

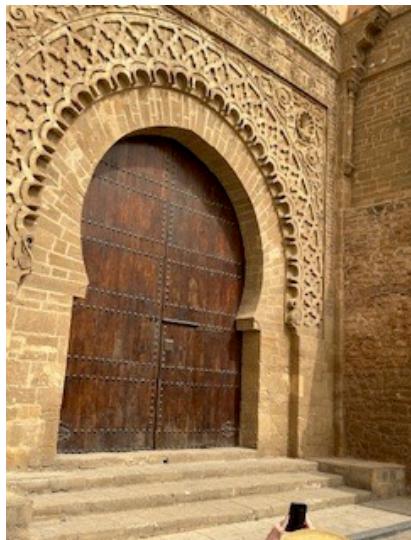
Christmas Letter 2023 (Written mostly January 2023)

As I begin this letter, I'm sitting on the shady deck of the M.V. Wind Surf, toward the bottom of the main islands of Japan. Being a part of the Pacific Rim, the islands are pushed up as part of the migration of the Paacific Plate beneath the continental Okhostk Plate. It makes for some very deep water, and some very mountainous islands. Perhaps only 15%? of the land area is suitable for mans' lifestyle. As a result, where it's flat enough, its pretty tightly packed. How could we ever have warred with these people (they started it!) The Japanese people are so gentle and respectful and accommodating. It's November 3 (2023) as I write this, and we are making our way slowly south to Bali, Indonesia, some 8° south of the equator. It's hot, and one wants to relax on Deck 7, under Deck 8, and in the shade. And wind!



Sue and I took a trip to the Kingdom of Morocco in April, a land based trip with Gate1 Travel, which we like. It's a fascinating country to see, a tiny bit like Europe but mostly Islamic. The sights were wonderful and the food very different. And we took a cooking class to try to make it at home! We made our own lunch in class, and it really took some of the mystique out of the cooking. Here's a gallery of Morocco photos

Morocco: Moorish architecture in older city areas



Open air markets



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The photo at left was our hotel room in Fes. It was once a fancy home - they have little outside exposure but rooms open to a large inside courtyard. I presume these were cooler in hot weather too. Moroccan "architcture" was often what seemed to be mud-brick construction - behind these two guys. It eroded heavily near the bottom from water splashing.

No big box stores!
Seemingly all merchandise is sold at small booths



A little fashion photography at the Fez hotel



Our visit included one night glamping in the Sahara Desert, and included a sunset camel ride. The desert was very much more "raw" and arid than the US version. What was Sue's camel saying to my camel about us??



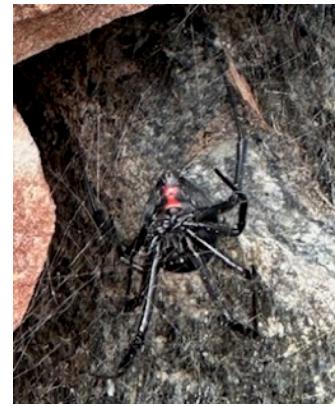
I love the way that food is sold in different countries. I suppose it's safe, or your gut gets used to it anyway. I love bread, and this sure looked good.

Coming home, our suitcases got stuck in Paris Apple Airtags sure helped!

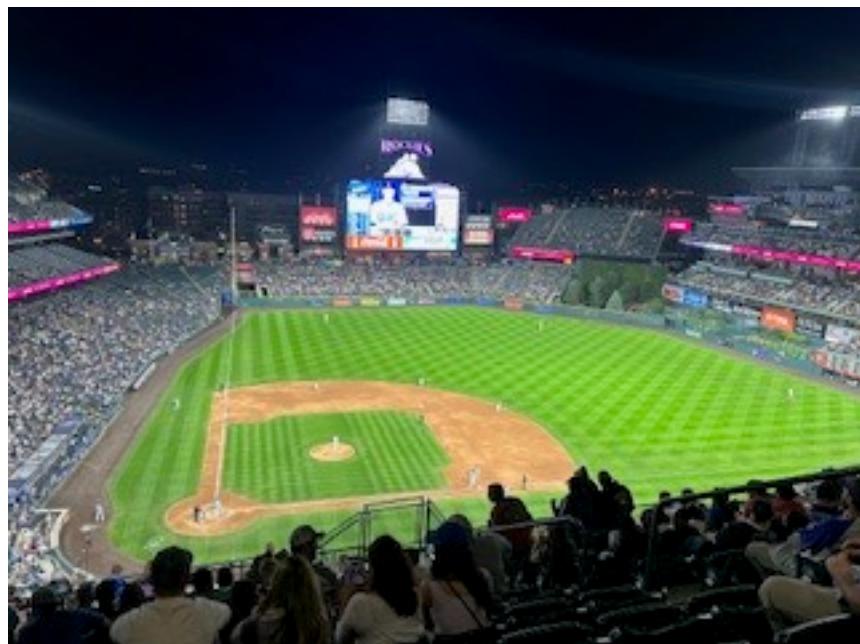


I ALMOST bought this 1930 Ford A. But I had to shoehorn myself into the driver's seat, and I feared never-ending home repairs. I backed out. Too many toys already, and not enough desire at my age to crawl under a 94 year old car.

We cannot forget that we live in the wilderness. May 8 - black widow spider in the backyard.



Most of this letter seems to be travel, and that was a big part of 2023. but here's a late season visit to a Colorado Rockies game. They were 59 wins to 103 losses for the 2023 season. I wish the games were on broadcast TV as I don't do "cable".



Now that COVID is over, mostly, we have begun to travel again a little more earnestly. My airline connections from years ago afford us access to some "last minute" airline deals, and we have tried to capitalize on it. We have come to enjoy the cruise company Windstar and their small ships. Sue found a cruise from Yokohama, Japan to Bali, Indonesia. It was a fascinating tour south from mainland Japan through the islands below and across the Equator.



Fighting Apple Pages. I converted this from a text document to a page layout document so I could add pages. Fighting it! Some stuff seems to have disappeared. I think my problem is with word processing vs. format mode! I give up on trying to squeeze in page

While in Tokyo a couple of days early waiting for our ship, we went searching for a Japanese "delicacy", basically fried cabbage that we had enjoyed there and tried to imitate in Boulder - Okonomiyaki. It's quite good in many varieties- watch for it. It's in the round picture with Susan below.



We discovered that Japan takes Halloween VERY seriously. Quite surprised! Decorations, costumes, and at a shopping mall, bakery goods GALORE! So much color and fun, and calories? We sampled a little.



One of the fun things to shop for in Tokyo is plastic food, displayed in many restaurants to entice you to order the real thing. These resin sculptures are SO good looking, and I'm sure they cost a small fortune to produce. Stack o' flapjacks? Yes, this is all plastic.

We had a VERY difficult and unpleasant time trying to find the dock in Yokohama, a major seaport, where our ship, the Windstar Line's Wind Surf was to arrive. We bag-dragged all over an industrial dock so much that Sue's suitcase got a flat tire. Honest. Finally made it with the help of a local taxi driver. Here is Sue about to punch out Captain Pedro when we finally did find the ship.

The ship had three restaurants and a bar-grill. The fanciest was Cuadro 44, with a Spanish theme. Here is my dinner of octopus, I reasoned that if I didn't like octopus here, I wouldn't like it anywhere. I didn't like it here. We ate mostly at the Sky Bar & Grill, where we could eat lighter and faster than 2 hours! Excellent buffet! (Many went to Cuadro 44 but once.)



Geisha in Kimono, a fascinating presentation on the ship. May I recommend the book (or movie) Memoirs of a Geisha. Fascinating novel that gives an excellent post-war perspective.





Our ship harbored in Nagasaki, from a nearby park. This is the same ship we took in the Baltic Sea four years ago, but between cruises the ship had been cut in half and added a center section. 312 passengers at max, and we were closer to 225. A video: https://youtu.be/OEuHPE_cLSI?si=IOwsrw_sCjo1YqA8

It was nice that at most times, the bridge was open to passengers to visit. The crew was eager to answer questions, and I had many.



I just love the little Japanese caricatures. What a gentle people. It's hard to believe they launched World War II in the Pacific.

It's so hard to pass on so many pictures for inclusion. If you can, travel. Life is fascinating.

I'm putting this together again in Apple Pages. It's a chore to do in arrears, and it is partly for a family album to record what and when. Apple has a new app "Journal" which might perform this function easily for next year?

From the port in Keelung, Taiwan, we took a train to the capital Taipei. Sue got to visit a wonderful fabric shop while I kept an eye on the motorscooter parking. For maybe 85% of the population, motor scooters, in swarms, are the principal means of transport. They are just everywhere. Thankfully, all have 4-cycle engines now and run much cleaner. We hiked all across the city through a busy area to a lantern shop. The small brown one at the end of the pole resides in our sunroom now. Great urban hike!





The US needs to spend some intellectual and monetary resources on trains and less on automobiles, Yes, we are guilty too.

Keelung was quiet by day, but had a vibrant and colorful night market. Hard to believe there could be enough diners to eat all the food presented! Most if not all of it was unidentifiable to us, and we had eaten on the ship, perhaps thankfully.



We sailed on to Hong Kong. To an outsider, knowing some of the controversy between Hong Kong and mainland China, it is hard to know what to expect. It is a VERY dense and very prosperous, and very beautiful seaside peninsula and island. Our package tour gave a wide perspective that we couldn't have managed on our own. Plus, postcards were easy to find! A number of these photos are from a large sampan ride.



Density! You have to just see it.



We took a long bus drive to these pontoon boats in Porto Princesa, Philippines. They were VERY loud unmuffled engines, and took us to an underwater cave. The boats were fun but had to cover the ears, 110.5dB. The cave boats were hand paddled and silent, thankfully,
Below right: Two boys playing mini-Chutes & Ladders are in Coron, Philippines. We stumbled upon them when we hiked into town to find a post office.



Manila, Capital of the Philippines. Rather less wealthy city,





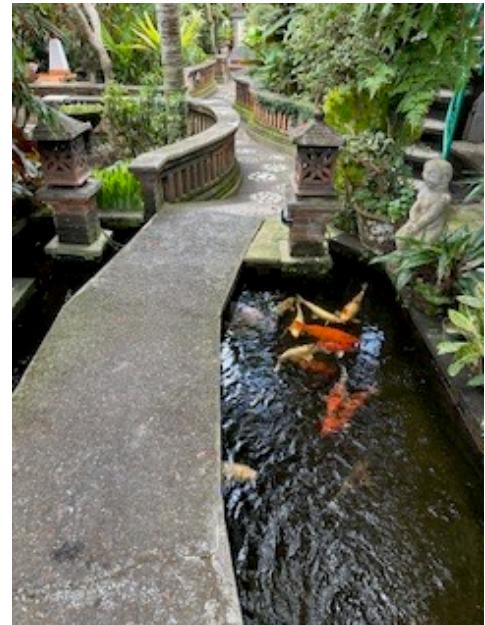
The gorgeous new mosque is Masjid Kubah 99 Asmal Husna in Makassar, Indonesia, Islamic. The name comes from its 99 domes, it was equally magnificent inside.



Moving on south through Indonesia, now south of the Equator, we took a side trip to Komodo National Park, Thanks to the Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding comedy skit, I knew of the Komodo Dragon, and we got to see them in their natural, and only, habitat. World's largest lizards....<https://youtu.be/gnGvKZOmDTw>?



Interesting and fascinating to see. Apparently the komodo dragons rarely dart about and eat things, and only once a person. The guides carry poles to deflect them. But mostly they just sit as close to immobile as a reptile could be, It was mighty hot and humid there, and we were inclined to echo their lethargic attitude,



We finally arrived at our port of disembarkation in Bali. We had two nights in a guest house there and were fortunate to meet Chandra Made, a driver who brought us from the ship, and then gave us a full day tour the following day. It was my dental hygienist Maddy that recommended Ketut's Place Villas in Ubud for our lodging, and it was delightful! We were so glad we chose to spend the two days in touristy and fascinating Bali and Ubud (a subsection of Bali) before our long three-legged flight home. The fellow in the photo is Chandra, and he was a big part in making our visit informative and interesting. We took him to lunch at the Indonesian restaurant of HIS choice. That's lunch with the Orange Fanta below. You'll have to ask Chandra what it was!





Traveling the world has been wonderful, and we are grateful to ALL the people, tourist industry like Chandra, and those like Satoru Canada in Tokyo who have made our travels safe and fun. Satoru, I should mention, came to our aid in Tokyo when we were lost in an alley and unable to find our Airbnb. He was wonderful but that Airbnb place was a dump. Thank you each and all.



Wow! I'm on Page 10 and have yet to include a few Christmas 2023 photos. Keegan and Yili and Annabelle flew successfully on Southwest from San Jose to visit us, and Lauren and Abel and Bennett and Olivia drove the 10 miles from Lafayette to spend a few days and nights, all together. It was great to have everyone here, if a little hectic. Good news, the three moms and dishwasher kept up!



Son Keegan and Annabelle, just 2. And Olivia, our best eater, working on a dish we call Straw & Hay on Christmas night.





Above: Annabelle, Yiel, and Keegan



Below: Annabelle, Olivia, Grandpa Phil, and Bennett all in one picture!

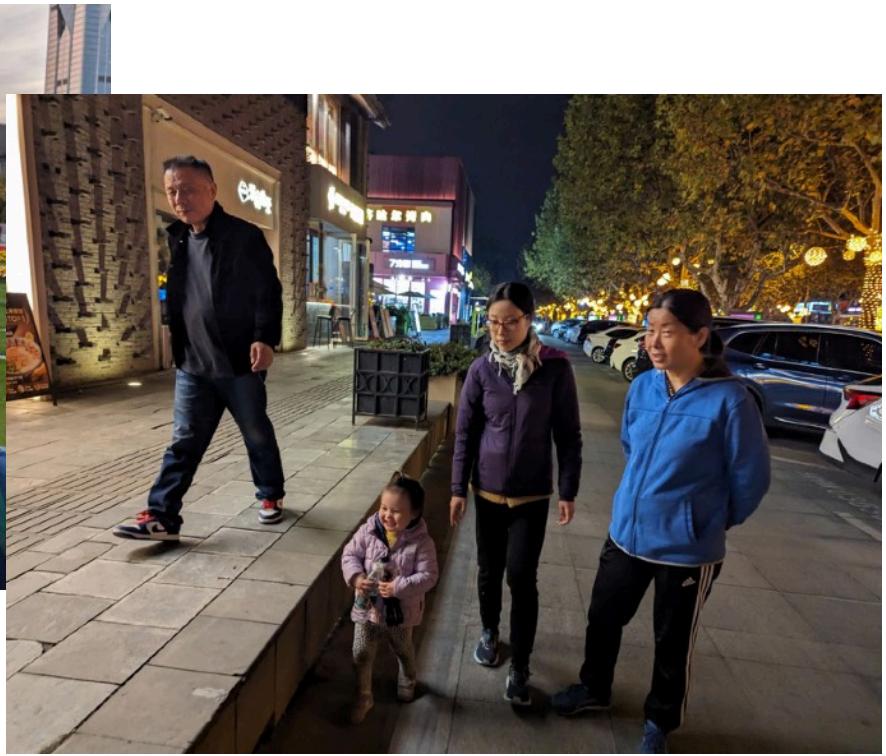


So, with family and friends dear, near and distant, it has been a wonderful year. All of us wish the best to you in 2024 - may the year bring happiness, joy, and a second term for President Biden!

And please stay in touch! I (Phil, your writer) can be found posting stuff on Facebook as "Phil Brown Boulder". Email is philbrown1969@gmail.com, Sue is susanb6330@gmail.com. Write back if you'd like a mailing address. And, importantly, VOTE for your candidate in November, especially if.....
I'm off to Nepal next week with a Sierra Club service trip. <https://content.sierraclub.org/outings/rebuilding-village-earthquake-damaged-nepal>

PAGE TWELVE! Parting Shots

Here's some photos of Keegan and Yielie and her parents Yongming (Grandfather) and Jin Peiyan (Grandmother) and Annabelle, and one taken of Olivia and Susan just today, January 21, 2024.



Lots of traveling, and some wonderful time at home too.

