

10<sup>th</sup> December 2006

Dear everyone,

Let's get straight to it, we've moved.

#### Washington DC, 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt

Though some of our friends in Denver asked if our stated intention to move to the East Coast was a threat or a promise, we merely wanted to extend our working holiday. What a holiday it's been! We only came for a year but somehow that stretched into 11 and all of them were in Denver. While it was a great base from which to see the natural beauty of the West, it was time for a change of scenery and the opportunity to see architecture, history, museums and galleries. And the ocean. I was also concerned that like someone about to fall asleep on the sofa, if we didn't move soon, we would be stuck forever.

Lan had been applying for jobs in various cities, but was offered a job in Washington starting at the end of February. Once again, our small station wagon proved a mighty cargo carrier as we transported a home starter-kit cross-country. Once again, we marveled at the flatness of southern Indiana.

I flew home and began looking for a new job and tidying up our affairs in Denver. During this time, I visited Lan a few times including during the *Cherry Blossom Festival*. Japan donated 3,000 trees in 1912 and in April 2006, the area around the major memorials was ablaze in pink!



On a walk around the Tidal Basin to see cherry blossoms<sup>1</sup>. Washington Monument behind.

To my immense relief, I was able to find a new job relatively quickly as the experience I'd gained at Wall St On Demand was quite worthwhile. I'd also gained some wonderful friends so it was hard to say good bye. I'd become so close to so many people.

Anyway, I drove over in mid-May in a truck with a 5m/16' cargo box with all our stuff. Loading was hard but the drive was easy. I was in awe of the flatness of southern Illinois—and also the cost to

refuel since I managed only 10mpg or 23L/100km.

The Motley Fool<sup>2</sup> is an interesting company to work for. While most companies in the financial services industry try to project a sophisticated yet conservative image through their web sites, the Fool sets out to "educate, amuse & enrich". Essentially we sell investment newsletters but the atmosphere on the site and in the office is casual to the point of being irreverent. There are pizza and cake days every month and there was a mini-golf tournament *in* the office. It's also a joy to take the train to work!



You only have to wear the hat at the Motley Fool if your computer program crashes the server.

After briefly sharing an apartment, Lan found a nice one for us in Alexandria, Virginia that is just 3km/2 miles from her new job and 8km/5 miles from mine. Real estate prices appear to have tripled in the 5 years before we arrived but rents have not so we're waiting for the bubble to fully burst before we buy anything.

#### The Great American South-West

There is a law<sup>3</sup> stating that before moving out of the South-West, it is mandatory to visit the national parks that define its character. Principally, this requires looking at a lot of rock. Accordingly, we drove to the bottom-left corner of Utah to see Zion National Park where the road at the bottom of the gorges is 600m/2000ft below the plateau at the top and uncomfortably hot even in May. The view, however, is spectacular.



Zion National Park—Temple of Sinawava Falls.

On to Bryce Canyon where you look from the top down instead of the bottom up. A hundred million years ago, this area and much of central and western North America was under water<sup>4</sup>. Uplifts 70 million years ago creating the Rocky Mountains and then again 10-15 million years ago, when the Colorado Plateaus were lifted a further 1000m/3000ft, buckled the land and exposed it to erosion creating colored pylons or "hoodoos".<sup>5</sup>



Bryce Canyon National Park is now my favorite.

Most exciting was our visit to the Grand Canyon with our best friends from Sydney. We were there in 1998 but arrived so late in the day we only saw where the canyon would be if the lights were turned on. This time we had two nights in a nice hotel just outside the park and a full day of sightseeing. To add to the celebration, Lan cooked a full turkey dinner in Denver which we brought with us, along with a microwave oven in which to heat it! Having children with us made me very conscious of the numerous places where an impetuous move could have tragic consequences.



At the GC with Lilly, Richard, Elizabeth and Sarah.

#### Local sightseeing

Alexandria is just across the Potomac River from Washington so there is a vast array of things to see and do. Our neighbors from Denver came to visit and after touring the Whitehouse, they had this fortuitous encounter on the street ...

<sup>1</sup> See more photos at <http://www.sweetandsour.org/photos/>

<sup>2</sup> The meaning behind the name: <http://www.fool.com/school/13Steps/13Steps01.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Or if there isn't, there should be.

<sup>4</sup> Beach holidays would have been easier but driving from San Francisco to New York much more difficult.

<sup>5</sup> For a really interesting explanation, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geology\\_of\\_the\\_Bryce\\_Canyon\\_area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geology_of_the_Bryce_Canyon_area)



Lan, Bill and Gloria near the Whitehouse<sup>6</sup>

The four of us visited the site of the July 1863 Battle of Gettysburg, generally considered the turning point of the American Civil War and also its bloodiest<sup>7</sup>. Its significance was recognized at the time and that November, President Lincoln delivered "a few appropriate remarks" at the dedication of a cemetery to the fallen. Those 272 words became known as the "Gettysburg Address" and the greatest speech in American history<sup>8</sup>. Referring the Declaration of Independence and its statement that "all men are created equal", Lincoln characterized the war as one to maintain a nation of free people. Those still living must now continue to strive so that *"this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth"*.



The George Washington Masonic National Memorial<sup>9</sup> is close to my office.

For the moment, the Smithsonian Museums have beaten us but we particularly enjoyed the newly-renovated National Portrait Museum and three concerts at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts—the Air Force Big Band, a blues singer Marcia Ball and a Dixie Jazz band—all the more so because it was Open Day so they were free!

## O Canada<sup>10</sup>

We spent a fabulous week visiting French-speaking Montreal and Quebec City and English-speaking Ottawa, the nation's capital.<sup>11</sup> In practice though, just about everyone seemed to be comfortably bilingual.



The flag flying on the Peace Tower which makes up part of Canada's parliament building in Ottawa

The most interesting thing I learned was that the American Revolution had a major impact on the development of Canada. The Americans expected the French speakers to be eager to join with them against the British, a point they made forcefully by attempting to invade in 1775. It turned out that the French weren't interested and the Americans were sent home licking their wounds<sup>12</sup>. However, those loyal to the British within America found life uncomfortable and many fled to Canada seeking refuge.

## Disconnect from reality

After we got married I read an excellent book<sup>13</sup> about the Vietnam conflict and I was struck by the disparity between the optimistic assessments at the time from those in power and what was being reported. I was amazed to see history repeating itself in Iraq—until just a few months ago. Now nobody, except perhaps the President, sees anything but a catastrophe. Responsibility and the blame to come are now being pushed on to the Iraqis, much as the *Vietnamization* policy attempted earlier.

As in Vietnam, the US failed to understand the history and culture and therefore its enemy and then corruption and brutality alienated the population. The French made the same mistakes in Algeria. Rent or borrow the movie *The Battle of Algiers* to see how not to run a counter-insurgency and to lose a war.

<sup>10</sup> Canada's national anthem, though only since 1980.

<sup>11</sup> No room here to show many pictures but you can see them at <http://www.sweetandsour.org/photos/>

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent summary, see [http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/expo/background\\_e.html](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/expo/background_e.html). The Americans tried again in 1812 with President Jefferson believing that victory "will be a mere matter of marching" in. Some believed they would be greeted as liberators. Sound familiar?

<sup>13</sup> *Vietnam—A History*, Stanley Karnow

I read this interesting quote: *"Of course people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. ... All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger."* A left-wing, Bush-hating, pacifist? No, it was the Nazi Herman Goering at the Nuremberg trials.

## Boats

We bought a canoe! More a work of art than a boat you would risk scratching<sup>14</sup>, Lan found it on eBay conveniently situation for collection a mere 942km/586 miles from home! However, we live in a 12<sup>th</sup> floor apartment so we can't keep it here, or anywhere else I can find nearby, so for the moment it is with Lan's family 640km/400 miles away in Charlotte, NC.

I read Sir Francis Chichester's account of his single-handed sail around the world. He turned 65 while at sea and thinking about his age says, *"Our only purpose in life, if we are able to say such a thing, is to put up the best performance we can - in anything, and only in doing so lies satisfaction in living."* He certainly did.

## Bumper stickers

- *Last time people followed the words from a Bush, folks wandered for 40 years in the desert.*
- *One person, one vote\*.*  
*\*May not apply in some states.*
- *God bless the whole world.*  
*No exceptions.*  
(In contrast to the numerous *God Bless America* stickers.)
- *Honor the dead. Heal the wounded.*  
*End the war*
- *Invest in weapons of mass instruction.*

On a light-hearted note, I can only offer these but they are good:

- *There's no place like 127.0.0.1*  
(A special one for web developers!)
- *Give dad a fish and he'll eat it.*  
*Teach dad to fish and he'll sit on the dock and drink beer.*

## Merry Christmas

I started this letter in July but now it is just in time for Christmas. Lan and I hope you enjoy the holidays and that 2007 is peaceful and prosperous for you.

<sup>6</sup> The hands belong to Gloria's husband Jim. "Bill" is a cardboard cutout.

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Gettysburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gettysburg)

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg\\_Address](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg_Address)

Also see the PowerPoint version!

<http://www.norvig.com/Gettysburg/sld001.htm>

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Washington\\_Masonic\\_National\\_Memorial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington_Masonic_National_Memorial)

<sup>14</sup> <http://amtraders.com/c-detail.asp?Model=Feather&Material=WE>