



December, 2017
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Dear Family and Friends,

We wish you a joyous Christmas, a fun-filled holiday season, and a healthy and happy New Year! Health-wise the past year has definitely been an improvement over 2016. Pat is much more mobile than she was a year ago and therefore Mel is more mobile, too. Pat's being mobile has not come about easily, but her hard work has really helped. Around the house she uses a cane at times but is mostly on her own. The two of us walk 3 mornings a week—timing it so that we run into Pat's walking group of many years. Mel holds Pat's hand until she is warmed up and when we get to flatter ground Mel holds the back of her shirt. They are walking up to 40 minutes each time and are working on extending her range. She is getting better at using her cane and uses it when out in public just to be sure—her balance was an issue before the surgeries and is complicated by the nerve damage in her legs and feet. Pat is accepting that she will probably never walk normally again, but she is so much better than she was.

Pat is glad to be back and functioning in the kitchen and Mel's cooking skills are improving, too. Everything takes longer than it used to, but she is getting better at planning for that. After a 15-month hiatus, Pat is driving again, not on any freeways, but to and from the LBJ Library, the beauty parlor, church, and to visit her Aunt Doris who celebrated her 96 birthday in June of this year. While in a wheelchair, she is still very with it!!

It was a terrible shock to learn the morning of Feb. 8, that Pat's youngest sister Sandy's beloved husband, Don Covert, had suffered a fall the evening of the 7th and had died the next morning—just days short of their 9th wedding anniversary. Nancy and Doug, brother Robert, and Sarah and Joe were able to go, but Mel and Pat were able to watch the service in real time as clever niece Allison set up a cell phone in the church on Facetime. Nancy and Pat and Sandy now do a conference call almost every evening.

Many friends and a few relatives made very welcome visits this year. Pat's niece, Kelly Winter Weil, was in town for a law meeting. Nephew Stuart Oakes and spouse, Jay Ruffner, were here for several days, Stuart's sister Jennifer Oakes Ables came from Dallas for 2 nights.. In mid-March, we needed a choreographer to figure out our schedules. We had had to cancel our trip to Sedona and the Grand Canyon in 2016 with Sarah and Joe, so we rescheduled for mid-March 2017. The complicating factor was that Beth was coming to town for a music gig then and so were Mardie and Durham on their spring break. In the end we all overlapped for a great visits.

In mid-April we had a wonderful Easter visit to Iowa City. We had not seen Emily (17) and Ethan (almost 15) (or Eugene) for nearly 2 years except for Skype visits. We loved getting reconnected with them.

In May, we had a great visit with S. Miami childhood neighbor Darragh Droz Browning and her husband Tom. On Cinco de Mayo, we climbed the 100 or so steps to the top of Mt. Bonnell, the highest point in Austin. It took Pat longer to get to the top than it did for Mel, Tom, and Darragh, but she got up and down without mishap. In June, we had a terrific time with Pria Sarma (Beth's "bestest" friend since the 4th grade) and her 2 sons, Gyaan and Jehan. In July, our daughter Sarah was here for a visit—overlapping briefly with Pat's brother Robert who was in town on business.

In June, Pat had cataract surgery. At the same time, the deteriorating lining of her cornea was replaced with a cadaver cornea lining. She has had significant improvement in her vision in that eye. She urges all of you to consider organ donation.

In October, Mel and Pat went to Vicksburg to see family and friends there and to attend a high school reunion. We had not been home in 2 years so it was really special to see so many folks we know and love. We were in Vicksburg when cousin and Formula One racing enthusiast, Jim Pierce, and his 3 daughters were here for the big race, but it worked well for them to stay in our house.

Beth, Eugene and family have had a year marked by both highs and lows. Emily (high school junior) is starting to consider colleges and is enjoying her current classes - especially British literature. A highlight for Emily was being chosen to play bassoon in the All State Orchestra where she

performed the first movement of a Mahler symphony with a terrific Korean-American woman conductor. Ethan (sophomore) is passionate about all things jazz. The Oakes/Buck household is filled to the brim with his various instruments and his free time is spent practicing, arranging, or recording music for his Youtube channel. Beth and Eugene continue to find meaning in their positions at the University of Iowa. Beth has become actively involved in racial justice work and has been joined by Emily in this endeavor. Highlights from this year included family trips to Europe, DC, the Aspen Music Festival (Beth and Eugene's old stomping grounds) and a college trip out East with Beth's best friend Pria and her family. The most difficult part of the year was losing Eugene's beloved mother Rose in the fall. Rose was an incredible woman - one of the early Korean immigrants to this country. Rose embodied strength, love, determination and deep spiritual belief. She raised her four wonderful children after the loss of her husband at much too young an age and had welcomed Beth into the family with open arms. She will be deeply missed.

Sarah and Joe are still in Arlington, VA and are making some changes to their house. They are in the midst of a master bathroom renovation. While all the details of any given day can be overwhelming, there are many times when the process is fun and hopefully there will be a beautiful bathroom to enjoy in the end. They enjoyed several visits with family, which included a spring break trip to the Grand Canyon with Pat and Mel, a visit from Mardie when she attended a D.C. board meeting in May and a visit from the Oakes/Buck family over the summer. They also were able to travel to St. Louis for a long weekend where they had a great view of the solar eclipse. Sarah attended her 30th high school reunion in the fall and enjoyed seeing good friends and spending time in Austin. Joe is still enjoying singing and is looking forward to his choir performing at the Kennedy Center in February.

Mardie is continuing to enjoy her work with Hello Housing. Despite a relentless stream of bad news on the federal front, Bay Area taxpayers recognized that they must come up with local resources to address the housing crisis, so there is unprecedented funding available for Mardie's work which is exciting. Durham has made the monumental transition to kindergarten and has started to adjust to all that comes with it. He loves playing chess and enjoys making Mardie laugh hysterically when he crosses his eyes at the most unexpected of moments. As many of you know, Mardie and Tony are separated and redefining their relationship as co-parents. So far, Durham has adjusted well to living in two houses, three block apart, and they are settling into new routines. Mardie and Durham looking forward to spending time with Sarah and Joe in DC before Christmas, and with Beth/Eugene/Emily/Ethan/Pat/Mel in the Bay Area over New Year's to celebrate the life of Rose Buck, Eugene's mother.

Mel continues his twice-a-week tennis matches. He greatly enjoys the group he coordinates. Much of his time is spent on the UT Physics History web site and with Pat, a history of the Congregational Church of Austin web site. He regularly emails or talks on the phone with many people associated in some way with these groups. His book club provides much insight and pleasure.

Compassion and kindness have always been a central tenet of the Christmas season. Let us all work to help our country extend this to the coming year. We wish you hope, love, peace, and joy.

Mel and Pat

Four family photos below.



Mel and Pat at the Grand Canyon

3/24/17 Mel and Pat at the Grand Canyon



Pat & Mel, UT Tower lit orange in honor of the members of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers

10/17/17 "Hook 'em, 'Horns"--Pat and Mel at the UT Tower lit orange in honor of the members of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers after the new inductees banquet--Mel was in the original group in 1995



Ethan Buck, freshman, & Emily Buck, junior

8/23/17 Ethan Buck, freshman, and Emily Buck, junior, on their first day back to school



Durham Oakes Deifell off to his first day of kindergarten.

8/21/17 Durham Oakes Deifell off to his first day of kindergarten at Sunnyside School in San Francisco