

January 2020 Annual Report

Our following “Holiday Letter” was essentially completed by the last week of January, when we realized our travelogue was incomprehensible without the photos. Therefore, we decided to assemble two new and extensive photo galleries for our 2019 trips; this took forever, as we both take photos from which to negotiate selections, then find agreement for the accompanying text, and then, with the uncomplaining aid of our loyal assistant, Lisa O’Connor, finalize the galleries. We wanted the photos to tell logical travel stories, which is no small challenge itself. You can find them at: <https://onemound.com/photo-galleries/gallery/europe-2019> and <https://onemound.com/photo-galleries/gallery/new-zealand-2019>

In 2019, we had two “trips of a lifetime”: April/May and November/December. We’ll discuss them below but first a note about the prior photo histories we assembled. A number of years back, when we ran our two B&B units here in Kenwood, we built our own website: www.onemound.com to supplant info available from Airbnb. We have kept the site alive to now serve as the Jefferson Photo Scrapbook (with text). So now Istanbul/Budapest/Prague-Czech Republic covers spring 2019, and our five weeks in New Zealand ate up November and a few days of December. (We selected “Central Europe” in which to continue our travel after having spent three weeks in April in the Western Cape, South Africa, and therefore essentially staying on the same time zone as the one in Africa.)

The second, devastating event, impacting us all, was the growing viral pandemic, recognized as something serious in Asia by early January and then clobbering the US and the rest of the world by March. The last 30 days of lockdown continues to create unexpected daily challenges and makes 2020 planning highly conjectural. (The worldwide economic and health devastation has only precedent with the Spanish Flu over 100 years ago.) Yet despite all the confusion and adjustments, we were determined to complete this very tardy Annual Report. We hope you find the journeys interesting, especially the photos, and now, on your unpaid “staycation,” perhaps you have the time to look at them!

Last year went by very quickly for the Jefferson’s but it was fascinating and enjoyable. First, watching our darling six-year-old granddaughter, Maddy Quinn Moylan, grow up continues to be a treat. “Nonny” Catherine is spoiling (called “advantages”) her beyond belief, but with excellent results. The first grader is very bright, artistic, mature, becoming articulate, and very cute. She loves music and theater; sings all the time, is reading well and is learning to ride a horse. She and “Poppy” Dave were skiing together a year ago! She is also tall for her age, and likely to be close to 6’ by high school graduation. Because her mother is a tall, beautiful Asian American, MQ is going to be a striking and impressive young lady by graduation. No limits for this talented and nice girl.

While we realize we have been very fortunate to be able to travel internationally in past years, we have numerous other Baby Boomer friends who also are enjoying extensive “international travel retirement.” For most that certainly is being truncated in 2020. However, Catherine did return to Alaska in early March to volunteer for almost two weeks of the Iditarod dogsled race; meanwhile Dave spent about a week in Ajijic, Mexico, near to Guadalajara, to meet the American expat community there through a local friend and work on his conversational Spanish. This November/December we are scheming some sort of Southern Hemisphere adventure, probably including South Africa and Patagonia. (Planning is underway but in early stages ...) Birthdays are coming faster, and in March Catherine entered her 70’s as does Dave’s sister Helen Jefferson (nearing retirement on Alameda Island) in June; Dave gleefully attained 77 on Feb. 11th, with a full head of silver hair coveted by most of his chronological cohorts. To be sure, we have some older age symptoms, but remain in pretty good health, getting plenty of sleep, and eating virtually no red meat. Small dietary sacrifices and personal weight goals remain important.

Some unusual travel items to note: our days in Turkey were really enjoyable and we encourage friends who have never been to put it on their Short List. We expected the romantically exotic nature of the city, straddling two continents as it does. A skyline with all the palaces and mosques, with Asia and the Bosphorus in the background, is musically scored by the haunting mourn of the Islamic dawn and dusk “Call to Prayer”. We were surprised, however, by the magic of the city and were enchanted by the smell of spices from the markets that perfumed the air on the streets. Further captivating was that Istanbul is clean, safe, and

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incredibly friendly. Unexpectedly, we wound up buying several Kurdish rugs, and then months later, when another Kurd showed up in Kenwood, we purchased even more. Spectacular additions to our home!

After three days in Istanbul, we then spent three more in Budapest. The parliament building on the Danube is a knockout at night and there are many other period buildings to admire and investigate! Then we flew to Prague for a few days and drove around Czechia for the last week. The commonality these three cities share, not surprisingly, is they are all situated on major waterways, the freeways of earlier eras as well as abundant clean water supplies. Istanbul on the Bosphorus, a “strait” between the inland Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, a bay of the Mediterranean. Budapest is on the romantic Danube and Prague on the Vltava River.

Further, they are essentially eastern European cities despite some anomalies. Eastern Istanbul is in Asia, and the Czech Republic is in Central Europe. Of course, many westerners think of the Czechs as being eastern Europeans since they *do* identify with the Slavs and share much history with eastern Europe. Hungary and Czechia (which was Bohemia then Czechoslovakia) have had a dark history during the past hundred years; this part of Europe has been three different countries, occupied first by the Germans (1938-1945), and then by the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1990. This all became explicit and frustrating when Catherine tried to hire a genealogist to find her Czech roots; they explained it would be very expensive due to incomplete and missing government records. So the task of family research is almost impossible.

Nevertheless, we found both the Hungarians and the Czechs to be full of optimism, and happy to leave their turbulent past behind them. We drove around Czechia for a week; it is about the size of Maine with 10.5 million people. She found no living relatives but did locate a monument in the village of Vrbno (pop. 80) listing Catherine’s grandfather’s brother along with the other fallen in The Great War (WWI). The country is a rolling quilt-like landscape of fields and farms, with large patchworks of lovely wooded dark green forests. Perfectly paved, narrow roads, and one medieval fairy tale castle after another. Just a gorgeous part of the world.

This trip had a lot of moving parts. We took 8 flights, had three car rentals, three different electrical adaptors, and four different currencies: starting with the South African Rand, then the Turkish Lira, the Forint in Hungary, and the Koruna in Czechia.

New Zealand

Dave had been in NZ in 1986 for a week, but things had changed radically in the 33 subsequent years. There is now almost 1 million more people, mostly immigrants (but still less than 5,000,000 total), but 50% less sheep. The lion’s share of Kiwi’s live on the North island, a little bit bigger than the State of Virginia. Of those 3.67 million, 40% live in the Auckland urban area. The larger Southern island, roughly the size of the State of Georgia, has under a million folks; considering its size, there’s hardly anybody there! However, the mountainous landscape is spectacular, and should not be missed. Coupled with the warmer beachy North island, NZ is perhaps the perfect place to live if you can handle potential geologic disturbances: we missed by nine days being stranded by the mud slides at the Franz Joseph Glacier and a deadly offshore volcano eruption by 10!

Salient NZ bullet points

- Their wine industry has exploded with quality wine and not just Sauvignon Blanc, The South Island is where most of the wine is grown, and the home of exceptional Pinot Noir. Neither of us had tasted much modern Riesling, but we enjoyed the classic cultivar, as we did exceptional Shiraz, especially that grown on the Gimblett Gravels near the City of Napier, on Hawke’s Bay, North Island.
- Catherine had done her usual yeoman job researching and planning the trip but what really helped was discovering an Auckland based travel agency (www.discovernewzealand.com) that did an exceptional job for us. From arranging for three different rental cars, a train ride, a ferry passage, selecting the housing throughout the two-island country, and advising on a myriad of potential activities: this Internet-hip outfit helped us greatly with a wonderful trip plan. All Catherine had to do was tell them where we wanted to go, and how many nights we wanted to be each place. (For those who want to consider a NZ trip, our whole itinerary is illustrated by the extended NZ photo gallery.)

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- For those of us who love beaches, New Zealand, with her irregular coastline, has one wonderful cockle shell bay, with beach or cove, after another. While NZ is a relatively new geological landmass, it is also a very new country. The Maori's didn't arrive until only 1,000+- years ago. Although Dutch explorer Abel Tasman passed by in 1642, and Captain Cook circumnavigated both islands in 1769, the Europeans (largely Brits and Scots) didn't begin significant colonization until the 1840's, after the English signed a treaty with the Maoris.
- Above all, the Kiwi's are friendly, helpful, convivial, and curious about Americans. We met wonderful people wherever we went. A couple of them took us home to entertain us; others joined us for dinner if not also spending a day or more showing us around! (Heading down there, we knew only two Auckland couples and hadn't seen them in years; now we are blessed with numerous new friends.)
- There is a wonderful simplicity and rhythm that feels very much like the U.S did in the 1950's of our childhoods. No one is in much of a rush; emails and questions in general don't need to be responded to for at least a few days. Because the islands are remote, they don't have the staggering assortment of material goods as we do. You want potato chips? Choose from five or ten in the grocery, not a whole chip aisle as we have. Same with appliances, panty hose and doorknobs. (We did not consider the shortage of choices a problem ... of course, we do not live there.)
- It's charmingly old fashioned and rural as well. Many often don't wear shoes! If you see someone without shoes, s/he is definitely a Kiwi! They will go without shoes in the coldest, wettest, most miserable weather, and permit bare feet in restaurants, supermarkets, anywhere.
- The male dominated 1950s is thankfully giving away: we attended a Rotary Club meeting in Taradale, just outside of Napier. They showed a video several of the men had made about the year they allowed women into the club, just 10 years ago! Rather surprisingly, the old men all agreed the women had worked out well as members. Duh. And not one of the men who had threatened to quit did so after the women had joined. (Cultural change is slow but inevitable.)
- And finally, our favorite: personal injury lawsuits are virtually unheard of. We walked and crawled a guided mile through a low roofed cave, and then back... We had been issued hard hats, flashlights and had to pick our way over and around rocks of all sizes in the dark. In the U.S., the federal government would have demanded a concrete or boardwalk wheelchair path. And visitors would always be suing over banged heads and scuffed knees in the caves.

Another example was walking around Wellington Harbor in winds of at least 30 MPH and frequent gusts to 60. The pedestrian piers have no handrails and there are numerous bicycle riders on them, as well. When Catherine asked a few locals if anyone gets blown into the bay, they shrugged and simply said Yes! "Assumption of personal responsibility" trumps all else in NZ.

- Most of the many bridges in New Zealand are single lane ones. There is a sign that alerts the drivers as you approach to share the bridge. First to get there goes first.

We hope this missive finds you in continuing good health and absorbed in tasks you thought you would never have the time to accomplish. Catherine is organizing a lifetime of family photos and Dave is threatening to start cleaning his office in our barn. The quarantine seems like it will stretch into eternity, but it won't, so exploit the "staycation" while it lasts. Stay well, above all else ~

Dave and Catherine Jefferson

(Proudly active, adventuresome and life observing seniors)