

December 2000

Dear Friends,

What an amazing year this has been! Last year at this time we were anticipating the arrival of Beth and Eugene, Sarah and John, Mardie and Deron--and my folks. Thanks to the generosity of our dear friends, the Sarmas, who let us use their house while they were in India for the holidays, there was plenty of room for the "old" folks here and the "young" folks there. We had a wonderful time and I could not imagine that anything could be better. But I was wrong. This year we are anticipating quite a different, but also joyous, Christmas as we await the birth of our first grandchild. Beth and Eugene are expecting on Dec. 13, and Mel and I will be spending the holidays in Iowa, helping out with the new baby. Eugene's mom Rose will be there from Dec. 2 until the 18th when I arrive. Mel comes on the 21st after he finishes grading his exams.

I find that this year I have quite a different perspective on the Christmas story. I wonder what on Earth Mary's mother was thinking as Mary set off with Joseph on that donkey. Surely they knew that her time was coming and that she shouldn't be traveling--even though traveling by donkey was better than walking. And, if Joseph was from Bethlehem, he must have had family there--and perhaps because of her unmarried state, no one would receive them. That must have been so hard for them. I know that they must have been pleased to see the shepherds and the Wise Men, but it must have been daunting for them with no family around. You can tell where my heart is.

Mel and I visited Beth and Eugene over spring break and got acquainted with Iowa City. It's a beautiful, small town with a vibrant university, and we very much enjoyed seeing the rolling farmland and the Amana communities nearby. We made a pilgrimage of sorts to Marshalltown, Iowa, the home of our late good friend Dick Berkley (Dick was responsible for bringing Mel to the Congregational youth group where I met Mel). We think Iowa will be a wonderful place to raise our grandchild--if it just weren't so far from here! We are looking forward to seeing their new home, which they moved into this summer. The Maia Quartet with Eugene and baby in tow will be here in March, so we will have a chance to introduce the baby to one and all. Beth and Eugene (celebrating their 1st anniversary) shared a wonderful vacation this summer with Sarah and John (celebrating their 5th anniversary) in Hawaii.

Mel and I spent a fabulous 2 1/2 weeks in Kensington, MD, with Sarah and John this summer. Since they were good enough to let us stay for so long, we were able to have quiet days alternating with touring days. John had to be out of town for a few days, so we took Sarah to Monticello and environs. We saw former Miami neighbors, the McDevitts, while we were in Williamsburg, we had a short visit with Mel's sister Eleanor and her husband Kennard--and we thoroughly enjoyed hanging out with Sarah and John. Mel had a grand time doing some around the house projects--fan installations, deadbolts, etc. An exciting highlight was touring the West Wing of the White House, thanks to connections of a student of mine. We reveled in fireworks on the Mall with a half million of our closest friends! Sarah is still teaching chemistry at Flint Hill School in Oakton, VA, and is enjoying teaching two new semester electives this year, Topics in Chemistry and Organic Chemistry. John, who finished his MBA in May, has been promoted and has a corner office at API. Sarah has stayed very busy creating beautiful baby quilts for all the new family additions.

Mardie has had a busy, productive year. She completed several projects (and left an important one hanging) at the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation in Houston. She has quit her job and moved during Thanksgiving week from Houston to Cambridge, MA. She will be working on her MBA at Harvard with the goal of learning how to better run a non-profit corporation. She plans to stay in the low-income housing business with an emphasis on innovative design solutions, but there are 18 months of very hard work ahead of her. She had a rental truck, so Mel flew to Houston and drove with her via Vicksburg (staying with Mel's brother Donald and his wife Bettye), and then to Atlanta where they stopped with her cousin Kamala and her family. She then went on to her Winter grandparents for one night and then on to her Aunt Sandy and Uncle Chip's. She spent Thanksgiving with Sarah and John and was joined by Deron who flew up there to help her the rest of the way to Boston and to get her settled in. There is still some chance that Deron will be moving to Boston if he can find a job there. One very sad note for Mardie this year was the loss of her dear friend Patrick Howard, a 14-year-old-boy for whom Mardie had babysat since he was about 3. Over the years Mardie has become a part of his family. Patrick died of complications from a bone marrow transplant performed in Houston that was done because of his lymphoma. Though terrible, she is grateful to have been able to spend much of his last 2 months with him and his family. He developed cancer as a result of having a progressive neurological genetic disorder called ataxia telangiectasia (A-T) which left him with a compromised immune system. He was a wonderful boy with so much heart and potential. Mardie is serving

on the board of the National Organization to Treat A-T. The story of Patrick's journey can be read online at <http://www.treat-at.org>

We had several opportunities for Winter gatherings, even though it was not a reunion year. Mom and Dad, Mel and I, and Nancy (Doug had to teach--and Sandy and Chip stayed in NC to see their new grandson Aubrey Starkey) spent a terrific week with Pat's brother Robert and his wife Julia and daughter Kelly in their nearly complete home in Pacific Palisades. It was great fun to see Robert in his capacity as host for the Getty summer concert series. I was also able to attend the wedding, a beautiful Hindu ceremony, of our foster niece Pragma Mishra in Indianapolis (I was the photographer and had such a good time!) and Nancy's family and Pragma's parents from Nepal were there as well as Mom and Dad. Just 2 weeks after that, Mel and I traveled--as did Nancy & Doug, Robert & Julia, and Sandy & Chip--to the folks in North Carolina to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary with them. We had a wonderful long weekend which was completed triumphantly when Nancy's daughter Shanti and her husband Frank (in Cleveland) presented Mom and Dad with healthy twin girls, their 3rd and 4th great-grandchildren. It was a wonderful time to be together.

I just returned from a National Association of Episcopal Schools meeting in San Francisco. The weather was gorgeous and we got to see a lot of the city. It was great to touch base with several old friends and to see my dad's cousin Ida and her husband Dave, and to spend the night with Rose Buck, Eugene's mom. I spent 5 days in Graham (with Sandy) and in Winston-Salem, NC, in August at the Foothills Music Festival in which Beth performs and which she helps to run. It was my one chance to see her while she is pregnant.

Mel and I continue to enjoy our work. We stay busy all of the time. Mel did use some of his extra time extraordinarily well this summer, though. He built a masterpiece of a cradle out of cherry for the baby. If you check out geneandbeth.com you can see what it looks like. I took pictures of the whole process and am going to make a book (working title--"Grampa Makes a Cradle") for the baby. You could also see their new house and pictures of the baby when she or he arrives. I am serving on the centennial committee for the church as we plan for our 100th birthday which is April 1st, 2001. Plans are set for the next Winter/Brown family reunion, which will be at Walden Lodge in Pigeon Forge, TN, from July 8-15. At the last reunion there was 1 child in the 4th generation. This year we are expecting to have 8 children 2 and under. It should be wonderful! There will be babies for everyone to hold.

December 13. Late Breaking News! Emily Rose Jinsook Buck was born last night (12/12/00) at 8:22 p.m. and weighed 7 pounds and 8 ounces and was 20 3/4 inches long. She is just beautiful and Beth and Eugene are doing fine! We can't wait to see them. Jinsook means "full of grace" and I reminded Eugene when he called of the old rhyme which I had checked the night before. It goes, "Monday's child is fair of face, Tuesday's child is full of grace"--and Emily was born on a Tuesday.

We wish you all the most joyous of Christmases and a very happy New Year!

Love,

**This was the family
last Christmas, 1999.
Back row, l-r, Mel &
Pat Oakes, Sarah
Oakes & John Modine,
front row, Deron
Neblett, Mardie Oakes,
Lois & Bob Winter,
Eugene Buck and Beth
Oakes.**