

Roden's Shakespearean Christmas Letter

Roden's in the Round

Well it has been awhile since Sonya and I have been able to send out a Christmas card let alone a letter. So a little update is in order. I left NASA in 2008 to work full time emergency medicine in College Station. Yes I know, five degrees from UT living in Aggieland. Like a vampire exposed to sunlight, I should have burst into flames. Thankfully I did not. It was a wonderful experience and great colleagues but recovering from working night shifts kept getting harder.

Looking at changing to a more 9-5 type career, on a whim we accepted a family practice job in Medford, Oregon, which is one of several towns in the Rogue Valley in Southern Oregon. It was one of the the best places we have ever lived! We made great friends. We had a great home on 5 acres. Sonya raised chickens. We lived in a small town in the Rogue valley called Jacksonville. A place right out of a Norman Rockwell painting. The Pacific Southwest was a real adventure for us. Sadly we just could not make it work.

I was a little depressed about the situation, I looked into a

possible emergency medicine position in New Zealand where the “faculty” do not work night shifts..... Then we received a call from Dr. Z., Sonya’s professor from UT MBA school. He is the provost of the Singapore Management University in Singapore. He said it would be easy for Sonya to find a job and I was looking at opportunities there when the Singapore medical counsel stated it did not recognize UTMB as a valid medical school? I called UTMB to rectify this and while doing so the dean asked “Are you Sean Roden?” Oh great that is never good... I said “Yes”. He then asked if I knew Scott Parazynski? “Of course I was his flight surgeon for his last shuttle flight STS 120.” “Well he is sitting here and wants to know if you want to go to the South Pole?” Turns out after Scott (who is a physician as well as a former astronaut) left the astronaut corps, he became the medical director for the Center for Polar Medical Operations at UTMB. Soooooo I flew to New Zealand and then to Antarctica. From October 2012 to February 2013 I was the expeditionary physician for the Admunsen Scott South Pole Station. Wow what an experience!

I came “off-the-ice” and Sonya met me in New Zealand. I had lined up some ER job interviews and we spent a month touring New Zealand. Again what an adventure. Glacier tramping, beach tramping, fjord ship tours, kayaking... What a place. I was seriously considering a position in Wanganui, NZ when I got a call from an old colleague from NASA and he said that NASA was hiring. Well we decided after 5 years away it would be great to go back. We flew back to Oregon and in two weeks we packed, loaded the two cars with our two dogs: Steve, the retired racing greyhound; Lizzy, our rescued catahoula hound; and not last, Zumi, our Japanese Bobtail kitty. Five long days later, we are moved back to Texas and I started back at NASA with UTMB and Wyle Laboratories.

Sonya and I have learned if there are potential situations where all the “*Holes in the cheese line up for a sub-optimal outcome, for us, IT WILL!*” We are Irish, so Murphy’s law is, well, law....As soon as we returned management asked if we would spend 5 months in Star City Russia. Usually it is 2! But we like it there and we agreed. So we had just unpacked the last box when we were packing again and went to Russia October 2013 through March 2014.

We renewed our friendships with some very dear Russian colleagues. We had a wonderful life there. The military base shuts down during Christmas and the US follows a Gregorian calendar and the Russians follow a Julian. That means we had a month off! So we spent Christmas with friends in Germany and skied in Austria. The Christmas markets in Munich are fabulous. Then we took a tour of Italy. Rome, Venice, and the Amalfi coast. Ah Amalfi lemons, seafood, Pompeii, ancient ruins, an amazing organic buffalo mozzarella cheese farm, the Vatican, bridge of sighs. Epiphany in Rome. Then back to Russia where we celebrated the Russian Orthodox Epiphany. Cold plunges, Shashlik parties in the snow, Troika rides, men's day, women's day. Just a wonderful time.

So we have been back in Houston a year. I went back to Russia and Kazakhstan briefly in September to launch my crew Barry “Butch” Wilmore on a Russian Soyuz rocket to the International Space Station (ISS). I have been working in mission control supporting the science and activities of my crew on ISS. Sonya has been updating our house, playing golf, and volunteering twice a week with the Bay Area Habitat for Humanity.

So there you go. Just like in a Shakespearean play we have returned to where we began. Well not quite. Last week I was offered a job as the clinical medical director at JSC so I will once

again take oath as a federal civil servant and truly be back to where I was in 2008. Christmas will not be as exciting as last but that is just fine with Sonya and me. We hope you are well and are wishing you and your entire family all the blessings and cheer of this holiday season. We wish you safe travels, good times with family and friends and of course, Tidings of Comfort and Joy.

Peace, joy, love, stars...

Sean and Sonya

Saturday, January 10, 2015



Sean at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, Antarctica



Sonya and Sean in New Zealand



St Basil's Cathedral in Red Square, Moscow