

The Year 1997 - an Asiatic Year

Summary¹ by Dieter & Silvia Vonderschmitt

It started in Laudun with snow ...

The Poeples in Laudun don't see snow very often. But in the night to the first January 1997 they got lots. The whole infrastructure broke down - highways and the TGV (the French fast train) did not work anymore. All the French who came down to the south to get some warm and decent weather had a hard time getting back to work. Fortunately, we were not in a hurry, since lectures at the university did not start until the 5th of January. Silvia's parents were also here, so she could stay till the 16th. Silvia has no job currently and one of the reasons she is not actively looking for one is the fact that it is a lot easier to take a few days off together. Which we did rather frequently. Never before have we been in our house so often. We went down south on the 14th of March (I returned on the 16th and Silvia stayed again with her parents) and again on the 26th to spend the Easter holiday with Karin's and Zita's family. We came back on April 30th because May 1st is a holiday and fell on a Thursday. We welcomed Wiss, Esther, his brother and sister in law and had a hell of a time together. If they did not put on some weight - we did. Monday morning I flew back to Zurich (from Marseille) and returned on the eve of Ascension, another holiday. Back again to Zurich by plane and returning to Laudun on Thursday before Whitsuntide. The week in July was thought to be a vacation and turned out to be mainly work. In fact we are pretty well installed with office material, PC and fax in order to communicate with the office in Zurich. Internet and e-mail have just been added these days. The few days in August, just before the European congress in Basel were also mainly devoted to the last preparations of the meeting. But after the meeting we sneaked to our house again for three days to introduce some friends of ours who took two weeks of vacation here. The week in September was a little more calm, but we were preparing a long trip to China. In November finally it is a tradition to come here for the „intronisation“ of new members of the Echansonnerie des Papes (a wine guild). No wonder did I put some 15 thousand miles on my car this year. Silvia's parents are usually in our house for several months and do all the maintenance work like mending and painting the wooden shutters. If they were not here our house would probably be in a rather dreadful state. And we would not get this wonderful home-made jam. By the way: the cherry yield was rather small and there were no apricots at all.

... and got rather hot in february

We wanted to see Hongkong before it was turned over to China. So, right after the term of the university ended, on the 8th of February, we flew to Hongkong hoping to see some nice warm weather. Instead it was

raining, windy and cold. We froze and Silvia got a bad bronchitis. But we were still able to get the feeling and atmosphere of this pulsating capital of trading and commerce. A one day excursion to Lantau Island showed us the „other Hongkong“. We were very much impressed by the big bronze statue of Buddha and we think it is the most likable of all the Buddha's we have seen.

The transfer to a small village close to Pattaya in Thailand was also a dramatic change in climate. Although the sun was partially hidden by a faint layer of fog in the morning it was so strong that Silvia and I got badly burnt the very first day. We stayed at the guesthouse of Swiss friend who just finished the construction. One of the highlights was the inauguration and benediction of the two houses by Buddhist rituals. These consisted of a two days ceremony with lots of monotonous prayers, the application of golden signs above the doors of entrance and the „opening of the eyes“ of Buddha. Each of the houses has to have a statue of Buddha in the yard. In its original form the Buddha has eyes that have no life. By changing the original eyes and applying black and white color to them they become alive. At the end of the ceremony we had lunch together with the monks and we served them huge amounts of food.

Another event worthwhile mentioning was a Minimarathon of 12 kilometers. Through some connections with the Thai Navy we got invited to participate in this event of charitable character. Completely untrained but well nurtured as I was I am proud to have finished the course in less than two hours. Silvia got „seduced“ by some Navy soldiers to ride half of the course on a Jeep. This was a good and really relaxing vacation.

The profession

Though the emphasis of this report is on our travelling, the job still takes the biggest part of my time. With 8 hours a week, lecturing is still a strong commitment. One of the courses for future heads of laboratories on „leadership“ was so strongly overbooked we had to give it three times. But the major event last year was certainly the European congress of Clinical Chemistry in Basel where I was responsible for the scientific program. By the beginning of the year most of the 160 speakers and chairpersons have accepted their invitation, but we had to ask for abstracts and exact titles, remind most of them, write the final program, proofread it and correct the hundreds of poster abstracts. It was very difficult to get a speaker for the lecture on „leadership in scientific research“ and finally I begged Jon Brodie to give this talk („you can bullshit about anything“). I was glad he accepted and he did a fantastic job. His talk was interesting, witty, well prepared and spiced with the most delicious slides. For me this was of particular importance because I was the chairman of this session on leadership. The congress as a whole went very well and the scientific program got

¹ This is a summary of the 6 page illustrated German version which we will gladly send on request

excellent grades. The social program was superb and the participants were happy.

Bangkok, Taipei, Shanghai, Wuhan, Beijing, Hongkong

Silvia and I were very lucky to have Patrick and Graziella Pei with us on our long trip to China. Patrick is an assistant at the institute and a friend of ours. Born in Shanghai, he speaks and writes Mandarin.

We started in Bangkok because we were asked by Bertrand de Castelnaud from Roche Diagnostics Division to participate in a small meeting there which was at the same time a launch event for a new instrument, the Integra. We arrived the day before the meeting and flew to Taipei the day after so there was, at least for Patrick and me who gave three talks, practically no time left for sightseeing. In Taipei we were visiting a University laboratory, gave again three talks, had dinner with the participants and Patrick gave precious instructions about the features and advantages of the Integra. We got some time to relax at the pool (it was very hot during the whole trip). The trip to Shanghai took a whole day, because we had to go through Hongkong. In Shanghai we attended a sino-american meeting where we met many familiar faces from the USA. But one day before the meeting we had again our talks, this time with simultaneous translation into Chinese. Patrick changed into Yao-Chang Pei and spoke in Mandarin. Our speeches were well accepted by the big audience. Silvia and Graziella were shopping a lot and got to know Shanghai much better than we did. Obviously, and since the beginning of this trip we have been invited out every evening. One lunch on the invitation of Patrick's brother is especially worth mentioning, not only because of the lovely company of Patrick's relatives, but also because of some of the items served; how about roasted back of snake, snake skin salad, grilled scorpions, sea cucumber? I tasted everything and found the scorpions to be my favoured dish. After taking two days off (Saturday and Sunday) to visit Suzhou and Hangzhou we flew to Wuhan, where - much to my surprise - I was nominated visiting professor of the Tongji Medical University. We also were lecturing to a big audience again and Jianmin Wu, our host who spent some time in Zurich, had prepared a true non-stop program. Fortunately, we decided even before coming to Wuhan to skip the trip to Xi'An that was originally planned. The changes, check-in at airports and in hotels were exhausting together with our lecturing program and the many new professional contacts we made. So, we got directly to Beijing and had three days with no obligations. We saw of course Tian An Men place, the forbidden city and the great wall. After our lectures, the visits of laboratories and of a clinic for traditional Chinese medicine, and a lunch with our host Prof. Zhang, the hospital director and the president of the National Center of Clinical Laboratory Sciences we were again free for another day of sightseeing. In Hongkong we were again meeting with Roche's Laura Lau and Bertrand de Castelnaud. At the dinner they offered Dieter

Doering, an old friend from Boehringer, took part as a big surprise. Another surprise waited for us on the next day when we were visiting three different Laboratories, partly as a sort of door opener for the Roche people. At the Prince of Wales hospital we were going to meet Prof. Yem who turned out to be Magnus Hjelm with whom I was together at so many committee meetings some time ago. After another dinner and lunch with relatives of Patrick my time was up and I had to leave for a first meeting in Zurich only two hours after my arrival early Saturday morning. Silvia and the Pei's stayed for another couple of days.

At the end of the year

This has been another busy year. One is often the victim of one's own initiatives, but as long as there are initiatives there is life. It has also been a good year for us and we are grateful for the many new experiences we could have.

The children are well. We do not see them very often though - no wonder with all the travelling. But we spent a few days of vacation together with Karin's and Zita's families, met Astrid several times, often to play „Rommy“ and I had lunch or dinner with Gregor at different occasions. He has passed his second exam as a mechanical engineer and will start his practical work in Zurich soon. He will be much closer to us then, but not for long, since I will take another sabbatical year to write a book about laboratory management. Most of the work will be done here in Laudun, where it is calm and peaceful. With Internet and all the modern means of communication I will have no problem staying in contact with office and family. I will continue some of the functions I have at the hospital, so each month I will be back in Zurich for a couple of days.

We wish all our friends a happy and friendly new year and we hope to see many of them in the near future.