

January 11, 2014

Happy New Year,

During 2013 we continued to enjoy Western Australia, and also visited Cambodia, China, eastern Australia, and the USA.

Cambodia

In February we visited the Hindu and Buddhist temples of central Cambodia. Our first stop was the city of Siem Reap. It is a wonderful, easy going place with many beautiful sites. Our guide, Bon Sen, was recommended by our friends Lyle and Carole Burgess who toured with him in 2012. Bon Sen was a pleasure to be with -- his knowledge, insights and excellent English skills added depth and perspective to our tour. He belongs to the new generation of well educated Cambodians who are actively engaged in rebuilding the country since late 1970's.

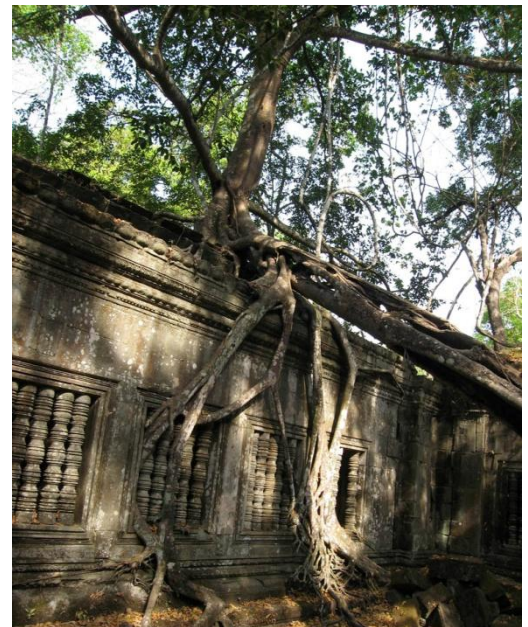
The sunrise over the world famous temple, Angkor Wat was magical! It is the best known of dozens of temples built in the region with the aid of elephants



A post card sunrise view of Angkor Wat



Cathie and Bon Sen,
waiting for sunrise at Angkor Wat



A courtyard at Beng Mealea Temple

between the 9th and 12th centuries. One of them, the Beng Mealea temple, has been left largely in the jungle, covered with thick vines and trees growing all around and through the walls.

Our tour continued to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, which is a much larger and busier city than Siem Reap. Phnom Penh has a hectic atmosphere due to new buildings going up, people selling all manner of things on the street corners, and roads filled by the motorized 3-wheeled tuk-tuk vehicles.

Tours of Cambodia rightfully include the history of the late 1970's when Pol Pot's Marxist government destroyed the country. We visited Pol Pot's main prison, which

was originally a high school. All skilled and educated people were killed and buried in mass graves in an effort to create an extreme form of "peasant Communism". It was sad and sobering to see the mass graves with bits of clothing and bones still on the grounds. Killing fields are spread all over Cambodia. We visited a memorial park in Phnom Penh -- its central monument displays many stacked skulls of victims. It is actually quite a beautiful and stately monument.

Before Pol Pot, Phnom Penh had two million residents. He decreed that everyone go into the countryside, and five years later at the end of his regime, there were only 700 people left in the city, hiding in closets and abandoned buildings. In 1979, Vietnam invaded and overthrew Pol Pot.

On a much lighter note, it was wonderful to see the entire country working at rebuilding itself and welcoming tourists. The Cambodian people are very kind and helpful and have some of the most delicious food. One dish in particular, fish amok, is quite good. Fish amok is steamed in coconut milk with many special spices, and served in banana leaves. We brought home a Cambodian cookbook and the "amok" spices to try it ourselves.

USA

In March, Cathie attended a Diamond Heart meditation retreat in northern California and caught up with many friends. She also attended the annual conference of the Professional Fiduciary Association of California, which is a requirement to maintain her professional fiduciary license.

In April, Bill joined Cathie to visit Portland, Oregon where we spent time with Cathie's sister Teresa and her husband Trent, and Cathie's long time friend, Sally. Portland is a beautiful city and we spent two days with a realtor to learn more about the city. Someday we might move there!?

After a week, we continued onto Pittsburgh, PA to spend time with Bill's mother, family and friends. We took a weekend trip to Gettysburg, toured the Civil War battlefield sites and met "General Lee and his wife" at a local B&B. They were amazing look-alike actors in dress and speech and told great stories of their lives. On our way back to Pittsburgh we stopped at the Flight 93 Memorial and viewed the field where the United Airlines plane crashed on September 11th. After this we realized we had seen enough memorial sites for the year. Little did we know what would unfold later.....



Bill and his mother, Minnie, in April

In May, Bill went back to the USA and attended the American Association of Petroleum Geologist's meeting in Pittsburgh. He also got to spend some extra time with his mother.

In June we received the unexpected news that Cathie's cousin, Frank Flanigan of New Hampshire, passed away after surgery complications. He was like an older brother to Cathie and it was very hard for her to not get on an airplane immediately to be with his family. This is the hardest part about living overseas away from family during the tough times. Frank will be missed a lot.

China

In early July, Bill went on a business trip to Beijing, China. On the weekend he visited the Great Wall and overpaid a modern Mongol robber for picture rights.



Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

In late July we stayed with our Friendship Force friends, Ken and Annette at their beautiful home in Brisbane, Australia, the capital of the state of Queensland. Ken and Annette gave us a grand tour of the Brisbane area and their Pacific Ocean



coast. We climbed the Story Bridge over the Brisbane River and later hiked for several days in the subtropical rainforest south of Brisbane, staying at O'Reilly's Rain Forest Retreat inside Lamington National Park. Cathie made friends with a wedge tail eagle named Bill, and later had an Alfred Hitchcock "Birds" experience.



Local people, and new friends we met at the Rain Forest Retreat at dinner, told us while hiking, to be on the lookout for leeches dropping into your hair from trees overhead, ticks, poisonous snakes, ancient poisonous spiders, lizards and stinging neurotoxin



Cathie in the subtropical forest, on "The Great Walk" trail

trees that grow to 40 feet tall. And none of that was in jest! Lucky for us, it was winter time so the cold weather kept all the critters in their nests!

Perth

This year, as members of The Friendship Force of Perth club, we hosted two dinners for out-of-town visitors at our home - visitors from Marlborough, New Zealand and the Central Coast/Newcastle clubs from Queensland, AU. In her spare time, Cathie also participates in a weekly English language tutoring program. Bill joined the City of Canning Australian Men's Woodworking Shed to meet other woodworkers and make progress on several projects.

Ongoing sport activities year-round in the wonderful Perth climate include yoga, swimming, running, bicycling, kayaking, playing Frisbee, long walks, hikes and gardening. There is always something to do!



Kayaking with friends, and dolphins on the Swan River near home

Mates on Bikes Country Ride

In October, Bill spent five days bicycling a 640 km (400 mile) loop south and east of Perth with seven Aussie friends. The group stayed overnight in old roadhouses in small Western Australian towns - at Pinjarra, Narrogin, Collie and Wokalup.



A goal of the trip, which we satisfied, was to place a "Mates on Bikes" gnome statue in Gnomesville, an iconic Australian site near Wellington Mill. To remember the trip, we made a 30 minute video, which had rave reviews among a select audience of gnomes.



Some of the gnomes at Gnomesville, Western Australia

Collie Adventure Race

Also in October, our adventure race team, called "The Steelers", participated again in the annual Collie Adventure Race. Cathie excelled as team manager, finding a new kayaker just in time this year. We had a great day out and finished fourth in our "over 50



Bill, Ken, Russell and Dave -- The Steelers

average age" group this year. Unfortunately there is not a higher age category for which we would certainly qualify. We are not getting (much) slower, but the competition that showed up this year was a lot faster.

USA

In November we had to make another trip back to the USA. Within 24 hours we heard that Cathie's Uncle Don Boggs passed away in Senora, California at age 83, and Bill's mother, Minnie Kowalik, passed away in Pittsburgh, PA at age 91. Two weeks later, Cathie's godmother, Mary Louise Knoblauch died at age 91 in Palm Springs, CA.

Uncle Don was the oldest brother of Cathie's mother. He joined the Air Force at age 18, spent time in Korea and travelled the world as an electronics repair expert for the military and private industry. Growing up, Cathie spent vacation weeks living with Uncle Don and his family in northern California, where she learned a love of the outdoors and water sports.

Bill's mother was a very loving, kind mum who was always there when you needed someone to talk with. She was also a hard worker who grew up on a dairy farm in western Pennsylvania as the youngest daughter of Ukrainian immigrant parents. Just out of high school at the beginning of WWII, she signed up for the war effort, and worked as a welder on landing ships. She welded many of the hundred plus LST ships, each 325 feet long, built at Dravo Corporation in Pittsburgh during the war. Minnie taught her four kids the value of hard work, and especially the value of education.

Cathie's godmother Mary Louise was an exceptional pianist, and a Professor of Music at California State University at Northridge. She had organized music education programs for California primary, secondary and college students, and authored a number of music text books, including the "World of Music Series K-8". Cathie loved being with her and listening to her many stories.

Before their passing we talked with each of them on the phone and shared a video connection from Perth. We celebrate their lives and continue to shed tears.

La Habra Heights House

In December, in a highlight for Bill, he sold the home in La Habra Heights, CA that he owned for 25 years and had rented out for the past 7 years. No more headaches dealing with renters and property managers! This was also a highlight for Cathie, because now when we visit LA, we won't have to spend five days working on the place :-)



We were very happy to spend a quiet Christmas and New Year's Eve in Perth, kayaking on the beautiful rivers and reflecting upon those we miss. We are also truly grateful to be able to participate in such rich life experiences.

We wish you a great 2014!

Cathie and Bill



Southwest of Brisbane in the Great Dividing Range



A Saturday morning on the Swan River



A family of black swans on the Swan River near home. Our whole neighborhood watched the cygnets grow up over several months. Black swans mate for life and are very protective when raising their young. Any person or dog that got too close was aggressively run off by the swan parents.