

Dear Friends

Our first Christmas Season in California, and what better time for a message and news from the Jouberts! We have joined in with the abundance of lights and decorations to our house and garden, and in sharing a greeting of 'Happy Holidays!' with people we meet. This is indeed a happy, albeit very short holiday, the schools closing for 10 days only - but with us on our way to Yosemite 'to get as near to the heart of the world as I can' (quoting John Muir) and for skiing into 2007. We have found little time this year to keep contact with you all. Be assured that we have kept you in our hearts and in our thoughts.

2006 was a remarkable year for us, and went by in the blink of an eye. Pierre had multitude business ventures – being global, this meant being away from home frequently, but seldom for more than 3 weeks at a time. The highlight for him was the frequent visits to Hong Kong and China, and the launch of a joint venture with Huawei – a large telecommunications company in China. Events in the Caribbean, Virgin Islands, Chile and Brazil were equally enlightening. He spends as much time as possible meeting and seeing 'real people and places' in the countries he visits – almost reflecting the National Geographic lifestyle he once considered. His group in the US has been shaped into a well-organized structure, with lots of goodwill - and strife when needed. Fun times include endeavoring to play the Chinese violin on stage in Shenzhen (!)

After working online from home for the first year, my job hunt led to a position at Stanford's Cell Sciences Imaging Facility, which is part of their Medical School. Joining colleagues and fellow scientists for 2 Nobel Prize functions during my first semester there was indeed an awakening to what Stanford is all about... It was a great challenge to get back to the EM lab, and the next step is now to get funding for my own research project. Though the first year working from home was extremely isolated, I managed to focus on recent research, and with co-authors got some papers published. I was furthermore lucky to have two conferences in San Francisco to attend with talks on recent work – and get connected to the world of science in this area. As Pierre so often goes away on business, the responsibility of home and kids obliges me to work close to home, with 'available hours' for the children's needs – until now a very satisfying compensation.

One of the biggest decisions since arriving here, was the 'when, where, how and if' of buying our own house. Fortunately we had to make this decision fast, as our landlord was retiring in the house we rented from him (and Pierre had been sending out vibes of building our own place again...). Due to strict regulations about school attendance in the district where one is homeowner, we considered only the Los Altos-Mountain View area, not to unsettle the children again – the main drawback being the exorbitant house-prices in this area. Our new home is now perfectly situated between the Verisign offices and Stanford campus, and is close to main routes. We have a view to the Los Altos Hills, just across the road, with large Open Space Preserves (undeveloped natural forest land) surrounding the area. Mountain lions and coyotes, deer, badgers, eagles and even rattlesnakes are often seen. Though we miss our big garden with grass lawns from Stellenbosch, the maintenance is not missed at all!

The children have now settled into the Californian lifestyle, which involves not only long summer holidays and a driver's permit when you're 16, but also intense school curricula, tutoring, and activities of sports, culture and community service – and a 11pm curfew for teenagers in this area, with alcohol restriction enforced to age 21. The kids do not wear pajamas to school (!), parents are phoned when kids miss a class, and the notorious public school system is indeed superb. And we are all adapting to miles, gallons, pounds, Fahrenheit...and the Richter scale!

Niels is now fully submerged into the Bear Culture of UC Berkeley's 'Cal Bears'. Apart from his electronic engineering subjects, which focus on electronic engineering, computer science, physics and math, science/engineering students here also have 'humanities criteria' to fulfill. In the past semester's course on "Politics in Music" his knowledge of recent changes in South African music was greatly appreciated! He is also part of the 'super nova' research team of the award-winning prof. Alex Filippenko, and tries to incorporate Astrophysics and Radio-astronomy with his EECS. This semester had the additional challenge and excitement of a Yahoo Hack Day competition, with subsequent job interviews after Niels got first prize on Berkeley campus. He'll now start as Yahoo intern on a part-time basis, and full-time during summer break. Life at Cal, with the freedom of speech typical of UC Berkeley, was an additional challenge to which he rose whole-heartedly. An exciting aspect of student life here is the number of live performances by famous artists in both the music and science world – ranging from Red Hot Chili Peppers to Yo-Yo Ma, with Stephen Hawking on the list for 2007. His favorite downhill-cycling is now a luxury for which he has to juggle free time.

With the challenge of college acceptance looming before him, Dieter in Grade 11 is currently preparing for his SAT1 testing in January. The SAT2 subject tests will follow in June, where-after the UC college hunt will begin. Dieter's initial challenge here was to get his subject choice and level on par with that focused on university acceptance. He managed to do that through additional summer courses, and taking an extra load of Honors and AP (Advanced Placement) subjects. He is still very much involved in his Cross Country running, a sport which here enjoys great support. He was very happy to have been selected as cello student with the talented and inspiring Jonathan Koh – Dieter's own choice, and therefore a devotion. He was proudly inaugurated into their 'Honors Society', and finds time for Mock Trial, Robotics Club and community service, as well as two choral groups (very smart in tuxedo, apparently with the most beautiful girls at school...). His love of reading and writing is further kindled in taking Compositional Journalism as school subject – great to see his name as staff reporter in the monthly issues of their 'Talon' school newspaper.

After moving to our new house, Pierre-Henri unfortunately had to change schools again – his third school within 16 months, which took a great deal of courage from his side. He is now in Junior High, and is very much involved and independent in his school work. Big advantage is that assignments may be carried out in digital format, and 'thinking out of the box' is rewarded. He has developed into a talented swimmer, and in 'junior swim-team' his breast-stroke is best. He is now a true clarinetist in the Egan School Orchestra, and also has private clarinet lessons at the local School of Music and Arts. Though our home language is still Afrikaans, he is already expressing himself better in English, which leads to some very humorous dialogue when talking at home! His love of cartoons is expressed in creating his own Flash animations – and the gift of a digital tablet from big brother to encourage his efforts.

The kids are indeed very busy – and it gets harder to plan family trips that include everyone. Our '4<sup>th</sup> of July' whitewater rafting down the King's River was an indication of which holiday activities should now be explored – and we're off to Yosemite for skiing in Badger Pass next week (after last year's initiation this can just mean FUN!). Trips to San Francisco are still a highlight, with the architecture and character of the city, surrounded by so much natural beauty, both awesome and astounding. Nearby coastal places like San Gregorio Beach, Santa Cruz and Halfmoon Bay are favorites, and the coastal redwoods of Muir Woods, the rugged scenery of Reyes Point and Big Sur, as well as quaint towns like Sausalito (ice-cream!) and Tiburon (clam chowder & beer!) are favorites to explore whenever we find the time. Hiking the hills provide an easy get-away.

Our own musical explorations are now limited, with electric guitar and bass often replacing the violins and cello - but still with piano, and now clarinet...viva la musica! Photography is still our main hobby – we recently indulged in acquiring a Nikon D200 for ‘Lydia’s birthday’. The old Leica cameras are now seldom used, though Niels found good application for them in his astronomy field trips. We try to find more time to digitize our collection of photo-slides, and also to edit the hours of digital videotapes that we shipped along. This may keep us occupied until retirement...!

The absolute highlight of the year was the visit in November of our parents from George (Oupa Nellis & Ouma Gerda). Their time with us simply flew, but we managed to break away to Yosemite and the Mariposa sequoias, as well as trips to Monterey Bay, Big Sur, and Napa Valley. We further simply let them experience our life in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley, and spent hours catching up talking and feasting! Our Thanksgiving turkey was joyfully shared with them. (Being a bird of such proportions that it required buying a new casserole, we even referred to it as the ‘ostrich’ in the fridge...). The ‘trick-or-treat’ of Halloween was indeed equally enjoyed by all generations!

Visits from the Weimers from Wisconsin, Priors from Stellenbosch, Mareli & Hanno from St Helena, and the Strouvelles from Switzerland, were greatly enjoyed and appreciated. The luxury of having relatives and acquaintances is especially missed in times of jubilation, sadness or pain. ‘People who share your memories...’, as Dieter so aptly put it. The loss of a dear friend to cancer, a special anniversary of our parents, and grieving for our beloved brother-in-law, are memories we have longed to share... Communication and networking via email, Skype, digital images, and even snail mail, were therefore fully exploited and explored. Here in ‘The Valley’ computer networks are high-speed, and more frequently wireless and free, even on trains and buses – a luxury that is fully indulged in, and totally addictive!

We have not succumbed to ‘Shopping Mall addiction’, presumably a favorite pastime of many Americans – though we have experienced the realities of ‘Black Friday’, the first shopping day after Thanksgiving, when people sleep on the sidewalks to grab sales items first! We find the people here accommodating towards other people’s cultures and traditions – probably because almost everyone in California comes from ‘somewhere else’. Apart from the level of science and technology, the focus on music and the arts was an eye-opener to us: Dieter’s High School has 8 choral groups, while Pierre-Henri’s Junior High boasts with 6 orchestral ensembles. We have also discovered previously unknown American authors, composers and artists. Attending the world premiere of ‘Dr Atomic’ in the SF Opera House was a highlight – though Pierre-Henri still finds it perplexing that someone can spend 10 minutes singing just one word!! The premiere performance of the multimedia Philip Glass-Frans Lanting show ‘Life’ was truly delightful, especially being an avid Glass follower...! Currently Dieter is exploring John Steinbeck, I am delving into the works of Henry Miller (previously banned), Niels is coding away in RubyOnRails, Pierre-Henri is exploring the world of Wii, and Pierre... well, Pierre is exploring the world!

Finally, for 2007, the words of Henry Miller (1946): “Peace and solitude! I have had a taste of it even here in America. Blessings! Blessings on you, one and all, no matter on which side of the fence you happen to be. Here there is abiding peace, and the serene security created by a handful of good neighbors living at one with the creature world, with noble, ancient trees, scrub and sagebrush, with poppies and buzzards, eagles and hummingbirds, gophers and rattlesnakes, and sea and sky unending.”

Peace and joy to you all, wherever your sea and sky may be!







