

December, 2020

*Merry Christmas & Happy New Year*

2507 Briargrove Dr.

Austin, TX 78704

oakes@utexas.edu

[www.patandmeloakes.com](http://www.patandmeloakes.com)

Dear Family and Friends,

Our holiday letter last year began, “We wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas, a happy holiday season, and a healthy and productive New Year.” Hopefully, that that has been the case—especially being healthy. Who knew what was about to happen? We wonder if the letter we wrote last year came from another planet. This has been a year of grief, continued racial injustice, and chaos—so many issues we need to address as a nation and as a world.

We did have one trip in 2020. We had a marvelous time with Beth, Eugene, Emily, and Ethan in Vicksburg. Along the drive to and from Vicksburg, it was fun to once again mark off the familiar towns. While there, we had wonderful get-togethers with family and friends. Beth came for a quick visit at the end of January, however Mardie’s visit in mid-March was not to be.

Pat was finally diagnosed with Parkinson’s (PD) in January by a wonderful movement disorder specialist who was able to get Pat on the proper meds—it took several months to get to the right level (that really helped). A psychotherapist and physical therapy (PT) were also really helpful!

Since the quarantine set in, Mel has done virtually all of the shopping and driving. Mel has continued to play tennis when courts were open. He walks with Pat 3 mornings a week, often with Pat’s long-time walking buddies.

We have both stayed very busy. We are very fortunate after all these years to still enjoy one another’s company! We collaborate on meal planning and cooking and clean-up. Mel works on his web sites and has tutored great-nieces and college-age friends in math and physics on Zoom. Pat has concentrated on culling, labeling, and organizing her huge number of photos. She also spends hours working on a PD exercise program with good results. She rides the exercise bike for 20+ minutes almost every evening while talking with her sisters in NY and NC. A new round of PT resulted in an amazing breakthrough with her walking. The therapist tried having her walk using a metronome app on a cell phone. The regular beat impacts another part of her brain and has really made a wonderful difference in how she walks. Therapist Bob tells her that she has done better than anyone he has used it on. 😊

Our church service each week is on YouTube followed by joys, concerns, and prayers on Zoom—plus other church gatherings. Our book clubs meet on Zoom. Mel organizes Zoom gatherings for our immediate family, for Pat’s St. Andrew’s retirees, our supper club friends, and best of all—bi-weekly get-togethers of Pat’s widely scattered cousins where we have a wonderful time sharing stories—something that we would not have thought of if we hadn’t been cooped up at home. We have thoroughly enjoyed watching Pat’s brother Robert on Zoom every other Saturday afternoon talk about his amazing MITA (Music In The Air) program. Look for his artsinteractive (one word) MITA program on YouTube.

It has been a difficult/stressful year for our daughters and their families. We and they are so grateful they (and our sons-in-law) are healthy at this point and have jobs and insurance. Beth and Sarah are both teachers (chamber music for Beth and high school chemistry for Sarah), both subjects being difficult to adapt to online teaching. The pandemic forced granddaughter Emily (20 this month!!) to leave Smith College (where she was thriving) suddenly in mid-March. She is taking a gap year at home and is working as an intern at the Iowa Writer's workshop. Grandson Ethan, (he will turn 18 in Feb.) is doing his senior year online and applying to colleges. He continues to love playing the saxophone which is his likely major. We've enjoyed eating Sunday supper with the Oakes-Buck family via Facetime every week. Sarah and Joe in Arlington, VA, have enjoyed a few hiking/climbing getaways while keeping busy with work. Daughter Mardie's Hello Housing non-profit in the Bay area has been impacted by the quarantine and it has been difficult for 8-year-old son Durham to adapt to online learning. He really misses his friends. Sadly, Mel's sister Eleanor, after several years of poor health, died in February just before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Pat's Aunt Doris, 99 1/2, lives in a nursing home less than 15 minutes away but we've had no visits since March. She is wheelchair bound, but still with it, despite the isolation as they no longer have meals in the dining room. We have weekly FaceTime calls on an iPad which is brought to her room. Pat uses her cell phone to show Aunt Doris old family pictures by turning the phone around to face the computer. She lights up and tells old family stories or helps Pat identify old photos.

We wish you, dear family and friends, a safe, memorable Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year with masks, social distancing and prospects for an effective vaccine.



Our church in 2018 before our annual Christmas candlelight service



*Pat and Mel*

