

December, 1986

Dear Friends,

It just can't be December again--we must be getting old! We realized this Thanksgiving that we were spending our 20th holiday season in our house. That doesn't seem possible, but when we moved in here we were expecting Beth--and that has been a while ago. We hope that you are well and that you are looking forward, as we are, to hearing from family and friends during this holiday season. We all seem to live such busy lives with little time for letter writing, that it is a real pleasure to sit down, curl up with the mail, and find out how you are doing.

Mardie, our youngest, is 14 now and enjoying her freshman year at Austin High School. She is growing up so fast--loves to talk on the phone and has lots of friends. She is doing well with her viola--made fifth chair in the region orchestra competing with older high school players. Orchestra is far from her favorite subject, though--she is enjoying her English class the most and has a really outstanding teacher.

Sarah, 17, is a senior and has just spent a tiring Thanksgiving holiday working on her college applications. She was commended by National Merit for her performance on the S.A.T. and is a top student at Austin High. She is applying to a variety of schools--Carleton, Brown, Rice, University of North Carolina, University of Virginia, Rice, Williams, Yale and UT. She really wants to go away to school, so this is a time of some stress for her--filling out all of those forms. She continues her interest in gymnastics and hopes to compete on the team this year. She sprained her ankle in practice last week and has spent this week on crutches. We are hoping it will heal quickly. In October we sent her up to Oberlin for five days to see her sister and to get a feel for a smaller college campus.

Beth, 19, is enjoying her sophomore year at Oberlin. The high point of her freshman year was last May when she went with the Oberlin orchestra and played a concert in Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center in New York--an all Beethoven program accompanying Andre Michel Schub on the piano. She went to UT this summer and visited her room-mate for 10 days in New Mexico. After much thought she has decided to drop her English major to devote more time to her music. It really is amazing to hear her say that she wants to practice four hours a day, but she does. She will be home for the holidays on Dec. 20 and we are looking forward to seeing her.

Mel celebrated our green VW bug's twentieth anniversary (we bought it twenty years ago in Paris) by researching paint shops and getting the car painted. He has spent a lot of time redoing the inside, too, and it is really beginning to look spiffy. He is still enjoying his work and playing tennis. He teaches the intermediate Sunday School class (I do the high school one) at our church. We sent Mel to Oberlin to visit Beth for a weekend for his birthday. He got to hear Beth play in the Oberlin orchestra doing the concert which she played in New York the following week. He still is a Macintosh computer enthusiast.

Pat. My life has changed the most in the past year. I had been thinking about going back to work next year, but last spring I heard about a part-time opening for this fall at St. Andrew's Episcopal School here in Austin. I have spent most of the last fifteen years working very hard for the public schools, so I had never thought about looking at a private school for a job--but the idea of a half-time teaching position was very appealing. I applied--and was hired. Fortunately I had most of the summer to get ready for this. I had been out of teaching for 19 years, and, except for my weekly newspaper column (which I am still doing), had not worked (for a salary!). Anyway, I am now teaching 6th grade language arts (reading, vocabulary, writing, spelling, composition, grammar, handwriting) to two classes each morning. I am getting up at 5:25 a.m. every morning so I can run 3 1/2 miles before getting ready to go to school--I am becoming more familiar than I ever thought possible with the night sky. I am at work before 8 and can leave about 12:30 or 1. In addition to getting back into teaching I am becoming familiar with the Book of Common Prayer in chapel every day.

I thought the first two months would kill me. The first day of school I nearly burned the house down by leaving a pot of black beans on high on the stove while I went out to lunch with friends to celebrate my new job. About a month into school, just after we had gotten rid of the fleas in the house, our 12 yr. old dog Tiger got out of the yard, was hit by a car and had to be put to sleep. I am still doing just about everything I was doing before, so it is a real juggling act. I miss my old life, but I am enjoying teaching again. Mel has been really good about helping with things around the house, bless him.

What with juggling summer school schedules and painting the house, we did not have time for a vacation trip unless you count three days in Salado, about 60 miles from here. We did, however, enjoy a wonderful week's visit with our long-time Florida State friends Dick and Sue Berkley and their daughter Jennifer in August. We are looking forward to the next Winter/Brown family reunion which will be held at Jenny Wiley State Park near Prestonburg, Ky., from Aug. 16-23. If you live in the area or will be near there, come by and see the clan. Look for my brother's radio show on your public radio station this spring (Robert Winter--Pacific Coast Highways). We hope that the coming year will be a good one for you and that we will hear from you soon. We pray that this joyous season of the Christ child will be one of happiness for you and that the light from the Christmas star will lead the troubled earth toward a time of peace and goodwill for everyone.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.



Mel & Pat
Beth,
Mardie & Sarah
Oakes



