

The Christmas season is upon us once more and we are looking forward to our family being together when Jane, Brent, Hallie and Kaira arrive here on December 21st. Tim, Julie and Robby are right here in Oceanside.

The year began with a bit of surprise when Nick had an unscheduled trip to the hospital in the early hours of January 3rd. He returned home a couple of days later having had three more stents. Fortunately these things can be done these days. He will be having another angiogram later this week. Apart from this "maintenance" issue he feels very well.

Our annual trip across the Atlantic this year took us to some new locations. We flew to Rome, where Nick's cousin and her husband live in the centre of the city pretty much within a stone's throw of the Coliseum. We explored Rome, mostly on foot. Along with the obvious sightseeing, we experienced a few locations that most tourists would never see. One was a food marketplace on Saturday morning. Lizzy was our guide, and we returned laden with incredible fruit, vegetables, fish and many other exciting foods.

All our travel in Europe was by train. We took a day trip, south from Rome, to Pompeii. This was not a guided tour. With a few words of Italian and an open mind our major challenge of the day was finding the right train from Naples back to Rome in the evening. It's a long story but all was well in the end. Suffice it to say, we learned that Italian trains do not always run on time and from the expected platform!!

From Rome we travelled by train through Milan and on to Lausanne, Switzerland to stay with long time friends. The train journey took us through some spectacular scenery. As the train entered Switzerland we were surprised to see hillsides covered with vineyards. Do they consume all the wine themselves? The view from Angela and Max's apartment across Lake Geneva is dramatic. It was a photographer's paradise, particularly since the weather was constantly changing. As in Rome, our exploration of Lausanne was on foot.

Leaving Lausanne, our next destination was London, via Paris requiring a station change – we made it! In London we caught up with more long time friends. Following this, we spent our time in southern England seeing family and friends, visiting more National Trust properties and gardens and discovering new Bed & Breakfasts. One afternoon we were very surprised to find ourselves following the local school bus on a very narrow country lane! It travels the same route every day. At least we were confident that we would not meet a vehicle coming the other way!

In June, our trip back east to visit Jane, Brent and the girls in Connecticut began by staying in the little coastal town of Rockport, Massachusetts. What a delightful coastal harbour town. During that time we joined www.historicnewengland.org and visited several unique historic houses, Roseland Cottage was one. As always, we had much fun at the Wiltshire home. Our visit coincided with Kaira's graduation from kindergarten and Hallie's school's celebration of Flag Day on June 14th. The girls now attended the same school. We enjoyed a day sailing on the Wiltshire sailboat and lobster dinner when we returned.

Quail Botanical Gardens has taken up much of our time this year and Nick continues to enjoy his Rotarian activities and time spent at the model railroad club. My garden club has had some interesting speakers this year. Speaking of gardens – the flower in the picture is Indonesian Wax Ginger (*tapeinochilus ananassae*). I still participate in aqua exercise all year in the outdoor pool at our local "Y". We are quite a social group! Nick is very consistent with his exercise, both at the cardiac wellness center and the "Y".

In sending our greetings, and receiving them from you, we are reminded of how fortunate we are to have so many wonderful friends and relations – blessings indeed. We wish you good health, good fortune and peace at Christmas and throughout 2009.

Nick and Sue



Lausanne, Switzerland



Coliseum, Rome



Pompeii and Vesuvius



Pantheon, Stourhead England



School bus in England



Rockport, Massachusetts



Roseland Cottage, Connecticut

2008