

January 2005

Bonne Année

We're writing this mid-winter report from the corner of rue Greneta and boulevard Sebastopol in the Third Arrondissement of Paris. Here we've already done a month of galettes des rois, kings' cakes, for Epiphany. This is the cake that has the fève in it, the little favor that is usually found by the youngest child. Our youngest child was in Belgium on January 6, so our oldest child found the fève, which turned out to be a figure of Dango, would you believe?— the French name for Goofy, Disney's dog. The galette is a round pastry with layers somewhat like a croissant, filled typically with an almond paste. The French seem to eat them all month long, so we've had many galettes, here and at social events. Now we're into the feast of Eid, Abraham's celebration, with warnings in the newspaper about not trying to slaughter a sheep at home. And the Chinese markets near us have had their red envelopes out in preparation for the New Year for months. So it's a long season of celebrations.

By finding the féve Emily is assured of good luck for the entire year, which is fortunate because she has to write a major paper next week. She arranged to spend her winter study month with us by proposing independent history research. This was to involve interviews with women about their experiences in WWII, and thus she had to be on the spot. She leads a charmed life, because somehow she managed to connect with five women of various appropriate ages, to interview them in French (tape-recorded, because she's really not up to that in French, nor are any of us, save Stephen) and then she found the perfect library, full of more references than she knew what to do with.

Stephen could probably steam right through all these French history books because he's been living in Belgium since late August. He decided to take a year off before starting college and went on an exchange sponsored by Rotary International to Marche-en-Famenne in the French part of Belgium. He's living with three families and attending another year of high school, taking things like Calculus and Geography in French. He has astonished us with his confidence, his *bon courage*, and his palate. He's tried more exotic food and drink than I ever expected of him back in the days of pizza and black-bean burgers. He's been down coal mines, to Alsace, to London and Paris (no, we weren't allowed to see him) and he's about to go skiing with his class, and later to Italy. Such field trips! In my day we went to the firehouse. In August he'll head to college. He decided on Yale, so both kids will be in the Northeast, Emily entering her third year at Williams College. We are thus assured of a regular supply of maple syrup.

For those who are mystified by all this French-ness in old Europe I should tell you that we decided the best way to deal with our kids moving on was to shift the empty nest. So we're doing another sabbatical year, this time a full 10 months in France. We thought we might enjoy shopping in a different supermarket and listening to the evening news in 6 other languages. France has a mostly Center-Right government, not Far-Right as in the US currently (Chirac is from the party that is analogous to the Republican Party in the US, despite what many Americans might have thought), but Paris itself has a pragmatic

Socialist mayor. So it's interesting to see how various issues play out---health care, immigration, family planning, religious extremism, marriage, war when/ where/how. The debates are similar but just enough different to keep us puzzled and interested.

You probably don't want to hear about any of the downsides of life here. Actually, the only one I can come up with is that it can sometimes be grey for days on end, but then I'd have to point out that our garden, which consists of two 5<sup>th</sup> floor window boxes full of geraniums, is still blooming in late January, so you can see that it never gets very cold. Then there is the tumbling dollar, but it helps to live in a multi-ethnic neighborhood with lots of street markets and street food, and a downsized life style---small apartment, no car, endless free entertainment in the form of church concerts, city museums, huge parks. Our biggest pleasure is walking, Chip has made quite a habit of it and has lost 8 kilos. We're already wondering how we can keep that up in Urbana.

Chip's long hikes are counterpoint to days spent on the computer. He's wrapping up a book project with an Australian co-editor and working with some other colleagues at a distance. In November he spent three weeks in Finland as a Fulbright Senior Specialist, and here has had various meetings with an interesting mix of French academics, librarians and art historians, sometimes even conducted in French.

I've kept busy and connected with some language classes, discussion groups, and endless teas. I joined a couple of organizations, one for expats and another purely French, and each has provided opportunities to hang out with interesting women, and a few men, from all over the world. Then I spend a bit of time editing Chip's stuff, keeping everyone fed, and prowling distant neighborhoods. I couldn't do it forever, but for ten months it's just about right.

We're looking forward to visits from various family members this spring, and especially to finally seeing Stephen, who will be enroute from Normandy to Italy and grace us for two days. In July or August we hope to catch up with the rest of the family in Texas and California. Our parents are still living independently, despite some ups and downs, and our mothers keep us regularly apprised of their activities via email, a great boon at this distance. (My mother is trying to get the hang of instant messaging at age 87 but isn't quite there yet.)

We send you our best wishes for 2005, and hopes for a better world in the coming year. It can't get any worse, can it? The good news of the day you probably all heard: an iceberg attached itself gently to a glacier in Antarctica instead of crashing into it and a tsunami victim was found alive floating in the Indian Ocean. And Paris seems to think the Olympics will be awarded here for 2012 (at least we've had free public ice-skating this winter, right in front of City Hall.) So get your tickets now.

, on behalf of all the Bruces

