



Dear Family and Friends,

As 2008 began, our tiny condo was bursting at the seams with Pasternaks, and with activities best described by the tagline for Teatro Zinzanni: "*Love, Chaos, Dinner!*". Once the festivities ended and our family returned to the four corners of the globe, our new year settled into a routine. We opted for adventures of the nearby sort – a crab feed, wine tasting, an outdoor screening of a Hollywood classic, a few concerts, and some precious days of skiing.

Late spring found us bursting for warm weather and a little travel. We picked the biggest of the remote Hawaiian volcanic rocks, converting the last of our frequent flyer miles into a trip to Kona. Our adventures started at the car rental facility where they tried to give us a tank for a car, but Ken's negotiations paid off, and we were eventually on our way into the Hilo wilderness in a spanking new, convertible Jeep. Of course it took us only a day to thoroughly scar our shiny 4WD as we mistakenly navigated a mule trail, over-

abundant in thorny plants, scattered with burned-out car skeletons and in places barely passable. Luckily, 3M's line of excellent buffing products helped us restore the car's lustrous shine! During our adventure, we inspected extraterrestrial-looking plants, hiked smoldering crater beds and dark lava tubes, and tiptoed on barely solid lava flows. Waterfalls were abundant, picturesque and very cooperative when it came to photos. The black sand beaches hosted scores of amazing turtles, lazily munching on seaweed; and a tribal sanctuary offered a glimpse into the often-grizzly local traditions. We snorkeled in sparkling, turquoise waters and marveled at the spinner dolphins, who playfully approached our kayak. Life on the island was fertile: one banyan tree could take up an entire park and the avocados grew to the size of small cantaloupes. All the bugs seemed to be on steroids, which at least made them easy to spot. . .

At the end of last year, Aniko's longtime friend Julie, who frequently monitors the Hungarian-American online grapevine, forwarded Aniko a post requesting language lessons. While Aniko is not a teacher, she has developed a Hungarian-lite system mostly meant to show how useful Hungarian can be when the right random phrases are used. Her new protégé turned out to be the feminist writer Susan Faludi. Susan was doing research for a new book, and had been growing frustrated with her own Hungarian-speaking father, who "Cliff-noted" his native language conversations for her, rather than actually interpreting them. Aniko and Susan met regularly during the first half of the year, and Susan walked away from this experience being able to at least say "I am a feminist writer" in Hungarian.

Aniko, having practically run out of wall space at home, hasn't given up on the idea of making it big with mosaics (Ken seems to be banking on it, too). She completed her first on-site installation, a fireplace mantle surround, for the Benners in Portland, OR. It was a breeze to work with Gen on the design and with Jordan on the technical details. Since then, Aniko consulted an interior-designer acquaintance to help her target local designers for year-round assignments. Her work was well received by the principals of The Wiseman Group, designers who focus on hand-made, custom finishes. Aniko is very upbeat about this promising new direction.

At the end of July, we flew to picturesque Vermont, where friends Lorelei and Ted floated us by pontoon boat to their remote, lakefront property. We all got caught in a roaring summer storm, and witnessed a spectacular lighting show over Lake Champlain. After the storm, we felt pretty smug about having scrambled ashore without getting fried, AND having saved the beer! After our wonderful weekend of wilderness in Vermont, Ken returned to Harvard, where he again co-hosted a successful seminar on brand identity for architects and real estate developers as part of the Graduate School of Design's summer program.

In September Ken and his buddy Tim signed up for an international open water swim, called The Tiburon Mile, held annually in the San Francisco Bay. The prestigious race attracts world champions and Olympic medalists, as well as collegiate teams from around the country. Aniko relaxed about potential shark attacks when she learned that Ken would be swimming within a frothy group of 900, but she failed to see the benefit of racing without wetsuits. The swim event (hosted by Johnny Moseley and televised on Comcast Sports Network) began in a melee that outdid every rock'n'roll mosh pit, and every freeway pileup Ken has ever been lucky enough to find himself at the bottom of. He clawed over other competitors just as they clawed over him, kicking at his goggles, and grabbing at his ankles. He awkwardly altered course when he felt a pair of thighs, belonging to a female swimmer, close around his ears. He and Tim eventually made it to the finish line, and once the delirium subsided and the hypothermic shivers were quieted, they decided that they would do it again next year!

The economic downturn has affected Ken's small company in unusual ways. First of all, they remain as busy as ever. Secondly, the profile of their clientele has changed unbelievably enough, to *include* financial institutions, as well as museums, cosmetics and furniture makers, who have filled the void left by delayed or abandoned real estate projects. Many clients are now content with video conferencing in place of flying Ken to last-minute meetings in executive boardrooms, which saves him the jet lag, but still occasionally requires a 5am start.

As you might expect, we couldn't let a year go by without at least one big adventure abroad. October flew by as we plotted our 21-day trip to Ethiopia and a return to Dubai. Our plans were crafted in daily emails; Ken's sister Sarah, who until recently

lived in Addis Ababa, arranged our every Ethiopian flight, guide, and lodge room in advance. Talk about reliable outsourcing! Our immunization cocktails of Hepatitis A-Yellow Fever-Tetanus-Typhoid put us in a world of hurt for a couple of days. Then, armed with advice about insects and dust, malaria pills and the official State Department warnings of armed conflicts, we embarked on 6 flights in 6 days, crossing North America, Europe, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa to arrive 10,000 miles later in the middle of Sub-Saharan Africa. We spent six days in the enchanted valley of the Omo River on the borders of Kenya and Sudan. We felt like real time travelers: Ethiopia still maintains the Julian Calendar, recording this year as 2001, while the South Omo Valley opens a door onto the Bronze Age. Our journey could only be completed in 4WDs on unbelievably rough roads, riverbeds and seasonal paths, carrying our own fuel and drinking water, but stopping along the way to buy delicious fruit from villagers. Five of us *faranji* (foreigners) traveled with 4 drivers and guides in two vehicles. Our drivers did an extraordinary job of navigating herds of cattle, goats and people (always on the road, never on the shoulder), of not falling off crumbling mountain ledges, of not getting stuck in riverbeds and of driving at night on barely passable roads without a single road sign! Our guides took us to tribal villages, to colorful markets, to tribal group dances and to a coming of age rite for young men called the Bull Jumping Ceremony. Every time we stopped along a seemingly deserted road, an army of small children would pop into existence, running excitedly towards our vehicle, yelling *faranji* and *hellophoto*. Food on the road was simple: *tibs* with *injera* (chopped goat meat with flat bread - no utensils). Some of our "hotel" rooms managed to redefine the term "hotel". We struggled to come up with a star rating for a room that only had electricity between 6-9PM, with no furniture but a bed and a mosquito net, no glass in the windows or doorframes, a bathroom with occasional cold running water, a broken toilet, birds nesting in the thatched ceiling, and a congress of extreme-sized bugs on the walls!

Ethiopia is home to a mind-boggling 80 tribes, with populations of several million to just a few thousand. Many southern tribes migrate, following water and pastures to Kenya, Sudan and Uganda; borders here only exist for those traveling on roads. Tribes are often at war with each other for resources, and beaded bullet belts and bone inlaid AK-47s are permanent fashion accessories. While used western clothing markets thrive, many South Omo tribes opt to wear colorful sheets of fabric only around the hip, accented with traditional hides, beads and body paint, and sometimes with bottle caps and metal watch-straps. The villagers we visited were very friendly, and just as curious about us as we were about them. Some rubbed our skin to see if we were painted white, and almost everyone was fascinated by Aniko's long dark hair. A few were insistent that it was some elaborate baboon or horsehair wig. Tourism has created the need for money: the going rate for each personal photo was 2 Birr (about 20 cents), and they were doggedly determined about having their photos taken, having figured out how to count the clicks. This gave us an excuse to better compose our shots, however most villagers preferred to pose and stare sternly into the camera. Whenever they saw their faces on the digital display, they would break out in bright laughter, poking fun at each other.

During our Ethiopian adventure we also visited an ancient group of Christian Orthodox churches in the north end of the country, in a small town called Lalibela. These churches were carved into the ground from high mountain plateaus creating large, hollowed-out monoliths not visible until you practically step into the chasm separating the monolith from the mountain. The locals habitually called to us *faranji*, but as soon as they learned we came from the US, they excitedly cheered "Obama!" We had several insightful conversations with locals, who despite having little access to a television, had thoughtful observations about the challenges Barack Obama faces here at home.

Our return to Dubai required a mental shift, to refocus on modern Arabia. The dust of Ethiopia was replaced by well-lit multilane highways, mosquito nets became heavily tinted windows and naked tribal costumes morphed into head-to-toe burquas. Architecture continues to astound: the arrivals area of the newest Dubai airport had the majesty of an ancient Greek temple, the scale of a football stadium, and the décor of a Las Vegas casino. The familiar skyline of Dubai has become a bit more crowded since 2006, with about a dozen new skyscrapers. The Palm Jumeirah, the first of the artificial sand islands, now gleams in the sun, its buildings finished, manicured and occupied. During our first attempted visit we ran into the invitation-only grand opening ceremony for The Atlantis (the fancy hotel anchoring the center of The Palm). During our second visit, we noted the surprising lack of gas stations on the island as our car sputtered to a thirsty halt. We enjoyed an unbelievable outdoor dinner feast among the rolling dunes at a resort called Bab Al Shams. The dinner featured the best of Arabia, including spectacular ethnic dance performances, camel rides and a falconry demonstration. Our Emirates explorations took us to Abu Dhabi, where the desert sun reflected off the white marble domes of the world's third largest mosque; and to nearby Sharjah's "Blue Souq" where we foraged for Bedouin jewelry within one of the finest traditional shopping venues in Arabia. Camels bellowed at us as we toured a local camel market in Al Ain, marveling at the variety of mama and baby beasts. Later we sat through an energetic sales pitch at our parents' favorite carpet shop, where we naively thought we could "just browse." On our way out, with a tightly folded, beautiful carpet tucked under one arm, we grinningly noted "at least we didn't buy a camel today!"

Now, as we settle in at home, reviewing our photos and huddling against the unseasonably cold weather in San Francisco (thanks Alaska!), we are thankful for yet another exciting, and eventful year full of family, friends, and good fortune.

We wish you all a very happy holiday season, and wish the very best for you in 2009!

Ken and Aniko