

Hi Everyone,

March 7, 2009

Many things have happened over the last 3 weeks since I wrote.

I know you have heard about the major, deadly fires on the eastern coast of Australia. Perth, where we are located, is on the west coast, which is about 1700 miles from the big fires. Arsonists did set fires nearby in Perth's Kings Park, but only brush burned and the fire department put them out quickly.

You may wonder why the Australians do not have mandatory evacuation rules in place. The thinking here is a bit flavored by a pioneer attitude. If someone wants to stay and defend their homestead, they have a right to do so. After this year's eastern fires, though, fewer people will stay behind in the future.

Australian communities are encouraging people to build fire bunkers at their homes. Fire bunkers are somewhat like tornado shelters, being underground and made of concrete, where people can stay during a firestorm. Anyone who had them and used them during the fires were saved. But the very fast pace of the firestorms made it impossible for most people to get out at all. The biggest problem was a lack of an early warning system via cell phone. That is now in place – turns out that the phone companies had it available for advertising, but it was never implemented for emergencies before.

Companies and public organizations have organized donation boxes to benefit the Victoria fire victims. Every place seems to have a donation box. The Australian government held a national day of mourning with ceremonies all over Australia for the victims and their families. Princess Anne came over from England for the events.

On a happier note:

After four weeks in a local hotel, Bill and I have finally moved into our rented house. We live in Subiaco, which is an old, circa 1920's, suburb of Perth. Subiaco is about a 10-minute bus ride from the central city where Bill works.



City of Perth banner



View of Perth at night

WE LOVE OUR HOUSE, please come for a visit as we have plenty of room and beautiful sites to show you. Perth is over 150 years old and has many buildings with beautiful architecture and trees and parks all around us. We have been riding our bikes and walking to explore the neighborhoods.



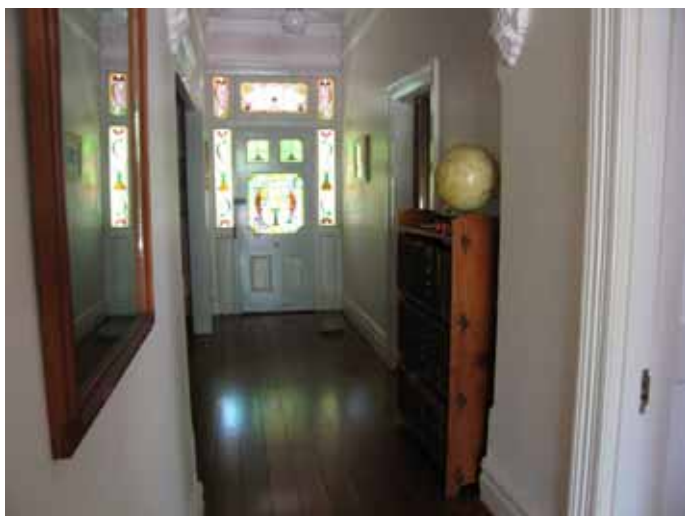
Subiaco Hotel on Rokeby Road



Park in Subiaco



Our house in Subiaco



Hallway looking back at front door



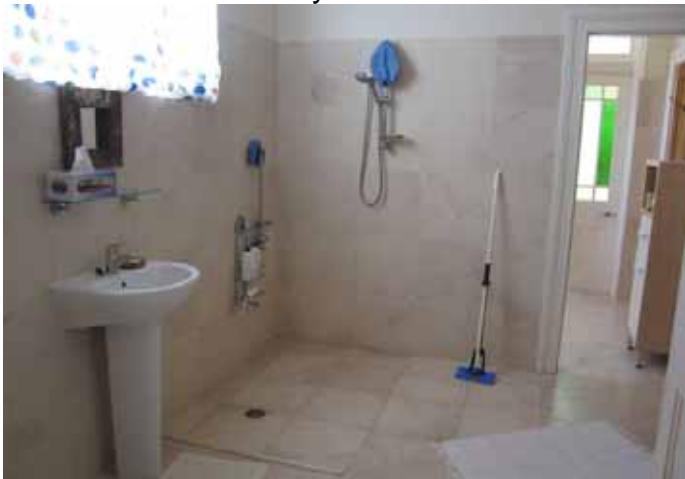
View of back patio/yard



View of Kitchen/Family Room



View back towards our office room on left



Our open shower bathroom

Chevron has provided a company car for use during our stay. It's a 4-wheel drive Jeep. Bill has been driving it successfully – it's useful to concentrate on keeping to the left side of the road! With the 4-wheel drive, we can get into the Outback.

Two weekends ago we got up early on a Saturday morning and rode our tandem bicycle, with new headlight shining, from Subiaco to the Indian Ocean at Cottesloe Beach about 15 miles away. There we watched some of the 2000 swimmers depart the beach at the beginning of the 19km (about 13 miles) swim race across the shark-infested ocean to Rottnest Island. Each swimmer or swim team had a kayaker along, as well as a small powerboat or sailboat for safety and support. Australians are very fitness oriented, and apparently not too concerned about the sharks – the common thought was that all the activity in the water would scare away the sharks. This was the 19th Annual Swim. The winner reached the island in about 4 plus hours, and told a story on the news about seeing a small shark as he approached the island.



Swim start line with swimmers in yellow caps.



Kayaks lined up to follow swimmers with sail boats further out to sea.



Two swimmers with balloons to help their kayak escorts find them amongst all the swimmers.

This last weekend was the Labor Day holiday weekend here in Australia, as Summer is coming to an end now. Aussie friends of Bill from graduate school who live in Perth, Lyle and Carole Burgess, took us on a 4-day weekend to Albany. It's a 4-hour driving trip to Albany, southeast of Perth, on the southern coast. If you look on a map, that ocean is either the Indian Ocean or the Pacific, but Aussies refer to it as the Southern Ocean. It is an incredibly beautiful area. Putting our feet into the Southern Ocean, was magical. As we gazed over the water we were looking in the direction of Antarctica! (about 3000 miles away) Despite that, the water was warm enough for swimming – and a lot warmer than the ocean in Northern California.



Trees along the road on our drive south



Working windmill at our lunch stop.



Beautiful fishing bay



Stepping into the Southern Ocean

Driving along, we saw our first wild kangaroos, wild emus (a tall ostrich-like bird), a blue-tongued lizard in the middle of the road, which we stopped for and moved it to the side -the tongue really is blue- and many colorful birds.



Frog on top of toilet next to flush button



Blue tongued lizard blending in with the road.



Cathie and kangaroo



Dog Rock (with painted collar) in Albany

Southwestern Australia has its own “Valley of the Giants” with tall trees. We walked amongst the tree-tops of giant red tingle and karri trees in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park. To protect the fragile soil and roots of these trees the Aussie forest service has built a walking bridge thru the tops of the trees, 200 feet in the air. It was so fun being up that high that we went on the walk two times.



Tree top suspension bridge walkway

Cheers,

Cathie and Bill