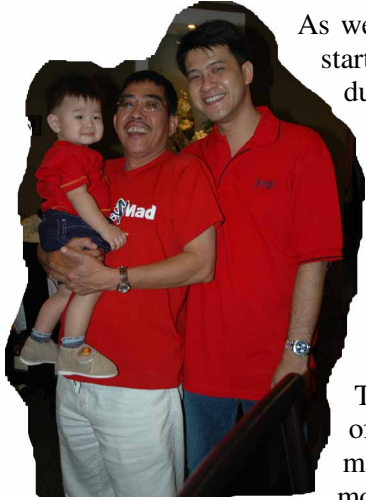




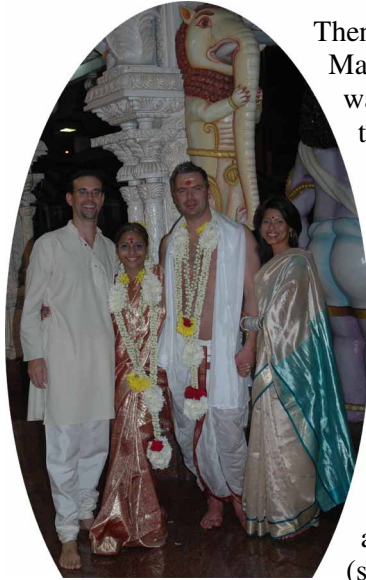
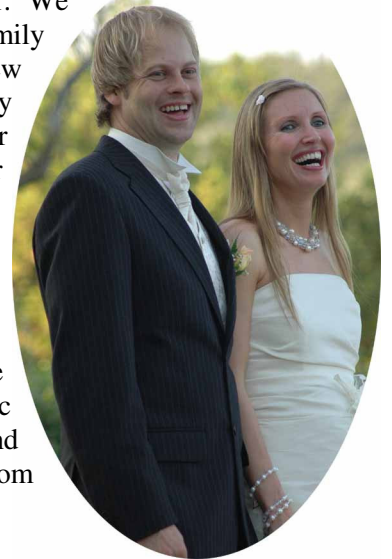
Dear Family and Friends,

December, 2005



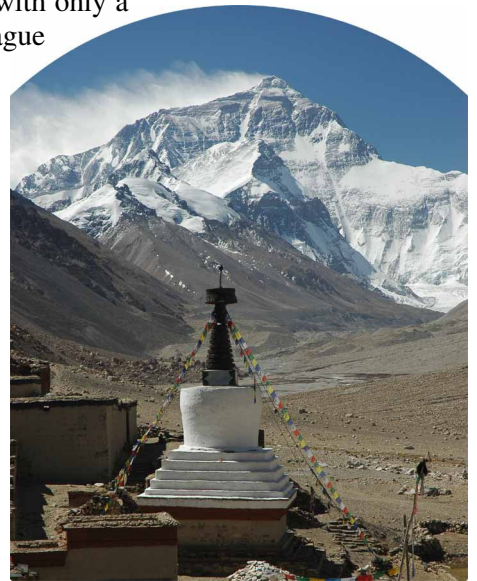
As we all know, times flies by extremely fast and 2005 was no exception for us. We started off the year back in Kuala Lumpur, where we, with the traditional “yee sang” during the reunion dinner, ushered in the Lunar Year of the Rooster. We were very pleased to share the occasion with so many family members, especially Khyn Win and Jia Wen (Jacqui’s nephew and niece) who had just turned one (the boys were appropriately dressed in red). In April, we headed up to Penang and Alor Setar for Cheng Beng (Chinese All Souls Day). Unfortunately our usual food fest in Penang was not the same without Uncle Peng coming along this year.

This year we were also glad to have been able to attend a couple of weddings – one in Italy and one in Malaysia. Lars’ cousin Nils married beautiful Berit in a wedding ceremony held in one of the most romantic settings possible – Siena, Italy. We had a fantastic time hanging out with family while indulging in wonderful Italian cuisine and wine, supplemented by good old kransekake and aquavit specially brought in from Norway.



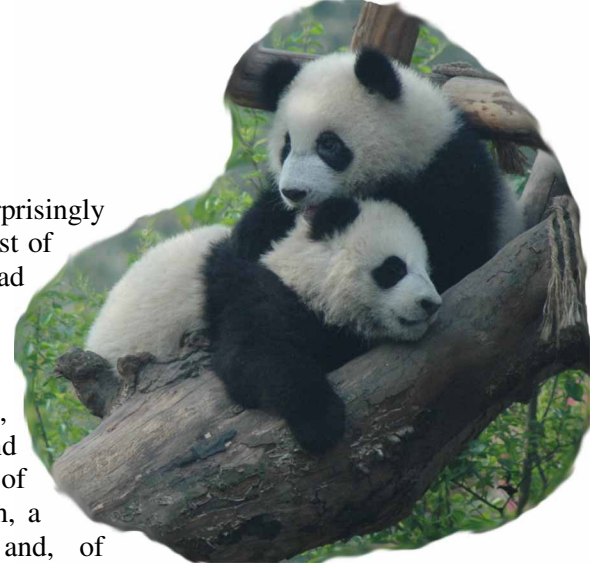
Then back in Kuala Lumpur, Jacqui was honored to be the bridesmaid at Janet and Mark’s wedding with a real mix of culture and tradition – where a church wedding was combined with an Indian temple ceremony. We both had fun dressing up in traditional Indian outfits for the occasion. It was a wonderful experience and reminded us of our own wedding which was spread over a weekend with family and friends participating in many activities and celebrations.

Our chronic travel bug is still with us, and this year it took us to China in late spring. We departed Singapore for Chengdu armed with only a return air ticket, a Mandarin phrase book and a vague idea of where we wanted to go in China. It was certainly an adventure in more ways than one, traveling overland from Chengdu (capital of Szechuan – the origin of the best Chinese food) along the ancient silk route to Kashgar in the west and then across the “Roof of the World” through Tibet (sleeping under ten blankets at Mt. Everest Base camp at an elevation of 5,200 meters) to Lhasa and then onto a cruise up the mighty Yangtze River. With the aid of only the phrasebook (neither of us speaks Mandarin), we somehow succeeded in haggling down hotel and taxi prices (always much higher for foreigners), purchasing bus, train, plane and boat tickets, and ordering food of all kinds and types.

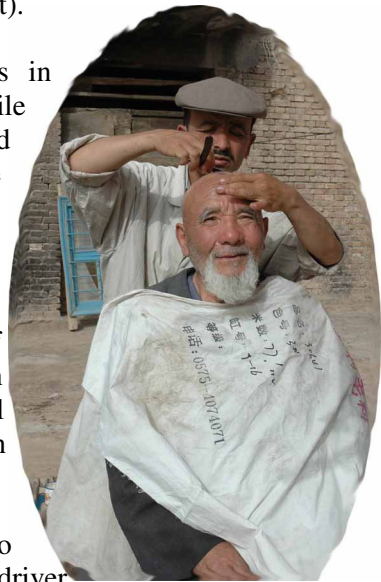




Speaking of food, for most of our travels in China it was surprisingly good, even in the most remote places in Tibet – apparently most of the cooks there were from Szechuan. In fact, at times we had difficulty finding local food due to the “Hanification” of the country (a whole other story – do not get us started). Anyway, we tried the famous mǎpó dòufu (nothing like we have anywhere else – our mouths went numb with the burning chili), the Chengdu hot pot (boiling oil filled with chilies and peppercorns - a masochist’s form of fondue), gourmet vegetarian fish, a wide variety of dumplings and, of course, oodles of noodles (usually freshly made by hand as we waited) that Marco Polo called spaghetti (with a variety of toppings, ranging from vegetables to donkey meat).



After being charmed by the elusive pandas in Chengdu (and avoiding the mad drivers while bicycling through the jammed streets), we headed west on the silk route via train, bus and car. We strolled along the ramparts of the lonely fort at the end of the Great Wall of China in Jiayùguān, marveled over the artistic Buddhist carvings and paintings at the ancient Mògao Caves (luckily some escaped destruction and looting) and climbed the singing sand dunes at the Crescent Moon Lake in Dunhuáng, explored the lost cities and underground irrigation system of Turpan, hiked on the shores of the (not so) Heavenly Lake near Ürümqui, and in Kashgar (the gateway to China along the Silk Route) shopped in the vast, historical Sunday Market and dusty lanes (Lars was tempted to shave his head as he did in Africa, but...).



In Kashgar, we considered our options “splurge” (in relative terms) and (who spoke no English) for Xinjiang-Tibet World Across the Along the drove along many snow meters (one in the fresh snow), sleeping overnight in shacks (a generous term for some of them) at elevations in excess of 4,000 meters.



and decided to hire a jeep and driver two weeks to take us via the Highway (the highest road in the according to Lonely Planet) high plateaus of Tibet to Lhasa. way to Ali in western Tibet, we isolated dirt roads and crossed over covered passes well above 5,000 had about two dozen trucks stuck



The sudden and dramatic altitude change took its toll, first with Lars getting a throbbing headache and few days (and for those you know that is serious) getting pulmonary edema due to a combination of complicated with bronchitis (most likely caught when we shared a train compartment with a very sick lady who kept spitting on the floor – another story). It was a good thing we both did not get sick at the same time. With the







assistance of DAN (Divers Alert Network) and our GSM phone (amazing that we got a connection in some of the remote towns), we found a “hospital” in Ali, where we both stayed for three, long nights. Jacqui recovered well enough to carry on (not that we really had any choice – air evacuation was not really possible due to the elevation



and remoteness and we could either drive back three days to Kashgar the way we came or carry on), bringing with her plenty of stories and experiences that would make you squirm (Lars, thanks for emptying the bedpans, delivering the meals and calling the nurses/doctors when needed). But before we left Ali, Lars had to head off to the local police station to “confess” to breaking the law (as the route we had taken is closed to foreigners, we had illegally entered Ali and Tibet) and then pay the fines and

“fees” to get the appropriate permits to carry on. It was all carried out in a very business like manner.



As we crossed Tibet, despite three flat tires and a couple of other breakdowns, we visited some of the most sacred places in Tibetan Buddhism, including Mt. Kailash, Lake Manasarovar, and temples in Rongphu, Sakya, Shigatse, Gyantse and Lhasa. We participated in a number of sacred religious pilgrimages. We toured the Potala, the home of the exiled Dali Lama (sorry that you could not be at home). The scenery along

the way was breathtaking – so isolated and beautiful. But it is all changing too quickly as development takes place with the rapid influx of the Han Chinese.



From Lhasa we flew back to Chengdu and finished off our great overland encounter with a cruise on the Yangtze, cruising upstream from Wuhan through the locks of the Three Gorges dam to Chongqing. We decided to spoil ourselves by selecting a boat that catered more to foreigners than locals, but with the tours (in English) and meals included in the price, it was not that much more expensive in the end. Our only



disappointment (well, Jacqui's really), was that the boat trackers that pulled us up the Shennong Stream in our peapod boats have evolved to wearing shorts – traditionally all they wore as they pulled the boats up the river were rope sandals (“sigh” from Jacqui).

We had a good time exploring China, trying to avoid the major metropolises on the east coast and interior, but we have one word of advice for independent travelers – bring along an umbrella to use when going to a public loo (there are no doors)!!! Also, if you are interested in the culture and tradition, go soon.

Back in Florida, it has been an extremely active year for hurricanes. Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by Katrina and Rita. Wilma passed through dumping lots of rain and packing winds in excess of 75 mph (110 km/h), but we had only minor cosmetic damage. It was our first hurricane experience. We hope that 2006 will not be as destructive.



Our “little” project of building a home on Lake Keowee in South Carolina is still on the drawing board (literally), but it has certainly kept us busy, more so while we are here in the U.S. Fortunately we managed some time to celebrate Lars’ nephew Carl’s 9<sup>th</sup> birthday (loved the homemade ice cream) and Lars’ parent’s 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary (care to share with the rest of us your secret(s)?) in New

York. While driving up and down from Florida to New York and South Carolina (where we are spending time working on our house plans) we took the opportunity to stop off in a few places like Lexington, VA; Harpers Ferry, WV; Charleston, SC; and Savannah, GA. We had a great time getting to know more places in the U.S. Finally, we had another wonderful Thanksgiving dinner, where we had family and friends join us for a sumptuous feast.

2005 will soon come to an end and after all the holiday festivities we will be heading back to Kuala Lumpur to join Jacqui’s family in ushering in the Lunar New Year of the Dog. And so, in the dawn of the New Year, we, as always, wish you Merry Christmas and a joyous year ahead.

