



December, 2003
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Dear Friends,

It has been such a year of ups and downs that it is hard to know where to begin. Chronological order may work the best. In January, we were delighted to have a visit from our Japanese engineering student of more than 35 years ago. Hisao Toyoda retired from his engineering firm in Japan at the end of December and came to Austin with his wife Harue and one of his sons, Taka, the first week in January. We had a wonderful time showing them around and catching them up with the changes that have taken place in Austin. I went to Iowa for 5 days to hug Emily and to help out a very pregnant Beth while Eugene went to Oakland to visit his mom.

On February 23rd we were blessed with our second grandchild, Ethan Louis (one of his Grandfather Oakes' middle names) Jinook (meaning "calm rising sun.") Buck. I went up for 12 days and helped out--being retired certainly has its advantages.

On March 26th, we got the shocking and terrible news that my youngest sister Sandy's wonderful husband Chip had died of an apparent heart attack in his sleep. The whole family rallied around and many of us were together for that long, sad weekend. Beth could not come because of her new baby, but Sarah and Mardie were able to meet us in North Carolina. The outpouring of love and support for Sandy and Jennifer, Randy, and Aubrey was--and still is--a great comfort.

In April, Sandy bravely decided to continue with a trip we had already planned. I flew to the folks, and then we drove to Sandy's. We four drove to upstate New York to surprise our sister Nancy for her 60th birthday--my first long car trip in 13 years. My back is slowly improving. Nancy's daughters pulled off the surprise party of the century! Dad was mending from a broken arm which he had broken the day he got home from Chip's funeral, but in spite of that setback, he and Mom did fine. We shed lots of tears on the trip, but also laughed and laughed--such good medicine. My brother Robert was able to come to the party and to stay for the weekend, as he had not been able to come to Chip's funeral. In late April I was once again back in Iowa City with the Oakes/Buck family to help with childcare as Beth finished up her hectic semester. The Maia Quartet is now all women with only Beth and Amy Appold left as founding members. You can check out their website at www.maiaquartet.com.

On the 18th of May, we celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. We had a wonderful party on Saturday, the 17th, and were so delighted that so many folks from out of town were there. Sarah, Mardie, Beth and Ethan came. It was Mel's first opportunity to get to know his new grandson. My two bridesmaids, Nancy and Sandy came--as did Nancy's husband Doug and Mom and Dad. Also here were Mel's brothers and their wives, Donald and Bettye and Floyd and Betty, long-time Vicksburg friends Johnny and Jane Griffin, and former neighbors Donna and Charles Jobe. It was so wonderful--after 40 years--for members of both of our families to get to know each other. The stunner of the weekend was when Sarah presented us with a gorgeous Baltimore sampler quilt that she had made for us. While the folks were here we visited Mom's sister Doris and her husband John in San Antonio. John died at 95 last month and we will miss him.

In June, we were visited by friends from Denmark, the Danielsens. We had a grand time showing them the sights. Mel and I thoroughly enjoyed our week's car trip to Vicksburg where we celebrated his brother Donald's retirement as school superintendent. It was gratifying to hear the many accolades Donald received. We got to stay in a gorgeous ante-bellum mansion bed and breakfast that is owned and operated by Bettye's son--Anchuca is its name and it is well worth a visit. It was so good to see our niece and nephews and their families. We also visited with many old friends.

In July, we spent a very busy week in Kensington, MD, helping Sarah get the house ready to sell. We worked very hard painting, making repairs, and cleaning up the yard. We were also delighted to have Mel's sister Eleanor and her husband Kennard come by for a visit. Later in the month we were back at Sarah's as a jumping off point to the family reunion which was at Coolfont Resort in Berkeley Springs, WVA. Fifty-five of us gathered--most for the whole week--to play, cook, eat, swim, and enjoy each other's company. We were so pleased to have a five-bedroom cottage just for our immediate family. Mardie made certain that her friend Tony came for the last two days of the reunion so that he could meet all of the folks. We had 11 children under four--most of them 2 or younger. It was a busy and joyous time. Dad celebrated his 87th birthday in the midst of the happy chaos.

The reunion ended on August 3rd, so Nancy and Doug and Mel and I took off for a pilgrimage to Gettysburg and then on to Washington, D.C., for two nights at a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, courtesy of Beth and Eugene. We enjoyed both locales so much--and learned a great deal. Later in August I was off again--to Winston-Salem--to help Beth with childcare with Ethan while she had a busy week at Foothills Music Festival which she runs with 2 friends.

In September, we learned why Mardie had been so determined that the family meet her friend Tony. She and Tony Deifell, a man she met while they were both at Harvard Business School, are now engaged--and as part of the engagement celebration they surprised us by coming for a three-day visit to Austin. We had a great time getting to know Tony better and talking about the joys of marriage. They hope to set a wedding date for next summer amidst getting settled into their new jobs and new city of San Francisco. Mardie is the Director of Real Estate Lending for a nonprofit organization that helps low-income communities in the Bay Area develop affordable

housing, community facilities and start businesses. Tony is working for a venture fund that invests in environmentally responsible businesses. Over the Christmas holidays, they will be attending the wedding in Cairo, Egypt, of a Harvard friend.

In October, I had already planned a pleasure trip to NC to see the folks when we found out that Mom had been diagnosed with uterine cancer and was having a hysterectomy. I was there a week later expecting to take care of Mom, but she was recuperating rapidly from the surgery. She made soup for me! Unfortunately the cancer has spread, so she is currently undergoing radiation treatment and will start chemotherapy in late January or early February. Her spirits are good and her outlook is positive--and we are all rallying around her and Dad. The retirement community where they live is a godsend--and their four offspring are visiting as often as possible. I will have been there again the first week of December.

This is a special Christmas for Mel. Following more than two years of suffering from constant vertigo, he discovered a website of a physician that outlined a maneuver (Epley's) which is able to move calcium carbonate crystals in the inner ear. The crystals are thought to be the cause of this type of vertigo (BPV). One ten-minute maneuver on the bed and it was gone! He has helped two others with the same condition. He celebrated by helping to renovate the kitchen (our 40th wedding anniversary present to ourselves), since he now could lie on his back without nausea to work on the plumbing. Tennis, gardening and woodworking occupy his leisure time. He is contemplating retiring this year. He received a Piper Professor award, one of ten honorees in Texas higher education.

I spent much of the year rehabilitating my left knee, but now it is quite strong. I am enjoying walking 2-3 miles 5 days a week with friends in the neighborhood. I continue to volunteer at St. Andrew's in the library one morning a week and am a volunteer docent at the LBJ Library one afternoon a week. Since I am retired, I have been able to be more active in our church and am a deacon again this year. I am also leading a League of Women Voter's study of our school district, which promises to be quite challenging. I have enjoyed watching one of my former 6th graders star in the Fox Network's show, "The O.C." Ben McKenzie plays Ryan Atwood (he was Ben Schenckan when I had him--McKenzie is his middle name.). I am also enjoying quilting and doing some sewing for Emily.

This year, more than ever, we are aware of how important faith, family, and friends are in our lives. We cherish the times that we have been with family and friends this year and cherish each day we can share with them. As we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we realize how much more we have to do to make this a peaceful world. We wish you a joyous Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year.