

December, 1995

Dear Friends,

Thanksgiving has come and gone and the holiday season is here, a time of rejoicing and happiness for most, a time for reflection and remembering times gone by, a time to think of and pray even more ardently for peace, a time to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. We send you our best wishes and hope that you are well.

This has been a year of wonderful family celebrations for the Oakes family. Our 1995 started out spectacularly when on Sunday, January 1, Sarah and John showed up after church in time for coffee hour with the wonderful news that they were engaged and would like very much to get married in July. Whew! It was a very busy few months (Mel and I and Sarah and John spent a good part of spring break addressing invitations), but we had a lovely wedding on July 8, at our tiny church which was filled to the brim with happy friends and relatives including my folks, Nancy and her family, Robert and his family and Beth's boyfriend Mark. Sarah's bridesmaids included her two sisters (Beth also played the viola before the service accompanied by her Uncle Bob). John Modine, Sarah's husband, is from Houston, has a terrific family, and works in the area of quality control in chemical plants. John's groomsmen included his two brothers, and his sister participated in the service. He has just accepted a new job with the Petroleum Institute of America, has been training for the new position in Dallas, and will be moving to Washington, D.C., in January. Sarah has a great job teaching honors chemistry in the new Stephen F. Austin High School in Sugarland and will finish out the year there before joining John in Washington. Fortunately, the company is paying for John to come home on weekends or for Sarah to join John, but it will still be a hard few months for them. Two weeks ago I finally finished the quilt that I had started for Sarah 12 years ago and have been quilting for the past two years.. It is somewhat unusual since because of my back, I quilted the whole thing standing up! Mel and I delivered it a few weeks ago when I went to Houston for a school meeting.

The wedding was on July 8, carefully timed not to interfere with the family reunion which was held near Lake Mascoma, Enfield, New Hampshire, the week of the 15th-22nd. Sarah and John went on their honeymoon to the British West Indies, got home a week later, got on a plane the next day and flew to New Hampshire to join the rest of the family. We had a fabulous time at an old inn which we took over for the week. We had two sets of newlyweds, lots of cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings--and lots of folks who had not been able to make other reunions which were not so close to the Winter/Brown New England haunts--including our 94 year old Aunt Marian!. For most of the week we had between 45-50--and a great time was had by all. We all particularly enjoyed the use of the commercial kitchen on the premises which was far superior to the minute kitchens we have worked in at prior reunions. John fit in beautifully with all of the merriment by performing brilliantly at the family talent show, balancing a number of objects on his chin--a lawn chair, a bat, and a skateboard were a cinch, but the checkbook bounced!

After the engagement announcement, but before the wedding, we had a wonderful 6 days in New York in April in honor of the Maia Quartet's New York debut. Since this was a once in a lifetime event, we made sure that Mardie and Sarah came along. My folks also joined us as did sister Nancy and cousins from Boston. It really was an extended family event since it was the first time that all of the quartet parents had had a chance to meet one another (coming from New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina and Texas). Needless to say, the quartet played brilliantly to a full house (about 250 people including 2 of my former Sunday School students who are living and working in the NYC area) in the concert hall at Juilliard. Now we are beginning to make plans to attend their next big concert which will be in Alice Tully Hall on April 23rd. This is a much bigger hall, so if you are going to be in the area, do plan to come! Beth continues to thrive and enjoy New York, but they are looking for a place for next year when their Juilliard position is over. The quartet is doing well and traveling to places like Portland, Ore., Baltimore, Kansas City, Aspen, etc. It looks now like they will be based in the Baltimore/Washington area and Sarah and Beth are quite excited about that prospect. We are looking forward to having the quartet here again in January as they were last January. They put on two concerts and perform and visit in schools while here.

Mardie finished out her year of work with an architecture firm in Houston, came home and worked here this summer and was able to take time off to go to the family reunion and travel for a few days with her grandparents. This fall she is back at Rice finishing her last year of architecture school. She is looking at a variety of options for next year including graduate school or getting a job. She is very interested in working in the area of housing for the poor, so is looking into jobs in social work or a master's in social work. We were delighted to have her and her boyfriend home for Thanksgiving.

Mel and I have clearly had a busy year. Fortunately Mel's health continues to be very good and I have had some improvement in my back after 3 cortisone injections into my sacroiliac joint this fall. After the wedding and the reunion we needed some time to ourselves, so we spent a spectacular week in Maine staying at charming bed and breakfasts, meeting a wonderful cousin of my mom's, a Bar Harbor native, and visiting an esteemed physics colleague of Mel's. This past spring Mel received another great teaching honor when he was one of twelve UT professors who were appointed to the newly formed Academy of Teaching Excellence at the University. About a month ago the twelve were honored at an elegant banquet where they had impressive medals hung around their necks by the President of the University and the Provost. I continue to enjoy my teaching and love all my children.

There is still no word on whether my brother Robert and his family will be coming to Austin and UT. Robert has had a rather high profile this year being featured in People Magazine (April 17 issue--check at your dentist's or the local beauty parlor!) and the alumni magazines of Brown University and the University of Chicago.

You are probably bored silly by now, but there has been a lot to tell. We look forward to hearing from you. You are all a wonderful part of our lives and we hold you in our thoughts and prayers. MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU AND YOURS!

