

# Happy Holidays 2008

Dear Family and Friends,

2008 was a year we did a handful of things we never expected to do:



We went to our niece Jill's wedding in Tuscany. You know, Tuscany: north of Rome, south of Florence. We also spent a week in a flat in Rome with daughter Laurie and her growing family.



Steve built a 130' concrete block wall up the north slope of our lot, across the front, then down the south side. Still don't know what got into him, but it was big toys for big boys stuff.



Steve built a 130' concrete block wall up the north slope of our lot,

We floated in a hot air balloon at dawn over 2,000+ pagodas along the Irrawaddy River in Burma, then drank champagne upon landing. Breathtaking!



Peggy now is part of a group ([www.SchoolsForSalone.org](http://www.SchoolsForSalone.org)) raising money to build schools in war ravaged Sierra Leone where we served as Peace Corps volunteers 40 years ago. Life presents unique challenges at unexpected times.

Other events, more predictable, are what make these years wonderful:

Miss Zoe Garber Spitzer was born January 24<sup>th</sup>. Peggy spent considerable time in Portland with Zoe and her brother Owen (5 and now in kindergarten – how exciting is that?).



Steve made many loaves of banana bread during the year, most with the help of Nathaniel (4). A proper loaf of banana bread contains walnuts and chocolate chips and at least three bananas.

Peggy and Adrian sewed another birthday dress, the third in successive years, each one becoming more elegant and sophisticated. Can you believe she is only 7 & pushing the foot pedal herself now?



Steve's \$1 million+ fundraising efforts for the Japanese Garden ended successfully with a groundbreaking ceremony in June. The new Entry Gatehouse should open next March.



Steve embarked on Adventures in Gardening with Adrian and Nathaniel in their very own home plot. This is a work in progress. At least the neighborhood wild rabbits didn't get the pumpkins.



We built our garage out of much concrete and steel, a 20 year project from conception to realization. Landscaping on the deck top is now proceeding, albeit substantially interrupted by winter. We started with a 2 ton, 9 foot tall basalt pillar. It's going to be amazing.



Peggy abandoned Steve for a brief sojourn in New England with her mom and brothers. Together we strolled through the wonders of the Roman Coliseum and the Forum, the grandeur of St. Peter's Basilica, and the beauty of many Piazzas, then climbed the hill streets of Montepulciano.



In late fall we admired several SE Asian palaces and thousands of temples, took a variety of boat trips on the Irrawaddy and the Mekong Rivers and journeyed through the incredible mountains of Laos.



We rode in pony carts, ox carts, bicycle rickshaws, motorcycle tuktuks, dugout canoes and the Rangoon local commuter train; dodged millions of motorcycles on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City; crawled through Viet Cong tunnels in the Iron Triangle and staggered across Pol Pot's Killing Fields outside Phnom Penh



We learned how to make rice paper and bamboo lacquer ware, helped harvest rice in a paddy, ate an incredible number of delicious and varied dishes, all with rice, and could have eaten fried tarantula.



We shopped in a myriad of open air village markets on land and on river boats, had a custom cashmere & silk suit tailored in Bangkok and watched the sun rise over Angkor Wat.



Then back home we heard many wonderful chamber music concerts; worked on numerous computer, video and sewing projects and spent time with kids, grandkids and family – all the things that make us realize how fortunate we are.

There will be more photos and stories on the [www.Garbers.com](http://www.Garbers.com) website, but not quite yet.

So here's a little story to close -



Lying on my back on a hatch cover of an old rice barge, now good only for ferrying a few tourists across the Irrawaddy River, I look up at the Milky Way. For someone living in Western Washington, what with the frequent clouds and the city lights, seeing the Milky Way is a rare treat. Here we are only about 10 kilometers from Mandalay - a city of over a million – but floating along in almost complete darkness. Mandalay is a busy but poor city in an exceedingly poor (and poorly governed) country, and

there is only very modest illumination at night. The far greater impediment to viewing the night sky will be the nearly full moon that is due to rise in about an hour. We know from other nights that by the light of the moon we will be able to see pagodas gleaming on one and another hilltop set back from the river. But not so well in full moonlight will we be able to see the Milky Way.





We've been to the village of Mingun, on the west bank across and up the river from Mandalay, to see the sights. We saw the monastery, of course, one of the bigger piles of brick in the world, now somewhat the worse for wear after the big earthquake a couple of hundred years ago. We saw an architecturally unique and quite lovely white pagoda. For a pagoda to be unique is a difficult



distinction in a country of tens of thousands of pagodas. Whilst walking through the little town of Mingun from monastery to pagoda, our ears were assaulted by greatly amplified, genuine (but not awful) Burmese rock and roll. These experiences can sort of ambush you sometimes, and you really don't have much choice

but to soldier through. But the site with the most stars in the guidebook was the 90 ton bell which lay nearer the pagoda than the monastery, said to be the largest ringable bell in the world. In many places that would result in a fair amount of security. In Burma, you can pick up the wooden mallet about the size of a very fat baseball bat which is leaning against the perimeter wall, walk up to the bell, and bongggggg away. Has to be three times. Buddha says so. So of course I did



Back on the rice barge on our way back to Mandalay, night falls early and quickly in the tropics. I reconfirm yet once again how poor my knowledge of the night sky is. That's all right. A sky full of stars from one horizon to the other is still a spectacular sight, even to the dreadfully ill-informed. As we navigate diagonally across the river, there is little need to worry much about other boats. This is Burma: Thailand minus 70 years. Not a lot happening. Almost no traffic on the river. I wander back to the pilot house. The glow of the navigation instruments in the pilothouse is always reassuring. But there is no glow. There are no instruments. None. It's completely dark. Just the pilot with a boy serving as a lookout up on the bow, an old wood boat on a big empty river flowing alongside a sleepy third world city. Governed by tyrants, not that you'd ever know it just passing through. Us, we meet lots of nice people, living their lives, interesting though very different than ours, mostly going nowhere. Why them and not us?

This is Burma.



Now when we read Kipling's *Road to Mandalay* (where the flying fishes play, and the dawn comes up like thunder out of China 'cross the bay) and George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, we understand the references. Such works come alive. We get it. We've been there. That's why we travel.

And this is why we come home.

*Steve & Peggy*

