

Dear Family and Friends,

It's been more than a year since we took a big leap into the world of unemployment (wonder if we're eligible for unemployment benefits?). We have enjoyed every minute of simply being bums as well as globe trotting.

Spending close to 8 months in Africa was most certainly the highlight for the year 2000/01.

Zippering through Europe from London, we crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and set foot on the Dark Continent of Africa, starting with Morocco. An ancient country of medinas, Kasbahs and oasis, we were charmed by it's culture and it's people. It was there that Lars was successfully persuaded to join the 'Ali Baba' look. Heading south, partway driving in a military convoy through a landmine filled area in the Western Sahara, we entered Mauritania.

Even though a vast country, Mauritania has mainly deserts to offer, beautiful cloudless night skies and dinner laced with some extra crunch. Next, a slight deviation from our original route, we visited Senegal, a place we believe harbors the highest concentration of African beauties. However, if we had been impressed with the well-known Paris-Dakar rally, Dakar city was unfortunately a big disappointment with rude and intimidating retailers.

From Dakar, we embarked on a journey that fascinated most of Jacqui's relatives back home - 5 nights/6 days without showers or proper sanitation, heading for the capital of Mali - Bamako. It was also the section where we drove less than 20kms in a single day. Although poor in material possessions, Mali was rich in culture - from the various Fulani tribes and the grand mud mosque of Djénné to the enchanting yet mysterious Dogon country and it's people. Continuing down south we visited Burkina Faso briefly before crossing the border into Ghana. Formerly known as the Gold Coast of Africa but our hearts were ripped apart while visiting the slave forts and the Gate of No Return.

Accra marked the end of the first leg of our trip but for some of our fellow travelers this was the end of the trip. We had just spent 2 months getting acquainted but we now looked forward to another 4 months learning more about this fascinating Dark Continent.

As we headed east towards Central Africa, we zipped through Togo and Benin (small countries) and Nigeria but we had enough time to visit a few national parks and rainforests as well as a rare opportunity to experience the 'excitement' of Lagos in 24 hours. We then entered Cameroon and boy, do we have a few stories to tell. Celebrating Christmas in Rhumsiki and ushering in the New Year and climbing Mt. Cameroon in Buea was certainly not of the norm - although we think we all did our best to get into the festive spirit with spit-roast, festive napkins, presents, Doritos and, of course, alcohol. There was also the case of our truck breaking down in Nike Bokoko, where we found ourselves mingling amongst the friendly inquisitive villagers and being at the mercy of 2 Catholic missions in Douala and Yaoundé because we could not find or afford anything better. Even the flight over Congo from Cameroon to Kenya was itself not without excitement - being refused take-off by the Congo government in Kinshasa.

When we arrived in Kenya it was past midnight, however being in East Africa brought us back to the days of Tarzan, Daktari and Elsa of Born Free. We also briefly walked in the shoes of Diane Fossey tracking the elusive mountain gorillas in Uganda - an awesome experience, as well as 'hitching' a ride on a raft down the Source of the Nile. Driving through Tanzania we saw animals, animals and more animals, but we also made a breakaway from the group for a few days to witness the beauty of Mt. Kilimanjaro at the break of dawn from summit Mt. Meru (at 4,526m our record highest).

If asked about our experience with rainstorms, Lake Malawi takes the cake and our 'fondest' memory of Zambia was getting bogged 5 times in one day. After all the hard work of digging, pulling, pushing, etc. to get the truck out of the mud, we were ready to be pampered. And so in Zimbabwe, we lived-it up a little with a great meal at Victoria Falls Hotel as well as throwing a few chips down on the roulette table at The Kingdom (we were just short of spending a couple of nights there - still on a budget). We even splurged on an activity called gorge swinging - basically paying money to experience a 'suicide attempt' jumping from

55-60 meters into a gorge.

Driving further south into Botswana (and Namibia), our immediate observation of Southern Africa was that except for the natives that walked down the streets (at least in the cities), it didn't feel like the Africa we had just experienced. We tracked the animals of Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta. Namibia, in particular Windhoek, Swakopmund and Luderitz, was like being in Germany with fast efficient systems, German buildings, cafes and street names. However, having visited Etosha National Park, the Cheetah park, Spitzkoppe, Fish River Canyon, sand boarding and quad biking in The Namib desert, Namibia is definitely a place we would recommend to those who wish to visit Africa, obviously without the roughing and toughing.

Setting foot in South Africa brought us to the realization that our African adventure was coming to an end. And so, being surrounded by the great vines of South Africa, we drank ourselves silly in Cederberg and Simons Town (where we enjoyed our last dinner as a group), and at Cape Point and Cape of Good Hope we had our last toast - we made it! All good things must come to an end and we were sad to leave the friends we made along the way.

We, however, were delighted when Lars' parents, Karin and Bill who had just spent a few weeks traveling on their own through Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa (but perhaps with a slight touch of luxury - like the Blue Train), joined us in Cape Town. It felt good to be back in the company of family. Having 10 more days to spare before heading back to Asia, we spent most of the time with the parents doing the touristy thing, like going to Robben Island, shanty towns, Table Mountain as well as enjoying the excellent cuisine and wines in Stellenbosch.

On May 22nd, with a total of over 180kgs of luggage, we flew on Singapore Airlines back to Asia, stopping over in Singapore briefly to say "Hi!" to some family and friends. Back in Kuala Lumpur, we didn't have too much time settling down before we were whisked away to historic Malacca for Szue Fei's wedding on the 26th. Lovely wedding. We hope we didn't stress her out too much with our drinking session.

At the end of June we decide to make a trip to Bangkok for several reasons. Lars hooked up with Greg Beatty and even managed a few rounds of golf in Phuket while Jacqui, along with Carol Mayappen, spent some girly time with Susan Low, eating, shopping and talking girly stuff.

Late July we made a trip back to New York for Carl's big 40th birthday and Jacqui's (hmm...) There was a big party in Valhalla, a night in New York City followed by a week in Queechee, Vermont. Whilst in Vermont, we took the opportunity to see Tom Weber, whom we haven't seen since our wedding in Norway.

Then back home in KL we managed to squeeze a couple of trips to Penang because we missed the food and Jacqui's mother (not necessarily in that order), diving in Lang Tengah (an island of the coast of Terenganu) and a visit to Ah Teo's place in Megat Dewa. We also started to get busy preparing for our departure to London and Florida, and then to South America. And in the midst of the hustle and bustle, on 26 September we were delighted to receive the news of baby LeAnne Fong's arrival - 1 month earlier than expected! Quote and unquote from the voice mail that proud father, Edward, had left us, "Baby has arrived! This is not a joke!"

The trip to London was very short but never the less a very important time as the Bespolka family gathered for Sienna Karin's christening on September 30. Some of the "Wegian" clan were present as Live Mugaas and Jørgen Kadal were amongst the proud Godparents. Coming back to Florida, we had more opportunity to spend time with the family while getting ready for yet another adventure trip to Galapagos and South America.

We hope that you will all have a blessed Christmas and a wonderful 2002. Even though we may be miles apart, know that you are in our thoughts and that perhaps one day amidst our travels our paths may cross (it's definitely in our plans to visit as many friends and family as possible). Take care and God Bless!