, the market has become a major tourist attraction. It spills out of the central plaza, throughout the town, with stalls selling all matter of souvenirs and handcrafts as well as produce and practical items. There are lots of peasants in their traditional outfits, most willing to have their photo taken for 50¢. And further into town is a huge open hearth oven, *horno*, which make the best bread and empanadas. The market has become massive and staged primarily for the tourists, who come en masse in busload after busload. Up above the town, about a kilometer higher, are some truly spectacular ruins, perched on mountain ridges and along old Inka roads/paths. I explored them on my own, after the rest of the group had returned to the States. My driver/guide led me around, after we'd both had some *chicha* (fermented corn beer). We climbed up and down through some fairly precipitous areas, crawled through a tunnel, and made a few jumps. The view alone was worth it, terraces, sheer cliff drops, fortresses hugging the mountains, and the Urubamba river winding down below.

There were quite a few other interesting sites here in the **Sacred Valley of the Inkas** (the Vilcanota/Urubamba River valley) . **Ollantaytambo**, named after a famous Inka general and rebel, is the site of a massive fortress, and of one of the few major victories the Inka had against the Spanish. Huge, steep terraces and some hundred steps lead to the fortress, which is built, with no mortar but fine fitting, from huge stones. It is quite a climb. At the base were baths and fountains, and the village of Ollantaytambo, which is built upon Inka foundations; it is an example of the *cancha* (courtyard) system, where the houses all open up onto a series of courtyards, not out onto

the street.

Chincho also has a large market, but for some reason hasn't quite gotten on the tourist track. The town has some very accessible ruins, and a lovely 15th century church with fantastic but crumbling frescoes covering its entire interior. Even though it wasn't market day, my mere presence attracted vendors, and I had to run the gauntlet to leave. I did acquire some nice weavings, though.

Closer in to Qosqo were some pretty remarkable ruins, also. Everyone visits **Sacsayhuaman** (which, the guides love to point out, is pronounced 'sexy woman'). It is just outside Qosqo, and consists of a series of zig-zag walls made of unbelievably massive stones almost ten meters high. There is also a sort of parade ground, which is the site of the annual festival of Inti Raymi (the winter solstice), when thousands of people gather to celebrate. Just down the road is **Tambo Machay**, the bath of the Inka where, in the light rain, we watched a traditional Quechua band perform, playing Inka melodies on authentic Quechua instruments.

Machu Picchu: Nestled on a mountaintop in the heart of the cloud forest is the ancient ceremonial city of Machu Picchu, probably one of the most awe-inspiring sites I have ever visited. Its existence was kept secret from the Spanish, who never had a chance to destroy it, although the jungle had reclaimed much of it by the time Hiram Bingham, Harvard professor, came upon it in 1911, while searching for the lost city of Vicabamba (the last stronghold of the Inka). No one is really sure what the function of Machu Picchu was; it was built, occupied and abandoned in the span of just one hundred years. It contains an unusually large number of religious structures, so may have been a religious site with little strategic importance. The large amount of agricultural land in proportion to population housed there has led to speculation that the principle function of the Machu Picchu region was to provide a stable supply of coca leaves for the priests and royals of Qosqo.

The Machu Picchu area is reached by a train that runs along the picturesque Urubamba river through the mountains. It winds its way along, down the mountains and into the jungle. The area is called cloud forest because it is that-tropical and high in the clouds. The vegetation is lush, with an abundance of orchids, bromeliads, and tree ferns. Flocks of parrots fly overhead, the elusive, bright orange cock of the rock lives nearby, and there are giant hummingbirds. The Urubamba flows wildly here, white water, especially after the rains. From the train station, a bus took us up a series of switchbacks to the ruins. They were magnificent, despite the number of other people-stone temples amidst the lush green velvet of the jungle, on high mountain peaks.

We spent the day wandering among the ruins, with and without guides. The workmanship was remarkable, especially the mortarless construction used on ceremonial and royal buildings. There were various temples and altars, and even some llamas (quite picturesque, but quite unnatural here, despite being pictured in all the postcards and tourist brochures. The llamas were imported here for a film and then abandoned; they do not normally live here, as they find the climate to be too oppressively hot!) The guides were all quick to point out the plumbing system in the Inka's toilet, as American tourists always seem to be fascinated by foreign plumbing. They also pointed out to us the spot where once an obelisk stood. It was dismantled by the army, the stones left in a random pile, in order to use the central square as a helipad for visiting dignitaries at a major international conference. Not only did they ruin the obelisk, which archaeologists haven't been able to reconstruct, but the vibrations from the helicopters have caused massive damage to many of the remaining structures, destabilizing them, and scared off much of the wildlife. Such is progress.

Such was my time in Peru, a mere two weeks. I dearly want to go back, and will probably do so in 1999. There is so much left to see: the tombs of Sipan, the Nazca lines, the Manu biological reserve. And, of course, so much more potential shopping. I had to buy a new suitcase (a cheap Chinese one at the black market) to get my purchases home this time, between the alpaca sweaters and rug, hats, books, and jungle crafts, including one medium-sized blow gun. Think what I could do with more time!

The UP It seems like a lifetime later that I drove on up to the UP (Upper Peninsula of Michigan), but it was only six months and one job later. Recently, my visits always seem rushed. I decided to have a nice leisurely visit this time, driving to Calumet (550 miles or so away) over the period of a few days, rather than trying to do it all in

one, as I had been wont to in my youth. The best laid plans tend to go agley...

I drove up to Sault Ste. Marie; even on a cold and drizzly day, there were lots of people at the locks. Locks fascinate people, and they still fascinate me, even though I've been through them numerous times (including some massive ones on the Yangtze). There's just something about watching a huge ship pull into such a relatively narrow space (only a foot or two to spare in either direction on a ship several hundred feet long) and then drop twenty feet right in front of you. I got the grand tour of town from my friend Paul, who was up for the weekend to work on his folks' house. Not only did I have dinner at the Ojibway Hotel, but I got the insider's tour of Christopher Columbus Hall. The following morning, we took his boat out onto the St. Mary's River. The herring were biting.

I drove up to Whitefish Point, stopping at quite a few lighthouses along the way. There I visited the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum, where they have quite a nice tribute to the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, which is still a frequent topic of conversation up here. Later that day, I watched the sun set over the lake, and got invited to a campfire barbecue on the beach; the man by the fire turned out to be the museum director, and it turned out that he was an old friend of Paul's father. I am thoroughly convinced that everyone in the UP really does know everyone else, or at least their cousin. The next day I visited Tahquamenon Fall again, and then stopped in at Oswald's Little Bear Acres. This is a new spot; the owners have been raising abandoned cubs and injured bears for years. As they said, people who come to the UP expect to find a place to see bears, so they thought they'd provide them with one. The bears were, appropriately, sluggish at midday, except for the perpetually moving cubs. Best of all, they were ensconced behind a high fence, probably more for their protection than ours. The T-shirts were great.

I also visited the Seney Wildlife Refuge several times over two days. I saw a large variety of birds, especially at dusk. Most impressive were the sandhill cranes, loons, hooded mergansers, bald eagles, and trumpeter swans. The latter were thought, only twenty years ago, to be extinct; then, a few were found in Alaska and Canada. A captive breeding program was instituted, and the swans multiplied successfully. They have been reintroduced into a few places, and the Seney is one of them. It was so magnificent to watch them gliding toward me, at dusk, through the mist on a plate-glass still lake. I hope their breeding program is as successful as the Canada goose one was.

Up in Calumet and Laurium, it was great to visit with old friends. The kids have grown so much, especially Emmy, who is now sixteen, drives, and does macrame. I first met her on my first trip to the UP in December of 1981, when she was but a wee baby and I was a third year medical student. It makes me feel so old. Maddy and Henry are both so much bigger; together with Lieschen, we visited the Quincy hoist and went down in the old copper mine. In the past year, a funicular has been added down the side of the hill, and is quite fun. We also went picking thimbleberries, blueberries and strawberries. Joel and Kara have also grown quite a bit. We went hiking around their house, near the pond, around the swamp. We watched birds and picked lots of wildflowers. We also had a lovely fire on the beach, always my idea of a perfect evening.

England: I decided it was time to visit Europe, like I used to do back when I'd just finished residency--just go and hang out for a month. Thanks to my British friends, who are always so welcoming, I can do so without bankrupting myself. Christobel is now living in the home counties, Kent to be precise. She lives in Seale House, or Tom's house, as her son Tom refers to it. It's a lovely Tudor structure which had some additions made in the Georgian period. It is also located right next door to the local underage pub, which is quite a noisy proposition on the weekends. When Chris moved in, the garden (Am: back yard) was a true jungle. I put some time into clearance, and Chris and I redid the entire rock garden and most of the beds. We planted a lot of heathers, some rhododendrons, astilbes, and lots and lots of spring-flowering bulbs.

Sevenoaks, Chris' new town, is quite an old town. It was named after the seven huge oaks which stood there until the hurricane of 1987 (which occurred, interestingly enough, shortly after my first visit to London). On its outskirts is Knole Hall, a fantastic National Heritage property built to match the calendar: 7 courtyards, 52 staircases, 365 rooms. It was built in the late 1400s by the Archbishop of Canterbury, expropriated by Henry VIII, then given to Thomas Sackville in 1566 by his cousin Elizabeth I. His family have held it since, and it was here that Virginia Woolf was inspired by her friend Vita Sackville-West to write Orlando. The gardens and grounds are also quite nice and there are a lot of fallow deer roaming around.

I visited quite a few places in the south of England. **Lullingstone** has a nice set of well-excavated roman ruins, an old villa. **Rye** has a stone beach with built-up dikes and attractive old town center and church. **Bodiam Castle** looks like a fairy-tale castle, all turrets and battlements, with a moat and drawbridge. **Rochester** was damp and rainy, but the castle is magnificent and huge, and the medieval fair on its grounds quite good, especially the falconer. **Canterbury** is apparently the second most visited place in England (after London), as I could attest. The cathedral is magnificently gothic, with huge masses of stained glass. I learned quite a bit about Becket, reading T.S.Eliot's [Murder in the Cathedral](#) on the train ride home.

Chris and I drove North to pick up Tom from his grandparents' house, where he was spoiled rotten for three weeks. We had a nice time, visiting **Levens** hall and walking in the park, touring round **Kendall** castle, shopping in Kendall town, driving to Settle in north Yorkshire, and touring the fells with Paolo. Driving around with him, I learned quite a lot about slurry and silage technology and sheep breeding and varieties. We went climbing in the fells and, at Chris' insistence, crossing rivers, into one of which I fell. Those wet, mossy stones can really get slippery. And, needless to say, we visited a good number of pubs--touring is thirsty work.

I also took advantage of my time here to visit with Bella, who I hadn't seen since Wisconsin. Bella is now living in **Bristol**, a really nice port city on the west coast of England. It is near Bath, and is almost as pretty in parts, with lots of parks and lovely Regency crescents. The Brunel suspension bridge is located dramatically and attractively over the river 240 feet below. The floating harbor (called that because, at low tide the gates are closed to keep the water in and boats afloat) has been redeveloped, with lots of shops and restaurants. Bella and I also visited **Avebury**, the site of a series of interlocking stone circles and mounds that date back to 2500 BC. The stones were not as big as those in Stonehenge, but were definitely more numerous, and one was the site of a Druid wedding while we were there. Another prominent feature of the west of England is the White Horses carved into the hillsides (there is chalk just below the soil). I had thought the horses were ancient Druid petroglyphs, but apparently they are the results of a fad which swept the area in the late 1800s.

Of course, I also spent a couple of days in **London**. I spent a long rainy afternoon in the National Gallery, which has expanded and rearranged a lot since the last time I took a good look around--1987. The Piero della Francesca and Botticelli were marvelous. I went all the way to the British Museum to see the stolen moai, only to learn he was temporarily being stored at the Museum of Mankind (until the reading rooms move out to free up more space for exhibits sometime in 1999). I had to satisfy myself with the marvelous Egyptian and Greek exhibits. And I shopped and visited Chinatown, and did all the usual stuff, just absorbing the sights and sounds of London.

Belgium: Did you know that it is now possible to take a train from London to Paris, Bruges or Brussels? Thanks to the Channel, it is now a quick, convenient and comfortable trip. I just hopped on the train in Ashton, at the international train terminal, and read and rode across the flatlands of France and Belgium. **Bruges**, my destination, is a fabulous city. It is in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, and was separated from the upper Netherlands during the fierce religious wars of the Reformation. The North remained staunchly Protestant and consumes salty, bitter licorice; the south remained Catholic and creates and consumes incredibly rich and indulgent chocolates.

Bruges is a medieval town built around a series of old canals. It was a major center of commerce, of weaving and tapestry-making, a port town, in medieval times. Then the river silted up and Bruges was on the losing side in a series of wars, and was allowed to decline by the victors. It stagnated, and became a forgotten backwater town. The Industrial Revolution passed it by. Then, in the 1960s, it was rediscovered. The canals were dredged, the buildings restored to their former glory, and voila! Tourism. It is now a truly quaint place, with small narrow streets, lovely canals, windmills, churches and cathedrals, and a huge clocktower with 366 steps to the top (which did, thankfully, have a lovely view). There were also lots and lots of lace, tapestry and chocolate shops. I must say, the chocolates were quite nice, and the Belgians make a very potent and tasty cherry beer. And the mussels.....steamed, fried, sauced, delicious! Definitely worth a long, leisurely visit.

Scotland: The best time to visit Scotland is during the height of summer, when it is reasonably warm and dry. We were there in September, in the damp, mist and rain. At least we somehow avoided the midges

(small bugs, the generic equivalent of American "no see'ums"). Still, it was fun, in large part because of good company. I travelled with Jane, whom I'd met at the conference in Peru (she's an GP from Australia, with a diploma in OB/GYN and a shared enthusiasm for travel, fine wine, smoked salmon and the cinema), and Rita, a good friend of Jane's, and now also mine. (Rita is originally Australian, but now lives in London. She says the three reasons Aussie women move to England are

1. You can leave butter out overnight and it won't melt
2. You never have to shave your legs again
3. Much smaller cockroaches.

Rita has the gift of conversation, being able to converse at length and in depth with just about anyone. We had some lovely long talks.) We rented a car, and took off for Western Scotland and the Islands. We visited an incredible number of castles, and perhaps even more pubs. Unfortunately, we never got to see the inside of a whiskey distillery!

We were in Scotland during that period of national psychosis that the British referred to as "Diana's Funeral". It was a surreal experience. Only the day before her untimely but undeserved death, the media were slagging her to no end. The articles went on and on about her affair with Dodi, Dodi's affair with some Californian, Di's wild lifestyle, ad nauseam. The next day she was the Princess of the People, the Queen of Hearts, an uncanonized saint. It was a disgusting display of false piety and guilt by the press. As for the unprecedented national mourning, I can only assume it was some sort of national catharsis, a letting out of centuries of pent-up emotion by this most reserved (except for the soccer hooligans) of peoples. People who didn't give a fig for her in life cried in public; those who had worshipped her before wailed lamentations.

Let's look at this dispassionately. Here's a woman who was a high school drop-out, from an incredibly rich family, who married well, not because of any special attributes, but because she was of the correct breeding stock and a virgin. She then sought publicity, performing most of her charity work in public and notifying reporters of her comings and goings, and then complained of her lack of privacy; she cheated on her stodgy husband once she'd tired of him, then spilled her guts to the press about it. When divorce seemed imminent, she once more cried in the press, and then threatened to tell all unless the Queen came across with a huge monetary settlement. She then took up with an Egyptian playboy, who'd never earned an honest buck and lived off his daddy's money, and was driving through Paris with him and a drunk chauffeur (and NOT wearing her seatbelt!) at 100 miles per hour when it all crashed. THIS is a saint? I think not. Marie Curie, Margaret Sanger, maybe. Di...Never!

Getting back to Scotland...even here, there were piles of flowers in public areas, although much smaller ones than down south. The Scots seemed less eager to close everything down on the day of the funeral, although they were all forced to shut their shops (including distilleries!) by the local councils on that day. Perhaps that helped ensure the vote for devolution a few days later. It made travelling round more difficult, because even gas stations were closed. At least the ferries still ran, so that we could get to the Isle of Mull.

Mull is a small island, roughly the shape of the isle of Britain miniaturized and squashed down. There are two main castles--**Torosay**, more of a stately home with large, lovely gardens, and **Duart**, a stronghold with proper dungeons and thick, thick walls. We stayed on the west coast, in **Dervaig**, in a B&B at Aintuim farm. Lorna, our hostess, suggested we attend the Fiddler's Rally that night in **Tobemoray**, and we did. It was quite fun. There were fiddlers from all over Scotland, playing together, so to speak. They'd never actually played together before, and it showed. None of them seemed to take any notice of the conductor, who was having a wonderful time dancing around and waving the baton. The organist was catching up on her knitting between her parts. We all enjoyed ourselves, none-the-less, singing "Catherine" and "Auld Lang Syne" together, and Jane even won a prize in the raffle (smoked trout; we quite enjoyed it for lunch the following day).

We did quite a bit of driving round the island, which was lovely and rocky, with lots of waterfalls. Rita wanted to wash her hair in the wild waters of Scotland, and was able to indulge. Driving itself was quite fun and challenging, as the roads were only one lane wide and most seemed to be on the sides of mountains. There were frequent small passing places, and one quickly learned the etiquette (first one to a passing place pulled off and let the other by). In our travels we ran into (figuratively, but almost literally) lots of Highland coos (cattle) that liked resting in the middle of the roads and sheep with similar habits. Jane had a particular affection for them, as they were very shaggy and gentle-eyed.

We made a pilgrimage to the **Holy Isle of Iona**, which is a short ferry ride off the south coast of Mull. It was a moving experience, at least for the Celtic Christians among us. The stone Celtic crosses were lovely, and the cemetery was desolate but attractive, the burial place of ancient British kings. The abbey was beautifully reconstructed, and a joy to wander about, as the Edinburgh String Quartet was holding a concert while we were there. The music wafted at you from magically odd corners.

After Mull, we drove through **Morvern** and **Moirdart** in the Highlands, around the **Sound of Arisaig**, then by ferry to the **Isle of Skye**. It rained. A lot. When Rita commented on the rain one day, our landlady responded "Well, it *is* September". We still enjoyed the scenery, just couldn't see it quite as well some days. The mountains on Skye are beautiful and desolate, particularly the **Cuillins** down by **Elgol**. We visited the west coast on a clear day; there we saw the castle of **Dunvegan**, which is quite tarted up for the tourists. **Loch Dunvegan**, that bit of the sea that it abuts, is quite nice; we took a boat out, and got to enjoy the brisk air, the seals and the shorebirds. We viewed the **Trotternishes** through the mist, and paid obeisance at the grave of Flora MacDonald, who saved Bonnie Prince Charlie⁷. We stopped at **Portree**, the tourist center of Skye, and had some horrible fish & chips (led astray by the Rough Guide), which we fed to the gulls. We talked to a reporter from Quebec, who was there with a CBC film crew covering the devolution election. She was impressed by the lack of enthusiasm on the part of most of the Scots she'd interviewed. She was also impressed by the fact that, at Stirling Bridge, the statue of William Wallace looks incredibly like Mel Gibson, and at the interpretive center, the history of the site is illustrated by photos from the movie [Braveheart](#).

We drove through the **Highlands** on our way back to England. They were magnificent. It was amazing to drive through such empty areas in Britain, which has the same area as the state of Michigan, but has more than 10 times the population (80 million). Most of the British live in the Beautiful South; the inhabitants of Scotland number only some five million. The Highlands are wild, with mountains, crags, and one loch after another. We stopped at **Eileen Donan Castle**, Scotland's most photographed monument. Its crenelated towers rise from the water's edge, joined to the shore by a narrow bridge, with mountains and lochs forming a backdrop. It was once a highly strategic location, and now attracts tourists and moviemakers; [The Highlander](#) was filmed here, among others.

Our last stop was across the border, in the Yorkshire Dales, where we stayed with Derek and Pia, two of Jane's crazy friends. They run a wonderful restaurant, the Rowan Tree, in **Askrigg** (where [All Creatures Great and Small](#) was filmed). We were fed incredibly well, had some lovely walks, and great conversation. Derek and Pia are travellers, too; we talked of Africa and South America, India and the US. I wish we'd had more time to spend together. Maybe next time.

Australia: I decided to visit the Antipodes this year, way down under, where the stars are funny and the animals truly strange. I've always wanted to visit Australia, ever since Taisa, my Dad's goddaughter, visited us back in the 60s and told us all about kangaroos and koalas, deserts and jungles. This year, after meeting Jane, I decided to actually do so; I now had some good friends over there, so it seemed worthwhile. After I quit my job and had lots more free time, I decided to make a real trip of it, going away for almost five weeks. It was a magnificent trip.

I rented a Toyota Corolla Segal, and put more than 11,000 kilometers on the odometer. I began in **Melbourne**, where I visited with Taisa (whom I'd last seen 27 years ago) and her sister Larissa, and with my old friend Andy Shashlo, an ex-pat now working for Ford, and his family. Between them, they showed me around town, and took me to some old outback towns and spas. From there I drove to Adelaide, by way of **Torquay**, home of Australia's surf

⁷ Quite a character, history has treated him much more favorably than he deserved. Charlie was born in Italy and spent much of his youth in the court of France. At the French king's urging, he decided to return to Scotland to seek his throne, despite no military experience, no Gaelic, and an imperfect knowledge of English. The Scottish clan chiefs tried to discourage him, and suggested that if he came, he bring an army with him. He didn't. He sneaked ashore disguised as a priest, and then set about fomenting insurrection. Many of the lairds supported him, out of sense of duty. They were roundly defeated by the English. Charlie ran and hid. He was finally smuggled out of Scotland, disguised as Flora's serving maiden. He spent his last days living dissolutely in Italy; he was married off to a young woman when he'd grown ancient, by supporters who wanted to preserve the Stewart line. There were no offspring, and his young wife left him in disgust. He died alone; rumor has it he died of syphilis.

culture and the Surf Museum, and the **Great Ocean Road**⁸. I then made detours through the **Grampians** (mountains with beautiful pine and eucalyptus forests and waterfalls) and the **Little Desert** (where I stayed at **Whimpey's Lodge**⁹, and went nature-watching with a passel of schoolchildren. I got to see mallee-fowl and lots of wildflowers, because the desert was in profuse bloom.) I spent a rainy day at the **Narracort** caves, one of which is full of fossils (imagine 10 meter high kangaroos!) and another is a maternity ward for bats (which can be watched by remote infra-red bat-cam). I then spent the next few days getting over a cold in **Adelaide**, where I stayed with my dad's old friends, Taisa's parents. While there, I visited the botanical gardens and museums. Even though it was only October, the town was decked out in its Christmas finery (Australians don't have the benefit of Thanksgiving to delay the onset of Christmas frenzy).

One of the best places that I visited in Australia was **Kangaroo Island**, just a ferry ride away from Adelaide. It is a large island, and most of it has been preserved as national parks and reserves.; as the fox was never introduced here, the wallaby population is intact. It was, as one of my books had said, the best place in Australia to see wildlife. At night the fairy penguins come in to shore in Penneshaw and Kingscote, and can be watched as they wander towards their nests, where their young await them, braying loudly. The wallabies also come out at night to graze, preferring orchards and garden plants, and can be seen in large numbers. There ar kangaroos and koalas by the score; a huge flock or chartreuse-beaked Cape Barren Geese; and ponds and lagoons full of black swans and musk ducks, with corellas and crimson rosellas overhead. And lots and lots of vivid blue fairy wrens.

After Adelaide I headed north, into the deep desert outback. I drove past vast, virtually dry salt lakes, and through the **Woomera** restricted area (a military area where turning off the highway is forbidden, and there are no stops, including gas stations, for more than 100 miles). I stopped at **Cooper Pedy**, center of opal mining in Australia; there is no vegetation whatever for miles and miles, only piles of stones in the desert where there has been mining. Further on, I visited **Ayers Rock**, as impressive for its size as for the fact that it is an undulation in the landscape. I spent a few days in **Alice Springs**, which has a bridge across a dry sandy river bed, but no river most of the year, and explored the **MacDonnell ranges**, mountains and gaps and oases in the desert. At night I watched the kites circle in the sky and settle into the branches of dead trees.

I drove further north across the **Tropic of Capricorn**, past the **Devil's Marbles** (huge red rocks, laying around and on top of each other, like the spilled contents of a child's bag of marbles). I turned east at **Threeways**, and drove across long empty expanses of desert, studded with thousands of termite mounds. I drove over dried river beds, and watched emus and their chicks running through the brush. At dawn and dusk, kangaroos would congregate at the side of the road, and try to jump in front of my car. Other traffic was rare, and occasionally go for half an hour without seeing another car or truck. Towns and gas pumps were rare, and signs saying "last petrol for 150 km" were not unusual.

Once out of the **Northern Territory** and into **Queensland**, the vegetation and evidence of settlement increased, but I still would often see tumbleweeds dancing on the road. I began to see sheep, then cattle, and even occasional towns. There was lots and lots of roadwork, all part of the process of building the National Highway (or so all the signs said). I blew out a tire in a construction area, and got to test my tire-changing skills. I passed through **Longreach**, home of the Stockman's Hall of Fame, and **Winton**, birthplace of QANTAS and the song "Waltzing Matilda" (which, thanks to several tapes I nearly wore out in my long hours of driving, I have not only memorized but can interpret for you). The land was flat, flat, flat, with only the colors of the vegetation changing.

As I began to approach **Brisbane**, here began to be hills, then mountains, and even trees. I descended into Brisbane itself, a subtropical city on a river. I stayed there with Jane, and her two Japanese roommates, Minoku and

⁸ This was begun as a make-work project for returning veterans after WWII, but has ended up having enormous importance as both a commercial artery and tourist attraction. It is easily one of the most beautiful drives I have ever done. It hugs the cliff, with steep mountains on one side and a steep drop on the other. There are fantastic rock formations along the way: the 12 Apostles, London Bridge. I spent a lot of time just stopping and staring.

⁹ I met another traveller there, John, a retired teacher from England, who had spent much of his life working and travelling round the globe. He said he was getting older, and was afraid this might be his last trip to Australia. He told me what he would miss most would be the desert sun and the smell of the eucalyptus trees. I miss it now, myself.

Tomomi, and her invisible cat Fufu. I had a lovely time and was quite well fed, curries, stir fries, and lot of rice. Minoku and I took a cruise on the river, partly in the rain. Jane showed me around the town and its parks, and then took me up to the **Sunshine Coast** for the weekend. We bought fresh macadamia nuts, avocados and pineapples at roadside stands, and stayed with her friends Cathy and Mark (a quite unconventional Lutheran pastor, who shared my tasted in asymmetric piercing of ears and radical environmentalist politics¹⁰). We went bush walking in **Noosa Head**, through subtropical rain forest, where we heard whipbirds and catbirds, watched kookaburas steal sausages, but never did spot any koalas (construction nearby has scared them off), and went to the **Eumendi** market with Greg, a fellow Cowboy Junkies fan, and bought useless but decorative things¹¹. I was treated to a genuine Aussie barbecue by Scott, Jane's brother, who is quit a good cook and a quite a lot of fun to talk to.

All good things must end, and I had to move on. On my drive back to Melbourne, I stopped in the **Lamington Ranges National Park**, a birdwatcher's paradise. I had gotten interested in birding in Peru, and had made some efforts in that directions back home. I'd done some birding in Europe, but took it up here with a vengeance--so many species, so many different habitats I encountered in my travels. And the colors, especially the parrots and rosellas. It is just so much more fun to watch birds in the tropics. I studied my bird guides, learned the families and species common in Australia, and managed to spot 167 species (OK, so some were introduced species, but at least 160 were completely new to me). One of Jane's friends, Andrew, had taken me birding in the Brisbane area, and helped me spot all the egrets and quite a few waders. Here at **Binna Burra**, a lodge in the mountains, I saw quite a few more, thanks to the guide who took me and others around. We saw bowerbirds and their bowers, replete with blue plastic straws and bottle tops; bright green king parrots and crimson rosellas; whipbirds and colorful finches. Down the road, at O'Reilly's Lodge, there were all sorts of semi-tame birds, and a rainforest canopy walk, although it was only 40 meters high and not nearly isolated enough¹².

It was a two day drive back to Melbourne, and I broke my trip in **Coonabarabran**, where I stayed at the Mexican-themed El Paso motel. The following morning, I drove out into the **Warrabungle Ranges** near town, wonderfully contorted mountains covered with eucalypts and telescopes (there are quite a few observatories in this area). It was very early, just after dawn, and the park was not yet open; in the fields near the visitor center, I saw herds of kangaroos grazing. As I approached them, they would look up, turn, and slowly amble away. It was the ultimate Australian wildlife experience--fields and fields of kangaroos, sunny blue sky, and eucalypt forest. All I needed was for a kookabura to swoop down and perch on the branch of a coolibah tree near the billabong.

The flight home seemed so much longer than the flight there--resignation vs.. Anticipation--although both were about 23 hours of total travel time. I stopped in Sydney just long enough to change planes, thus becoming probably the only tourist in Australian history (with the exception of Christobel) not to visit Sydney. There just *wasn't* enough time; besides, it'll give me something to look forward to on my next visit, along with Tasmania, the Top End, and WA.

¹⁰ Mark was a strong proponent of Aboriginal rights, and understood the nuances of the Wik debate currently raging in the parliament. Basically, in recent years the courts (in the Wik decision) have decided that the government couldn't simply extinguish Aboriginal land rights by legislative fiat. Several state governments had handed out huge grazing leases even after it became evident that these weren't legal. Now they were in trouble with the pastoralists, and were trying to get laws passed to legitimize the leases. The Aborigines were justifiably upset by attempts to circumvent the law. The churches came out on the side of the Aborigines; a minister of the government then suggested that the pastoralists should boycott the churches, and that they should mind their own business. They replied that the Ten Commandments, including "Thou shalt not steal," were their business. I followed all this on the radio as I travelled around; great stuff for a political junkie.

¹¹ There was also a make-up fairy at the fair, who had a 24-hour beeper number for make-up emergencies. Fairies are very big in Oz; all the little girls own fairy outfits, and often attend fairy parties. Go figure.

¹² There is much to be said for isolation. ACEER, which was quite remote, was a quiet place, where you could study the wildlife in the canopy. At O'Reilly's, there were lots and lots of daytrippers from the Gold Coast (which much resembles the more touristy parts of Florida), many of whom were loud and obnoxious. There were even a group of schoolies (new graduates in the process of celebrating) who decided to jump in unison and make the whole structure shudder and sway! The wildlife here all fled for shelter when the first tour bus arrived in the morning.

Well, that's it for this year. It's more than enough, I know, but in just a few hours it will be Christmas Eve, so I had better get going if I plan to copy this and mail it out in enough time to still have a pre-December 25th postmark. I hope you and all your loved ones have a great time over the holidays, and enjoy next year as much as I enjoyed most of this last one. I'm off to India and England in February, and then am going to be camp doctor for a bunch of Ukrainian orphans¹³ this summer up in the Carpathian Mountains. I haven't been back to Ukraine in almost five years; it will be interesting to see all the changes, and see my family and friends over there again. There's also a Medical conference in Uzhorod, just over the mountains, that I may attend. I haven't decided where I'm going yet this fall, but I feel the need to hear Spanish spoken in a warm climate in the fall, so who knows?

Anyway, happy holidays, keep in touch, and maybe I'll see you this year in my travels!

With warmest regards,

Luba

¹³ Through the auspices of Help Us Help the Children, a group run by my cousin Vera here in the US. She became involved with them in Canada, and has worked at their Ukrainian camps the last two years, and was in charge this past year. They bring Ukrainian orphans from all over the country to the mountains for two weeks of healthy living and education. At age 18, these children are thrown out into society, most with no preparation what-so-ever. They try to teach them about health, hygiene (my task) and the principles of economics...i.e. How the market works, and how to survive in a market economy.

