

Christmas, 2014
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Dear Family and Friends,

How did it get to be almost 2015 already! Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and Happy Holidays to you all. We have had a good year. We had several trips—to San Francisco in early May to celebrate Durham's 2nd birthday—and Mel's 78th. At the end of May we went to Vicksburg for an Oakes/Dose reunion where Mel made a presentation on the history of the two families. In late August/early September, we went (with Pat's sister Nancy—Doug could not get away) to the Maritimes of Canada. Our special mission was to meet 3rd cousin Bill and his wife Faye Griffin. His great-grandfather and Pat and Nancy's great-grandmother were siblings. We had a marvelous time exploring the area, visiting old cemeteries, and seeing the sites where Pat and Nancy's ancestors lived and worked as hunters, trappers, and guides. The Griffins were terrific and generous guides. We also managed to see the Bay of Fundy at low tide, made a quick trip to PEI to visit the Anne of Green Gables historic site in Cavendish, and then went on to Halifax to enjoy the wonderful Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, scrumptious seafood, and beautiful Peggy's Cove. We tried to go to Iowa for Thanksgiving, but the airline gods cancelled our connecting flight while we were in Dallas quite late at night, no help from AA, so we caught the last flight home back to Austin feeling very disappointed. We did have a great Thanksgiving meal with friends from church, though.

We had a number of out-of-town visitors this past year—we really enjoyed seeing them. If you are in our area, please give us a call and come by to say hello.

Pat continues to enjoy walking with her friends 5 mornings a week, working on family history and pictures, writing the Personals column for the church newsletter, participating in the women's book club at church, and visiting with Aunt Doris each week. Aunt Doris continues to do well and has been an invaluable help with family history. The high point of the year for Pat was being a volunteer for the Civil Rights Summit held at the LBJ Presidential Library where Pat has been a docent for more than 12 years. She was stationed between the elevator and the green room and got to meet and shake hands with so many heroes of the civil rights movement including Rep. John Lewis, Andrew Young, Mavis Staples, Julian Bond, Vernon Jordan, Bill Russell, Jim Brown and Graham Nash.

Mel continues to play tennis twice each week. He is almost the elder statesman of the group. He works daily on his History of the University of Texas Physics Department web site and maintains five other sites. He is still active with his book club and enjoys better health than he should expect. His New Year's resolution is to write some short stories he has had in his head for a few years. His granddaughter Emily's writing has inspired him.

Beth is in her 3rd year as Coordinator of the University of Iowa String Quartet Residency Program and is thoroughly enjoying the position. Funding for her new program was renewed for another three years, which allows her to breathe a little more easily these days. She enjoyed a trip to Austin last spring and is planning another one for February 2015. Eugene continues to work as the facilities manager for the Dean's Office. Construction is well underway for the new music building after the University lost the former building to the devastating flood of 2008. Both Beth and Eugene are very excited to see the new building rising from the ground and it is slated to open in the fall of 2016. Emily turns 14 on Dec. 12 and is a busy, active 8th grader. Her passions are drawing and writing but in her spare time she plays the violin and has discovered a real love for the bassoon. Ethan, 11, is in the 6th grade and balances his extracurricular time amongst baseball, saxophone and piano. These days his hobbies include magic tricks and card games. The Oakes/Buck family spent a magical week in D.C. with Sarah and Joe, seeing cousin Kamala, Jay and family, many beloved friends and lots of Eugene's family. They are very much looking forward to the upcoming gathering in Vicksburg!

Sarah and Joe continue to enjoy living in Arlington, VA. Sarah's wish from last year that her work life would become more manageable came true. Unfortunately, Joe's job has picked up the slack. They are hoping to get their work/life balance more in sync by the spring. Summer trips included a school-sponsored trip to Copenhagen and Stockholm to learn about the history of the physical sciences in Scandinavia along with Sarah's spending a week in Austin in August. The Oakes/Buck family spent a week visiting Arlington in July. Sarah and Joe got to spend a few days having fun with Emily & Ethan while Beth & Eugene celebrated their 15 years of marriage by spending those same days enjoying an anniversary getaway in D.C.

Mardie, Tony, and Durham moved into their renovated fixer-upper in Bernal Heights in SF just in time to meet their personal deadline of "Thanksgiving in the house!" As it turns out, this meant the very first meal cooked in the house was Thanksgiving dinner for 16 (11 adults and five kids under four). It was the perfect way to start this chapter in a home they love and that will be a great place for entertaining, both for kids and adults. Mardie continues her work at Hello Housing and is anxious to get the remodel behind her so she can focus more on what's ahead for the organization. With foreclosures dropping and home prices rising again, her organization is once again reinventing itself based on the ever-changing housing markets and reduction in public funding. Tony's put AwesomeBox (<http://www.awesomebox.com>) "out into the wild" and is getting great feedback and participation. Some really powerful stories are emerging of people using AwesomeBox to celebrate a loved one who is sick or dying. He's looking forward to 2015 to add some new features and to create a way to participate that doesn't require a Facebook account. Durham is thriving and has been excited to finally move into "The Blue House" where he has a spacious room to play in and a fun sleeping nook. Mardie and Tony have quickly discovered that the downside of his having a fun bedroom is that he wants to play instead of go to sleep! He loves climbing, fire trucks, oatmeal with bananas, his best friend Kate, *Green Eggs and Ham*, and bagels. He spontaneously says "I love you, Mommy" and "I love you, Daddy" which makes their hearts melt.

We are really looking forward to hearing from you this holiday season. We are excited about our trip to Vicksburg right after Christmas where we will introduce Emily and Ethan not only to lots of cousins and aunts and uncles, but also to the town where Grandpa grew up. We are also looking forward to the Winter/Brown reunion on Hilton Head Island July 11-18.



P.S. While talking to Nancy yesterday, I realized that I had left out a major event. Mel and I spent much of January and February going through our slides, discarding many and keeping about 5000 to be digitized. In the spring, Nancy rediscovered 9 large boxes of our folks' slides which she had brought home after they died. We hatched the plan that Sandy and I would come help her go through the slides. We had an exhilarating, memory-filled, and exhausting 4 days going through about 13,000 slides and saving 3000 to be digitized. What fun to share that time together!!