

December, 2001  
oakes@mail.utexas.edu

Dear Family and Friends,

I've been sitting at the keyboard for some time now--and I just don't know how to start the letter this year. Merry Christmas just doesn't work--maybe Thoughtful Christmas or Peaceful Christmas is better. We are all trying to do the "normal" things, but normal just isn't normal anymore. Our hearts and prayers are with all of those families who lost loved ones on September 11. Life is now very much divided into before and after.

Last Christmas we celebrated the arrival of our first grandchild, Emily Rose Jinsook Buck. She will be 1 year old on December 12. She has outgrown the gorgeous cradle Mel made for her, is walking and talking and is the smartest, most adorable baby that there has ever been (we are only slightly prejudiced--check out [www.geneandbeth.com](http://www.geneandbeth.com) for proof). After spending Christmas with the new family, I flew to Iowa Presidents' Day weekend for Emily's christening. In late March, the Maia Quartet performed in Austin and Beth and the 3 other quartet members were here for several days. Eugene came as chief nanny for Emily, so we got to do lots of grandparent kinds of things. In June, we spent a marvelous week with Beth and Emily at Interlochen Music Festival in Michigan (with short visits from Eugene on both ends of the week). The quartet was working at the festival and Beth needed to have Emily nearby, so we rented a beautiful cabin on the lake and babysat to our hearts' content. In July, we had a marvelous family reunion filled with babies, including Emily. In October, I flew to Iowa over Columbus Day weekend for 4 wonderful days. Now we are looking forward to seeing her again when Mel and I go to Iowa for a week after Christmas. With all of the recent sorrow, she is such a joy.

Beth, Eugene, and Emily continue to thrive in Iowa City. They both enjoy their work and have flexible schedules which means that Emily is only in child care part of the time--and they are very happy with their child care arrangements. The quartet was invited to Rome in June to play the quartet, which Pierre Jalbert (a classmate of Beth's at Oberlin) wrote for them several years ago. Pierre won the Rome Prize for Composition (and more recently, the British Masterworks Prize) and put together the program, which included the quartet. It was a marvelous experience for the quartet and all of the significant others who went along--including Eugene and Emily.

Sarah and John are still in the D.C. area. We enjoyed a lovely visit with them after the family reunion. John has received several good promotions at API and is doing very well. Sarah has had a very busy fall at Flint Hill; the school has opened a new high school and she has been in charge of setting up the new labs, etc. Her teaching continues to be quite challenging and enjoyable. She was able to accompany John for 10 days on a business trip to China in late May. They had a marvelous trip and saw and learned so much. A real highlight for Sarah was spending an afternoon in a Chinese high school surrounded by enthusiastic students asking her questions and eagerly practicing their English. We are looking forward to seeing Sarah and John here at Christmas.

Mardie is working so hard in Boston at Harvard Business School--so much challenging material for her to learn, but she is surviving quite well. Mel and I also visited her this summer after we left Sarah and John's. We got to go to several of her classes which was a stimulating experience. The professors and the students are just outstanding. It was great to meet some of her new friends and to walk through Cambridge and enjoy the ambiance. She and Deron Neblett, her boyfriend of four years (whom she met at a Rice alumni book club) are now engaged. It has been hard for them to be apart so much during this time as he is still working in Houston (he is a photographer for the Houston Press), but things should settle down for them when she graduates in June. They have no date set for a wedding as there are so many variables in their lives right now, but we are looking forward to having them here at Christmas, too!

Mel and I stay busy with our work. We still enjoy teaching as much as ever. Mel is active with tennis and the men's book club from church. He has made Emily a beautiful set of maple blocks for Christmas. His mother would be so pleased to see the beautiful job he has done with our yard--our caladiums were the envy of the neighborhood this year. It has been 10 years since his heart problem was diagnosed. We are grateful every day that we live in a time when he could be restored to full health and activity. At the neighborhood parade on the 4th of July, I bent over to pick up some candy thrown from one of the floats, and something ripped in my left knee where it shouldn't have. I kept hoping that it would get better on its own and went ahead with all of the trips we had planned, but it did not improve. I had arthroscopic (from the Greek *arthro* meaning joint--I figured if I had to have the surgery, I had to be able to spell it) on my knee 10 days after school started. I was out for 5 days and then went back to work. I just started physical therapy to make it even better. It has been an interesting experience and one that I do not want to repeat. Fortunately (I think because of my wonderful massage therapist), my back is improving, so that is a real blessing.

The family reunion was wonderful this year. This one was the 15th (since 1972), if I have counted correctly. There were 60 of us at Walden Lodge near Pigeon Forge, TN. The most amazing part was all of the babies. My folks had nearly all of their grandchildren there plus all of their great-grandchildren (6!). Five of the six great-grandchildren were born within 6 months of each other this past year. It was such a joy to see this next generation of cousins getting acquainted.

Our church has a new minister whom we are enjoying very much. He is young and has done a lot of volunteer work in Honduras, so has many stories and experiences to share with us. The church has decided to stay in its historic location near the UT campus, a decision that we are very happy with. There are many challenges in that location, but we feel that we can meet them.

Our most fervent prayer this year is for peace in this troubled world of ours. We pray for world leaders who have to make critical decisions that affect not only their own people, but also those all over the Earth. We pray that decisions will be made that consider justice for all people. We pray for the safety of our troops. With all those prayers in mind, we are grateful for wonderful family and friends who sustain us and keep us believing in a good future.