

December, 2008
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Dear Friends and Family,

Advent is here, the season of hope and expectation. This year we are filled with more hope and expectation than we have been in a long time.

Mel and I have had a busy, good year. We are particularly excited this year that the whole family will be here over the Christmas holidays! We find that we are enjoying retirement greatly and traveling a good deal. We stay active—Mel with tennis and I with my walking group. We get to San Antonio about once a month to visit my Aunt Doris. We are both enjoying working on our family genealogies. It has been a lot of fun—and very informative—to call relatives we have not talked to for a long time or never knew to hear family stories and to ask about old photos. You can see some of what we have accomplished by checking our Web site at <http://www.patandmeloakes.com>

I was in Iowa in January to help Beth and Eugene with the kids during a very busy time, and Mel and I were in North Carolina in February for my sister Sandy's wonderful wedding to Don Covert. In March, Mel and I kept the kids here in Austin for 12 busy, fun-filled days while Beth and Eugene traveled with the Maia Quartet in Japan. Sarah and Mardie came for a few days over Easter to help, which was a treat for us all.

In May, Mel and I and my sister Nancy and her husband Doug took a spectacular Elderhostel trip by train across the western two-thirds of Canada. The trains were wonderful, it was fun to have our sleeping compartment, the food was fabulous, and we spent hours in the glass-domed viewing car being served champagne every now and then. We stayed several days each in Montreal, Toronto (where we celebrated Mel's birthday with old friends), Edmonton (where we visited Mel's graduate school house mate), Jasper (where we celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary!), and Vancouver with train transport in between. We learned so much about our northern neighbor—and loved the wonderful scenery and the beautiful cities. It was so much fun to meet people from all over the world as we traveled the on the train.

In June, Mel and I attended our first Hartley reunion (his mother's family) in Vicksburg and met wonderful "new" cousins. In July, we spent a terrific 8 days in Interlochen, MI, with almost the whole family. Mardie and Tony were unable to come, so Nodie and Dennis Murphy, good friends from church, came along and fit right in with the family. The weather was cool and lovely, the company was terrific, Emily and Ethan had a great time, and Beth got to work with the quartet during the day and spend time with the family in the evening. In late July, Nancy and Doug came to Texas with Shanti and Narayan Mishra, their dear Nepali friends from Peace Crops days, whose daughter Pragya is an integral part of our family. We had a great time showing them Austin and San Antonio in the blistering heat!

October was busy. I went to D.C. and had a great 6 day visit with Sarah (Mel was supposed to come, but he got sick—sigh). I particularly delighted in seeing the National Portrait Gallery and Fallingwater, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home in nearby Pennsylvania. A few days after I got home, Mel was recovered enough for us to go back to Vicksburg for a countywide school reunion. In addition to seeing his brothers and their wives, Donald and Bettye and Floyd and Betty, Mel particularly enjoyed seeing old friends from high school days whom he hadn't seen since they were playing football on the Redwood or opposing teams. We also enjoyed delicious meals at Anchuca, the fabulous bed and breakfast and dining establishment that Bettye's son Tom Pharr runs. At the end of the month, I was off again to join sisters Nancy and Sandy and 5 other friends for a 5 day trip to NYC with a night going and coming in Upper Montclair, NJ, with a long-time family friend, Pria Sarma and her family. While in the Big Apple, we went to the opera, saw a show, walked for miles (including across the Brooklyn Bridge), and generally had a fabulous time. In D.C. and in NYC I got to visit with cousins of my dad's. We are looking forward to the Winter family reunion which will be held in Mars Hill, NC, near Asheville, June 20-27.

Beth, Eugene, Emily, and Ethan continue to thrive in Iowa City. However, there have been difficulties related to the terrible flooding in Iowa City in June. Their house was fine, but 20 buildings on the campus were inundated by the Iowa River, including the School of Music and the entire arts campus. Emily and Ethan were proud to help their mom as the community pitched in to carry instruments, books,

furniture, etc., up to the second floor of the music building. It may take as long as five years to recover the music building, so this makes it hard for faculty and students alike. Eugene's job has also been impacted by the flood, as he is in charge of space allocations for the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences--and the aftermath resulted in identifying alternate sites throughout Iowa City to house the displaced departments. Beth with the Maia Quartet performed in Japan and China, New York, and Interlochen, MI, this year and they keep up a busy performance and teaching schedule at the university. Emily, 8 in December, is a cheerful second-grader and enjoys playing the violin. Ethan, 5, is a happy kindergartener who enjoys art and playing the piano. Both of them have a great time with gymnastics.

Sarah continues teaching high school chemistry at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes in Alexandria, VA. She enjoyed a beautiful week of hiking in Sedona and the Grand Canyon this summer. She also got to sightsee for several days in Chicago thanks to the generosity of a family friend who has a condo there. Sarah is an amazing aunt to Emily and Ethan, especially this past summer as she was in charge of childcare for a week while the Maia Quartet was in Interlochen.

Mardie and Tony are still in the Bay area, but recently moved from San Francisco's Mission District to a houseboat in Sausalito, just across the Golden Gate Bridge from SF (10 West Pier, Sausalito, 94965). Mardie is enjoying riding the bus in to work, but Tony is missing some of the liveliness of the Mission as he does much of his consulting work from home. Mardie and her non-profit are nearing completion of her 3 year project of building 61 homes for 250 physically and developmentally disabled adults who have lived in a large institution which is being closed down. Many miracles are happening as people move into their new homes. We are so proud of Tony who was named an outstanding young alumnus at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in November.

There are so many things to be afraid of right now—terrorists, a troubled economy, poverty, joblessness, environmental depredation—but we cannot help but be filled with hope as the time comes for the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Peace. We can all resolve to do our part to make this world a better place. We wish you a joyous holiday season, a blessed Christmas and a very happy New Year!