Part of the attraction of living abroad for a year is that you are much freer to change. Jen has used the year to strengthen and solidify certain aspects of her self while exploring new ways of being. Her blond hair – which I am now embarrassed to say I strongly resisted – and her embrace of Nordic/City fashion, is an outer sign of her inner transformation.

One of the dominant themes of Jen’s year has been Art. The absence of an extensive network of friends here in Helsinki made for a big increase in free time, even though the kids’ school days were much shorter here than in Missoula. And Jen used this extra time to paint. It has been a very productive year for her in terms of output, but also in terms of art sales, both in Montana and Finland. Also, she has given and a number of presentations on her art to organizations here in Helsinki.

Jen’s work changed a great deal throughout the year as she explored new ways of expressing herself. Early in our stay, Finnish design had an influence. More recently, she has returned to familiar subject matter with a new perspective, style, and skill.

Art aside, Jen continues to be our family anchor. She keeps things running smoothly and tempers my more mercurial way of being. And although she has not found a substitute in Helsinki for her friend network in Missoula, she has made some great new friends through the American Women’s Club.

A ritual that we kept going through most of the year was a weekly morning trip downtown to enjoy coffee or tea in a café. We both agree that once we’re back in Missoula we’ll miss the European sidewalk café experience. A weekly date, though, is something to keep. It has been very good to have a stretch of undistracted time together every week. We will also miss walking, following coffee, around Helsinki’s wonderful downtown; though unassuming, it contains architecture of consistent high quality. Walking in a well-put together city is a joy that we did not know before Helsinki, and that we will miss.

A major highlight of the year for Jen was her extensive travels: Norway/Sweden, skiing in Lapland, Spain, Estonia, Ireland, and Paris. Also, running and cross-country skiing in the local city park/forest gave consistent pleasure. And she was very happy to have her mom and brother visit.
A recent painting.

On one of our weekly dates in downtown Helsinki.

On the chair lift at Pyhää Resort, Lapland.