

Christmas 2013



Nam "Mad Dog" Duong – Outlaw



Companion of the Holy
Royal Arch of Jerusalem



Visiting Hiram Lodge #50,
Madison, Wisconsin

How The West Was Won – Plans for Nam to attend a professional workshop in Wisconsin in July rapidly morphed into plans for a four-week trip to the USA. In late June we flew into Salt Lake City – now there's a city like no other – to join a tour of the Wild West. On the shuttle bus at the airport we met Virginia and Richard Schindler who were also about to join the tour – we struck up a friendship immediately, dined together that evening, and became the gang of four for the rest of the adventure. We headed north past the Great Salt Lake, clipped the corner of Idaho, and arrived in western Wyoming. Several days in the Grand Tetons and then Yellowstone followed ... we'll let the pictures speak for themselves! A raft ride on the Snake River in the shadow of the Tetons was a highlight – sighting a bald eagle on a tree branch at water's edge was an inspiration. I found the thought of about one-half of the Yellowstone National Park being a huge 4,000 square kilometre active volcanic caldera rather scary. The "Old Faithful" geyser is famous, but the entire area is covered in volcanic activity. The tour then trekked across the vast open spaces of northern Wyoming. On Nam's birthday we stayed overnight in Cody and saw a country music band at the Cody Theatre. The Tour Director had tipped them the nod, and the whole theatre sang "Happy Birthday" to Nam! After passing through the Bighorn National Forest we stayed at a "dude ranch" called U-Cross. Nam opted for horse riding, I opted for a rest. The final leg of the journey was a visit to the Crazy Horse and Mt Rushmore Monuments in South Dakota.



Virginia: "That pesky Aussie is still hanging around"
Richard: "There's a boiling steam vent just behind us"
Both: "They'll never find the body – hehehe!"



"Why did the bison cross the road?"
"Because it damn well wanted to – are you going to argue with it?"



The Irma Hotel in Cody, Wyoming was built by "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and named after his daughter Irma

You Went Where? – From Rapid City we were to fly to Detroit via Chicago to visit a friend, Kristoffer Gair, an author who writes under the name Kage Alan. Violent electrical storms swirled Chicago that day – we made it to Chicago, but the Detroit flight was cancelled. Chicago airport was in chaos, and I didn't fancy trying to find overnight accommodation (and more storms were predicted for the next day), so I asked if there were any flights at all into Michigan. They managed to get us and our luggage onto a flight to Lansing. It was only once we were in the air that I realised that I had never heard of Lansing, nor bothered to check where in Michigan it was. Kristoffer cheerfully made the 300 km round trip from Detroit to collect us! Detroit wasn't nearly as scary as people think, although we made sure we kept close to Kristoffer. The day after we left, the City of Detroit officially declared bankruptcy – a coincidence?



Australian Feral meets American Gothic



Da boyz in the Detroit 'hood



Chicago gangsters aren't what they used to be

Chicago, One of the World's Great Cities – From Detroit we flew (uneventfully) back to Chicago. The architecture of Chicago is stunning and we did heaps of sightseeing. Chicago is also famous for its night-life, but we were well in bed by then each night – maybe next visit. We drove to Madison, Wisconsin, for Nam's workshop. I left Nam hard at work and enjoyed the scenic pleasures of Madison and the surrounding countryside. I made a pilgrimage to Taliesin, the estate of the iconic architect Frank Lloyd Wright. After the workshop, we drove back to Chicago for another few nights before making the long haul back to Australia – and reality.



Chicago – we're falling for you!



"So bright ... so beautiful ... ah, Precious!"



The Table Top Boys

An Accumulation of Little Miseries – 2013 has not been the best year for me health-wise again. I started the year with some surgical reupholstering to the abdomen and things never really got better from there. I have a number of what the doctors delightfully call co-morbidities, and they plus their treatments interact in a devil's playground. In August I had a bizarre course of treatment called Trans-cranial Magnetic Stimulation. It proved to be completely ineffectual in my case – I might as well have sat at home and hit my head with a tack hammer and saved everyone the bother. That was followed by a medication augmentation that worked well for a few weeks and then very nasty side-effects kicked in. I find that by the end of the day I am exhausted, and so I do not go out much in the evenings. One activity that suffered as a result was that I hardly made it to any Wagner Society events this year, although I shall be master of ceremonies at the End of Year Lunch in a few weeks.

Aprons and Bats – I have made the effort to keep up my Masonic duties. I am now Senior Warden of Prince Alfred Collegians' Lodge and Junior Warden of Saint Andrews Lodge. In March I was Exalted as a Companion of the Holy Royal Arch of Jerusalem. While I go off with my aprons and gauntlets, Nam is active in his table tennis club, playing and practising several times a week. Nam's team in the Winter competition came runners-up, and in the current season he is in a team in the finals again.

Operation Sovereign Borders – November 18th was a signature date this year: it marked our fifth anniversary and was also the day that Nam had his citizenship interview and test. They clearly thought that anyone with the resilience to put up with me for five years must have the right sort of toughness of character that Australia wants in her citizens, as the citizenship application was approved. We now are waiting for the official ceremony. A very close friend of Nam's, Minh, is coming to stay with us for Christmas, and we are all getting excited about that too. And another big excitement was the recent purchase of a new car. My trusty Toyota Corolla had served me well for 11 years, and it was time to trade her in. I've bought a new Honda VTi-LN, which comes with cruise control, climate control, mind control, and the list goes on – apparently it even lets you drive it places! We are both looking forward to the holidays, and we take this opportunity to wish you good health and happiness in 2014.



Best wishes for 2014, with love from Alan and Nam