

# 2010 The Year in Review

Friday, 24 December, 2010 at 17:10

This year was a relatively quiet one. Life is pretty good here in Switzerland, with very few exceptions. We were unsuccessful in finding a house to buy, but we're still looking and are optimistic that the problem can be solved. The first step is for Jackie and I to agree on our criteria, after that it should get much easier. We haven't bought a car yet either since it generally isn't required, and we rent one for the four or five times a year one is needed. We have a pretty regular daily schedule, so we fit into Swiss society quite well. I normally ride my bicycle to work, and this year won the office prize for the most kilometers – but that was only because they kindly allowed me to include the trip down to Bern for my German lessons in my “commute”.

Just like last year, Jackie and I attended many German courses, but we're still struggling with the language barrier. I'm taking an 'intensive' course four mornings a week and Jackie's class is a more leisurely two mornings per week, but she does way more homework than me. We attended a Goethe Institute course in Dresden that I would recommend to anyone. It's a combination of language and culture – with German classes in the morning and trips to castles, museums, art galleries, restaurants, operas, Leipzig etc. in the afternoon and evenings. I guess in hindsight we are making some progress. For example we are getting some of the jokes and can follow some slow moving TV programs. It's a start.

As far as travel goes, we managed to stay just a few steps ahead of catastrophe. Following on the trip to Greece last year just before that country had a financial meltdown, we went to Ireland this year and did the same to that country, then went to Stuttgart just before the Stuttgart21 demonstrations and followed that up with a trip to Rome to visit Samantha, and they are now rioting in the streets. We also went to Morocco, but that country appears to be still OK as of this writing, so maybe it isn't just us. We'll try going to Copenhagen as well, so if you hear about a disaster there, we've already left. We made local trips to Montreaux for the jazz festival, Zurich because we figured we finally should see more than the airport, Thun by bike, Lausanne to visit Samantha, La Pradet to visit Sheila, and Kandersteg and Chur for winter sports.

At work, there are even fewer people in the Gümligen office now, but this is just natural attrition with the hiring freeze on. I'm slowly getting accustomed to the Product Design role although other people would beg to differ. Due to a 'rationalization' of locations around the world, I'm now working with a team in China *and* North America, but no designers in Gümligen are working with the software developers here. Not a very rational rationalization in my opinion. With the difference in time zones the

work day burns the candle at *both* ends, and I'm basically working by myself again. If you remember, those were the big reasons I finally packed in that alone-in-my-basement self employment thing.

I replaced my Blackberry with an HTC Desire. It's one of many Android smart phones out there. It's become another hobby of mine because the barrier to entry for programming the thing is very low, unlike with the Blackberry and iPhone. I'm constantly amazed at the computing horsepower that one can carry in a pocket, and this means many ideas I have are now possible – and it's a Java platform, my favorite language. One of the ideas I'm working on is an app that can translate a picture you take, something like what Edwin (<http://neureau.com/>) does for speech to speech, except translating text to text. Speaking of hobbies, I still haven't got my CNC machine, or a 3D printer, or other manufacturing devices, but I'm still looking around.

The kids are having fun. Samantha has finished her 4A school term in Rome and starts back on a work term in Lausanne after a short holiday break with her friends and then family. Alex is in her final year at Gymnase français de Bienne and will have to decide what she wants to do and where she wants to go next pretty soon.

Best wishes to everyone, and have a healthy and happy 2011.