

December, 1997

Dear Friends.

The years fly by--this is our 35th married Christmas. How can that be??! I know that it means that we have been having a wonderful time if the years speed by so quickly--and that is so. We have just returned from a marvelous Thanksgiving holiday at Sarah and John's in Kensington, MD, where we were joined by Beth and her boyfriend Eugene Buck, my parents from North Carolina, and Mardie who flew up from Houston. It was so good to be together and to see both Sarah and John's place and Beth's in Baltimore. While we were visiting in Baltimore we were able to rendezvous with Mel's sister Eleanor and her husband Kennard. It was great to catch up with them, too.

Beth and the Maia Quartet continue to flourish. This is a difficult time for them, though. They will need to find a new professional home by next fall as their two year appointment at Peabody in Baltimore ends in the spring. They have had the great joy of playing all over the country and even went to Katsuyama, Japan, to perform in February. There Beth met our old UT friend Hisao Toyoda (whom we took home to Vicksburg for Christmas in 1966) and his son who took the train for several hours to reach the ski resort where the quartet was playing. Beth is the proud new owner of a gorgeous viola (1916 Italian, the same age as her Grandfather Winter). The quartet was here twice this past year--in January and again for the Austin Chamber Music Festival in June where they played to a standing room only audience at the Austin Wildflower Center. Beth with 2 other friends launched a very successful music festival, The Foothills Music Festival in Winston-Salem, NC. Her grandparents and Aunt Nancy and Uncle Doug (all the way from upstate New York) and Aunt Sandy and Uncle Chip surprised the quartet by showing up unannounced for one of the performances.

Sarah and John took a big step this summer when they bought their first house. It is in Kensington, Maryland, and is 75 years old--younger than Beth's viola! They have spent months working on various projects getting it ready for the Thanksgiving invasion of relatives. Sarah is still teaching high school chemistry at Flint Hill School in Oakton, VA, and finds that her commute from their new home is just about 10 minutes longer than from Arlington. They are looking forward to learning the ins and outs of gardening as they have a beautiful large lot. Over Thanksgiving, crown molding was cut and installed in the living room while there were many willing hands to help. They've painted and updated everything and declare themselves ready for visitors. They are located just outside the Beltway near the train line so that John can be at work at API in a relatively short time. He continues to enjoy his work and finds it challenging and interesting. Currently he is establishing API as an accredited ISO 9000 registrar.

Mardie is still working at the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation and is currently project manager for a several million dollar development with 24 units of housing and a small business incubator. The corporation is a non-profit organization which builds houses for the lowest income neighborhood in Houston. They are doing a tremendous job of revitalizing the area. She has recently moved into her own apartment after living for several years in a very cramped garage apartment behind a mansion in River Oaks for free in exchange for caring for the dogs. The dogs just became too much, she found a very nice apartment in an old area of central Houston, and she is adjusting to paying rent. Those of you who know her would not recognize her since she has gotten her long hair cut very short--but it looks really good!

It has been wonderful to have opportunities to see one another throughout the year. We had a great treat the first week in November when we got to go to Houston to hear the quartet play and to see Mardie's new apartment. Pierre Jalbert, who wrote a quartet for the quartet, is on the music faculty at Rice and he arranged for them to come and play. Mardie has had several meetings in the D.C. area, so she has been able to see her sisters on those jaunts. Immediately after school got out in June I headed for Cortland, N.Y. where I made niece Allison and Jim's wedding cakes (and will be doing the same this next summer for niece Shanti Hatch who became engaged this Thanksgiving). Brother Robert was here for a short visit to UT in the fall and stayed with us in the newly refurbished guest room (my summer project).

Mel and I attended a wonderful family reunion in New Hampshire in July. It was strange not to have any of our children there, but Beth was at a music festival, Sarah and John were getting ready to move, and Mardie had to work. More than 60 relatives were there for at least an afternoon and the hard core of our group for the week was about 35 people. I made niece Jennifer and Randy's first anniversary cake and an encore groom's cake for Allison and Jim since in all of the festivities of their wedding they hadn't gotten any. After the reunion, Mom and Dad, Nancy and Doug, and Mel and I headed for Maine. Nancy and Doug could only stay with us for 4 days, but the rest of us had a whole week together. It was so much fun. We enjoyed every charming bed and breakfast we stayed in, soaked up the cool air and the gorgeous coastal scenery, visited wonderful museums, and ate lobster, fresh fish, and blueberries until we could eat no more.

Mel continues to be in good health, a fact we never take for granted. He had a new pacemaker installed in April. He roused enough during the procedure to ask the doctor if he could have the old one. The doctor was a bit surprised, but he said it would be fine. I have suggested that we add them in a line under the old license tags we have displayed in our garage. Mel has done a wonderful job of gardening and home improvement and continues to enjoy playing tennis several times a week. His teaching and individual work with students continue to take a lot of his time. Our tiny church is pondering a move which has us both concerned.

I am in my 12th year of teaching and enjoying it more than ever. It is so much fun to be in a job where I can learn more each year--and I really do enjoy being around the children. My feet and my back have kind of leveled off so that I am relatively comfortable much of the time. I am walking 3 miles 3 times a week and even run a few blocks on good days! I have started work on a quilt for Mardie and have no idea when I will ever finish it, but it is fun to dream. I plan to be in Hendersonville in January to help Mom and Dad in the moving process to Tryon Village, a retirement community near Hendersonville. I am also hoping to be in Miami in the fall for the National Association of Episcopal Schools meeting (October 22-24). I'll take some extra days so I can catch up with Miami friends. I am looking for family reunion sites for summer of 1999 and would appreciate any suggestions you have. We need to be north for cooler weather, there needs to be a piano, a large kitchen, accommodations for 35-50 people (not bunks, but separate rooms), tennis courts and other amenities, and a nearby airport. Prices have to be reasonable, but we save money by doing all of our own cooking. If you have ideas, please let me know soon--thanks! You can send ideas to us via Mel's e-mail at oakes@hagar.ph.utexas.edu.

We wish all of you a very blessed and happy holiday season. Have a wonderful 1998.

Thanksgiving at Sarah and John's
l-r John and Sarah, Mardie, Mom and Dad,
Beth with Eugene Buck, Pat and Mel

LOVE,

