

December 2009  
oakes@mail.utexas.edu  
<http://www.patandmeloakes.com>

Dear Friends,

Merry Christmas, and a very Happy New Year. I cannot figure out where the time goes—not just the past year, but the past 50 years. It was a great shock for me to realize the other day that the sewing machine that I bought with the first \$100 I earned as a Howard Johnson's waitress the summer after graduating from high school is now 50 years old! I wish I had an odometer on it. Time is flying by.

We've had a very good year filled with wonderful trips. In April and May, we were in Spain for a 16 day Elderhostel trip (Madrid, Segovia, Toledo, Granada, Cordoba, Sevilla) and then a week in England with friends (Don and Ann Kimber, friends of almost 50 years from FSU days and Meredith [Williams] and Graham Parker with PanAm and church ties to Miami and childhood). We missed going to my 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion in Miami, but the trip across the water was worth it!

In June, we were at the Winter family reunion at Scenic Wolf Resort near Asheville (the Browns were celebrating cousin Elton's retirement in Minnesota), so there were "only" 35 of us there for a fun-filled week. We especially missed brother Robert who was unable to make it. All of Mom and Dad's great-grandchildren were in attendance—there are now 16. A highlight of the week was Gramma Camp when the grandmothers and grandfathers took care of 15 of the children (newborn Lukas stayed with his mother) for part of a day. The 6 of us managed to take the kids swimming, feed them lunch, and share a movie so that the middle generation could enjoy lunch out in Asheville.

July brought us back to Interlochen, Michigan, (The Maia Quartet was working at the music festival) where we shared a wonderful, cool week with Beth, Emily, and Ethan (Aunt Sarah overlapped over the weekend). Mel had a great time introducing Emily and Ethan (and me) to the joys of fishing. The kids loved digging for worms and catching fish. We never caught anything big enough to keep—or eat, but there was a great deal of fun in the process.

In August, my Aunt Doris, Mom's last sibling, moved to a retirement community, just 3 ½ miles from our house. We are enjoying having her close-by—and are not missing the monthly drive to San Antonio to see her. Also in August we flew to Jackson, MS, where we were met by Mel's brother Donald. We met several new cousins on that trip to Vicksburg. Our family history project is expanding daily. It was great to visit with several of the nieces and nephews whom we had not seen in a long time.

We took two trips in September—a part of our strategy to get out of the heat in Austin. We have lived here 45 years and this was the worst summer we ever remember—68 days of 100+ degrees—almost breaking the record of 69 days—and almost no rain. It was pretty scary. We first went to San Francisco for a long weekend to visit Mardie and Tony. We timed our trip to see the annual Floating Homes Tour. It was spectacular—and we enjoyed sharing the experience with cousins Teresa Meikle and Peggy Meikle Egli. The following weekend we went to Washington, D.C., to visit with Sarah.

In October, we drove to Vicksburg for the annual reunion of Redwood, Culkin, and Jett high schools which closed in 1965. It is a great gathering of many of the folks who attended those county schools and a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends. While there, Mel realized that Redwood (his alma mater) did not have a Web site and the other two did. That is no longer the case, and Redwood now has a stellar site with new additions being made almost every day (go to [redwoodhs.net](http://redwoodhs.net)). Mel is having a wonderful time setting it up.

We had a special Thanksgiving holiday this year. Cousin Becky and her husband Julius Erlenbach, in San Antonio for a meeting, extended their trip to come and spend a few days with us. In addition to them, Aunt Doris and cousin Alan Koziol were at the table plus 2 new friends from Ft. Hood.

Beth and Eugene and Emily (9 this month) and Ethan (will be 7 in February) continue to thrive in Iowa City. The university is still coping with the aftermath of the terrible floods of 18 months ago which has made Eugene's and Beth's jobs more challenging. Eugene has had to scramble to find classroom space for classes since many buildings still cannot be used. Performance space was destroyed, so that has been a particular difficulty for the Maia Quartet. Emily enjoys school, the violin and gymnastics and has just joined her first orchestra, which she loves. Ethan is a wonderful gymnast and pianist and loves school. You can hear and see them play at [www.geneandbeth.com](http://www.geneandbeth.com)

Sarah is working hard this academic year helping to create a new level of chemistry class at her school. It feels like first year teaching again. Despite the time commitment, she and her boyfriend Joe have found some time to have fun cooking and hiking this fall. Over the summer Sarah took several great trips including the family reunion in NC and visits with Emily & Ethan in Michigan and Iowa. Joe was able to join her on a trip to see Mardie & Tony in San Francisco and a New Hampshire /Maine visit to see one of her friends since 6th grade.

Mardie and Tony have enjoyed spending the year living on a houseboat in Sausalito. Tony just published a major report called "The Big Thaw: Charting a New Course for Journalism" and is getting rave reviews. Mardie is launching a new housing project, utilizing Obama stimulus funds to buy and renovate foreclosed homes for low- income families and people with mental illness. They continue to love the Bay Area and feel lucky to have a wonderful community of friends, but miss being close to family!

Mel and I are staying busy enjoying our retirement. We are both involved in genealogy (Mel especially!) and church book clubs. I am still walking 3 miles with my friends on weekday mornings and Mel continues to organize and play tennis (sometimes there are 12 folks playing) twice a week. We both enjoy the opera company here in town and going to Austin Playhouse productions, and I continue to be a docent at the LBJ Library.

We hope that you all are doing well. As we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we continue to pray for peace and justice in this troubled world.