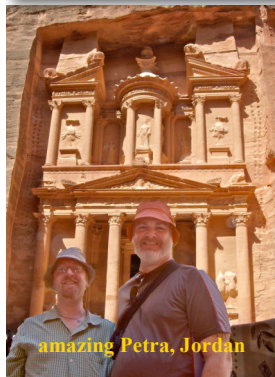




Dead Sea mud



amazing Petra, Jordan



Jerusalem



Tel Aviv, from Jaffa



Vancouver



Portland

**2009**'s highlight for me was, of course, an unforgettable monthlong trip to **Israel and Jordan** with Kevin, my first since 1987 and his first ever. We explored the country from end to end for 18 days, then enjoyed ten days at a slower pace in Tel Aviv. For me, the high points included snorkeling among the fish and coral in the Red Sea; riding camels with Bedouins in Jordan's Wadi Rum; beholding the amazing ruins of ancient Petra, carved out of the rosy mountainsides; driving through the vast Machtesh Ramon crater; cooling off in desert waterfalls at Ein Gedi; covering ourselves in therapeutic Dead Sea mud and floating in its salty waters; climbing Masada at sunrise; a daylong guided tour of Jerusalem's Old City, including walking on the ramparts and visiting the Western Wall and Temple Mount; attending choral concerts with Israeli friends in the churches of Abu Gosh; lunching at the top of the Golan Heights, higher even than an ancient fortress with a commanding view of the Galilee; soaking in warm springs on the shores of the Kinneret; clambering through the caves in the white chalk cliffs on the Lebanese border; a sunset concert on the shores of the Mediterranean in Caesarea's Roman amphitheater; the charming old neighborhoods, galleries, and markets of Jaffa and south Tel Aviv; the plunk-plunk of paddleball games during lazy days on the beach, just minutes from our apartment, then evenings on bustling café-lined boulevards; an exuberant, colorful Gay Pride celebration in the parks, streets, and beaches of Tel Aviv; discovering cool restaurants everywhere; reconnecting with an old college friend; getting to use my Hebrew extensively; and visiting both familiar haunts from previous trips and also so many new sights, all seen through Kevin's fresh eyes. I can't wait to go back! (Both Kevin and I kept travel blogs, including photos; mine is at <http://bit.ly/4A3yl6>; his is at <http://bit.ly/63gr20>.)

◆ As part of my career shift to freelance **editing**, I established Rich Text Editing LLC ([www.richtextediting.com](http://www.richtextediting.com)), joined the Northwest Editors Guild, and attended its spring conference. I've been editing monographs for a Boston natural medicine database company, but have also edited a first novel, and worked for a local radiology center and a Mumbai company that helps Japanese academics ready their articles for publication. My **volunteer** gigs included serving as the program book editor for the Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival (SLGFF) and proofreading the Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF) program guide and the Greater Seattle Business Association's directory. (I would very much appreciate any **referrals**!)

◆ In January, Kevin and I trekked north to the Skagit River Valley to join our irrepressible friend **Matt** for his birthday wish: eagle-watching. The day was memorable: quite a few eagle sightings, some good pictures, and a great time in the snow along the river, the beautiful mountains all about us, ending with a sumptuous buffet at the Tulalip Casino. Matt was thrilled (<http://bit.ly/5F9Tle>). Hardly a week later, we were shocked and terribly saddened to hear that Matt had died, a result of his epilepsy. We established a memorial page on Facebook, where friends expressed their grief, related many happy memories, and posted pictures and videos. Two memorials followed: a raucous karaoke evening, befitting Matt's exuberant personality; and a subdued ceremony at beautiful Deception Pass, where we burned memorabilia from the first memorial and set candles on the water to float away (<http://bit.ly/6WXliV>).

◆ Kevin and I made two winter trips to **Portland**, once for a cocktail party and once to see "Wicked" on stage (again). We also visited with my friend Jim, explored cool neighborhoods, discovered some great restaurants and diners, and made our pilgrimages to Powell's Books, the Saturday Market, and Voodoo Donuts (<http://bit.ly/67WtE4>; <http://bit.ly/8IIT8N>). Summer **getaways** included a restful weekend (reading in the hammock by a gentle creek) at our friend Klaus's wooded idyll in the wilderness outside Ellensburg, WA (<http://bit.ly/5Cu1VS>) and a day with our friend Sephy at the bucolic gay campground in the mountains north of Seattle (<http://bit.ly/8H1Cyh>). Over a few August days in beautiful

**Vancouver**, BC, we used the full passes to the gay film festival that Kevin won in an auction, taking in six films plus the opening night bhangra dance party. We also visited our favorite gelato and breakfast joints, bookstores, and neighborhoods; explored a new part of town; and caught some "Bard on the Beach" (outdoor Shakespeare), even if we did mistakenly attend the wrong performance! (<http://bit.ly/5mc0II>)

◆ Summer brought **visitors**: Malka and family on their annual sojourn from Israel; Liz, a schoolmate from age 5 to 18, and her family, on vacation here (thanks, Facebook!); and two friends of Kevin's from St. Louis, whom we took on a whirlwind tour of the city. In the fall, Daniel came back to Seattle from San Francisco for a week that included my birthday dinner and our friends' annual Halloween bash (<http://bit.ly/8rn9oJ>).

◆ **Cinema** dominated our social life, including four festivals (Jewish, youth, and two LGBT fests, in Vancouver and Seattle, the latter where Kevin is the volunteer coordinator). We also attended three wildly popular outdoor movies; our first Hump; a Romanian vampire flick in Olympia; a very entertaining "bad movie" series (think "Gigli" and "Rhinestone"); and maybe half a dozen Bollywood films at a local theatre that screens them the same time they premiere in India. Not to mention all the Netflix and first-run films and my annual festive Oscar party. We also enjoyed **concerts** by Idan Raichel (multiethnic fusion from Israel), Lykke Li (Swedish pop-rock), Bajofondo (Rio Plata tango fusion), and the Esoterics (a chorus of which Kevin is a member). Further afield, we took in a traditional and two transgressive drag shows (Trannyshacks), I got a kick out of the spectacle of Teatro ZinZanni (cabaret-circus-vaudeville plus dinner) with Ken, and the gang returned for the much-anticipated season of "Project Runway."

◆ Now over two years **together**, Kevin and I made new acquaintances at the Seattle Gay Couples group we joined. We've both exercised our second languages: my Hebrew at regular Meetups; and Kevin's Swedish at a movie or pancake breakfast at the Swedish Cultural Center. We were also delighted at the 53% vote to uphold "everything but marriage" (state, not federal) benefits for domestic partners in Washington State, in contrast to the sad defeat in Maine.

◆ Please keep in touch! My email is [rmisoac@gmail.com](mailto:rmisoac@gmail.com), or you can find me on Facebook. As always, I wish you and yours a happy, healthy year to come.

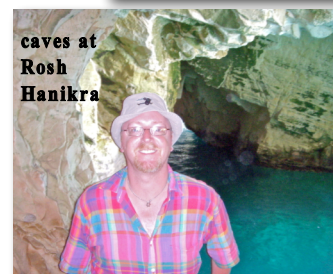
*Rich*



Wadi Rum, Jordan



Haifa's Baha'i Shrine



caves at Rosh Hanikra



Tel Aviv



eagle-watching with Matt



Seattle and Mt. Rainier



Halloween