

December, 2007  
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Dear Friends and Family,

This has been such a different year from last year. At this time last December, we were planning our trip to North Carolina to meet with Pat's siblings to clear out Pat's dad's apartment. It was a special time of remembering as we went through a lifetime of pictures, letters, mementos and "stuff." We all had a good time, sharing laughter and tears. We were so pleased to be able to stop and visit in Vicksburg both coming and going and catch up with several generations of Oakeses. We even stopped in Alabama to visit a grade-school friend of Pat's and a cousin of Mel's whom he hadn't seen in 60 years.

Mel fully retired in January, so we have been learning to coordinate our calendars to make sure that we haven't double-booked ourselves. We both stay busy—Mel with tennis, genealogy, occasional subbing at UT, and various projects around the house. The house exterior got painted this year (Mel as boss and Pat as assistant). Pat finished up a four year League of Women Voters project on education in our school district, continues to docent at the LBJ Library, walks 5 days a week with friends in the neighborhood, volunteers in the library at St. Andrew's where she used to work, and has started updating the genealogy on her side of the family. We both continue to be active in our church.

In February, we enjoyed a weeklong trip to Iowa City. Beth and the Maia Quartet had put together a marvelous Scandinavian-Nordic Fest which showcased music, art, dance, and literature from that area. Besides having the opportunity to enjoy Emily and Ethan, it was even more special since Pat's brother Robert came from UCLA as a featured performer, and Mardie came to see everyone, too. When we got home we had a wonderful visit from old friends of Pat's parents, Yann and Colette Bouger from France, and we have seen Yann twice since then.

In April, Pat's spelling team, the Church Ladies, participated for the 4<sup>th</sup> time in the Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee, which benefits the Literacy Coalition of Central Texas. It was a weird match and they ran out of time, so they finally declared that we had tied for first—not quite the outcome we had wanted, but we are still technically undefeated!

In May, cousin Becky came for a visit and then we celebrated our 44<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary by taking a 6 day trip to Chicago with good friends from church, Nodie and Dennis Murphy. We were delighted by the Chicago Symphony and enjoyed visiting many museums. Beth, Eugene, Emily, and Ethan came over to help us celebrate. It was so much fun to be with the kids as they experienced their first dolphin show at the Shedd Aquarium. Pat found it more fun to watch the expressions on their faces than to watch the dolphins!

July was a very busy month. Pat and Mel, her sisters, brother, brother-in-law, and foster sister were finally able to coordinate a trip to Wrentham, Massachusetts, where we had a service of interment for the ashes of our parents in the family plot in the old cemetery next to the Original Congregational Church of Wrentham (established 1680). What had started out to be a very somber service became leavened with laughter when we realized, as we were on our way to the cemetery, that we had left the ashes back at the motel. There was a moment of stunned silence when we understood that we would have to turn around and go back, but then we laughed until we cried—and then laughed all over again when we finally got to the cemetery where we explained to about two dozen anxious relatives why we were late. It was wonderful to see so many relatives including several cousins who could not get to the family reunion. Second cousin Joanne Cummings hosted all of us for lunch at her home by the lake in Wrentham, giving us all a chance to visit.

Just days after getting home from Massachusetts, it was time for the Winter/Brown family reunion which was in Biwabik, MN. Sixty-five of us gathered for a fun-filled week enlivened by the 15 children under the age of 8. We both enjoyed putting together a retrospective slide show of all of the reunions since 1972—this was the 17<sup>th</sup> in 35 years. The talent show included some great new acts—Irish step-dancing, a children's bell choir, Emily playing the violin. Since the reunion was held in cousin Elton's home territory, the family pitched in and helped with Sunday services at his two churches—Beth on viola, brother Robert on piano, cousin Josh on organ, cousin Phil and Aunt Peg singing, cousins Martha, Becky, and Cathy on the flutes, and Pat with the children's sermon.

In August, Pat, Eugene's mom Rose, and Sarah worked out an 11 day plan so that Eugene could join Beth in China where the Maia Quartet was working and performing at the Great Wall Music Festival. While Pat was there, she got word that her widowed sister Sandra's house in North Carolina had burned to the ground. Fortunately no one was home (the two dogs who were there died), and Sandra and her daughter and son-in-law and 3 grandchildren who were living with her at the time were all OK. It has been a difficult time for her family and all of us. The outpouring of love and support for them has been amazing.

We got so entranced with the idea of China, because of Beth and Eugene's trip, that we signed up for an Elderhostel tour and spent a fabulous month of September in China. It was the trip of a lifetime—we covered more than 6000 miles within China—by train, boat (on the Yangtze), and bus. We saw and learned so much. China is growing and changing so fast. The Chinese people are so hardworking and kind—and there are so many of them! Fifty percent of all construction on Earth is going on in China right now. If you are interested, check our Web site (listed at the top of this letter), click on Travel, and look at our pictures.

In November, we went to North Carolina to be with Sandra and her family for Thanksgiving. While there we got to meet Don Covert whom Sandra will marry on Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>. It has been a whirlwind romance for them both, and we wish them much happiness. Sandra, Jennifer, Randy, and the three children will be celebrating Christmas with us in Austin. We will visit Aunt Doris in San Antonio while they are here.

Beth and Eugene continue to enjoy Iowa City with the kids. Emily just turned 7 and Ethan will be 5 in February. The Maia Quartet continues to teach and perform at the University of Iowa and Eugene continues as a college administrator. The quartet will be performing in New York and Houston just after the first of the year (Pat is going up to baby-sit for 6 days). Beth got the surprise of her life when Sarah and Mardie showed up on her doorstep for a weekend in honor of her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in October.

Sarah is still happily teaching at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in the D.C. area. The highlight of her year was a summer trip to Paris and several spots in Italy. The Paris trip was paid for by a school grant and took her on a tour revolving around Marie Curie's life in Paris. She walked around the Latin Quarter, visiting several apartments where Marie lived. She visited Marie's laboratory, which is now a museum in addition to several other science museums in Paris. There was even a little time left for the more traditional Parisian highlights and several Nutella crepes. After Paris, Sarah joined a friend for a hot week in Rome and a much cooler visit to the islands of Ischia and Capri. The trip ended with a week-long language course in Todi, a small walled city in Umbria.

Mardie and Tony are thriving in San Francisco. Mardie continues as executive director of Hallmark Community Solutions building homes for developmentally and physically challenged folks. She has attended several Echoing Green conferences and has enjoyed making contacts with other social entrepreneurs. Tony has done a number of presentations on his book *Seeing Beyond Sight* and continues to work on his "Why Do You Do What You Do?" project ([www.wdydwyd.com](http://www.wdydwyd.com)). We enjoyed a three-day visit with them on our way home from China.

We look forward to hearing from you and wish you a joyous Christmas, happy holidays, and a very happy, peaceful, and healthy New Year. We have used the word "continue" several times in this letter—we will use it some more. We continue to be grateful for all of you—and we continue to pray for peace and goodwill to all on this precious Earth of ours.