

## *Merry Christmas & Happy New Year*

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Dear Family and Friends,

**W**e wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas, a happy holiday season, and a healthy and productive New Year. We have had a memorable year with some wonderful trips and a real challenge. Mel is still playing tennis twice a week and Pat is still working her Thursday afternoon shift at the LBJ Library and writing a column for the church newsletter. Mel continues coordinating his tennis group and working on our family Web site (patandmeloakes.com). We walk 3 mornings a week, often meeting up with Pat's walking buddies of years past for 10-15 minutes of our more than a mile walk. We visit Pat's Aunt Doris (now 98) every Saturday. Our daughters are still in their same jobs and locales—Beth as director of chamber music at U. of Iowa, Sarah teaching high school chemistry at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes' Episcopal School in Alexandria and living in Arlington, VA, and Mardie as President of Hello Housing in San Francisco.

**W**e had 4 family-related trips this year. In May, we traveled to Iowa City for our granddaughter Emily's graduation (with highest honors) from high school. It was extra special as Sarah and Joe, Mardie, and Eugene's sister, Liz, were there, too. There was a lot of unintended drama at the graduation because of tornadoes in the area. Everyone had to take shelter in the underground tunnels associated with the UI Field House. The ceremony was an hour late starting and only a few measures of "Pomp and Circumstance" were played. Emily is now a freshman at Smith College in Northampton, MA, and her brother Ethan is a hardworking junior in high school still enjoying robotics class and playing the saxophone brilliantly

**O**ur 2<sup>nd</sup> trip was in mid-June as many of Pat's extended family (including her 2 sisters and her brother) traveled to Wrentham, MA, for the meaningful and moving memorial service for our wonderful cousin Martha who died of pancreatic cancer on Jan.1<sup>st</sup>. The service was held in the Original Congregational Church, established 1692, which many of us attended as children in our summer visits. Family members led the service and provided the music. During our 6-day visit, we were able to see other relatives in the area. For the four of us "Winter kids" it was so special to have that time together.

**O**ur 3<sup>rd</sup> trip was an Alaskan cruise with our dear friends from the Sarma family—a total of 16 in our party. Sarah came along to be sure we did not fall off the ship! It was our first cruise and we loved it. We went up and back on the inside passage, spending lots of time on our balcony—saw gorgeous scenery, glaciers and a few whales, and stopped in interesting ports. We especially enjoyed a visit in Victoria with Faqir and Raj Khanna. Faqir was Mel's housemate back in FSU days.

**O**ur 4<sup>th</sup> trip was actually in two parts. Our good friends, who in 2018 let us housesit their home in San Francisco, invited us back for a longer period of time. We went out first for 3 weeks, came home for 2 weeks and went back for 2 more weeks. In addition to the obvious advantage of being out of the Austin heat in the summer, it was such a joy to have so much time with Mardie (whose divorce was finalized last Dec.31<sup>st</sup>) and our grandson Durham, 7 1/2, who spends half of his time with each parent. We also did some sightseeing and walked and walked as we explored nearby Golden Gate Park.

**A**s we grow older there are inevitable challenges. After Pat's difficult experience with her back surgeries 4 years ago, now it is becoming increasingly apparent that she has Parkinson's disease (PD). There has been no definite diagnosis yet—that will happen in January when we finally get to see the specialist we made an appointment with in September.

**W**e are really looking forward to seeing Sarah and Joe here in Austin from Dec. 19-25—and the 2 of us will be driving to Vicksburg for New Year's. We are going to meet Beth, Eugene, Emily, and Ethan who will be driving back from a Buck family reunion in New Orleans. We look forward to visiting many of Mel's family while there.

With love and fond memories,



Mardie, Mel, Pat, Point Reyes, CA



Mel, Durham, Pat, San Francisco



Mel, Pat, Mardie, Beth, Emily, Sarah, Joe, Iowa City



Pat, Nancy, Robert, Sandy, Wrentham,



Mel, Pat, Juneau,



Mel, Emily, Pat, Ethan, Iowa City

