

I've just re-read 16 years of holiday letters, and I have to say, it's worth it to me to subject all of you to this annual ritual. Because I'm reminded that when we first moved to Illinois in 1990 we lived down a road marked by a pig sign and when we moved to Paris we had geraniums blooming in January. These all go in a file folder, and thence to one of many boxes marked *Memories*, where one item of baby clothing for each offspring is stored, along with too many art projects, childish stories, and report cards, plus a few digital files. Emily and Stephen will have to deal with it all one day.

Anyway, I learned that last December I summed up our year month by month, which was easy, because there were so many clear markers of travel and family. This year is more muddled in memory. Time to switch to an online calendar, instead of one that I tear out and file somewhere.

So... beginning with the youngest. Stephen is in the middle of his second year at Yale, which means declaring a major and planning his future. He's working on the first, probably Humanities, which involves lots of history, literature, languages, and ancient famous professors. As far as the future goes, we wait to hear. He's one of the tour organizers for his Glee Club tour of Italy in June, and carries the credit card for the Russian Chorus, so he must be the treasurer and learning how to balance books. This past summer he worked as a counselor at French Camp in Minnesota with many interesting peers from the US, France, and Cameroon--all of whom he hopes to visit at some point.

Emily is in a less enviable position, though she too is managing to go to Italy with the Williams Choir in January. But before then she has to finish applications to grad school, in history or library science. She's thinking she'd like to go straight on, though she's keeping the option open of working for a year and then going back to the student life---older and wiser, but probably still poor. She, like Stephen, fills up many hours with singing in four ensembles. I wish I could insert here an audio-file of the two of them singing together at Thanksgiving---- not for the pure sound of it, though that was not bad, but the merriment.

We had both kids here for turkey, and will again for Christmas. With some regularity we manage to see my sister Karen and her husband Dave in Chicago, particularly this year, because Chip has been teaching a course at the *Paseo Boricua*, a Puerto Rican neighborhood in Chicago. This involves three long days of meetings, and then classes via Internet, and he's found it a very engaging project.

He managed to get back to Finland in June and has dropped in to too many other places for meetings throughout the year, resulting in a disinclination to go much of anywhere for a while. Except maybe for a short Fulbright in Nepal or the Philippines, depending on the state of the world.

I continue with my work for Books to Prisoners, and working at the local jail library. Urbana-Champaign is a great community for this kind of effort; it's easy to have a real impact. Where else would they let a bunch of volunteers into the jail without searching our box of dictionaries, volumes of poetry, biographies, and thrillers? And we get the most amazing letters from Illinois prisoners. I hope that sometime in the next century we collectively figure out how to have a smaller prison population in this state and nation. It's a tragedy to be a national/world leader in this regard.

We attended my 40<sup>th</sup> high school reunion in August at the perfect place, a ranch up in the hills above Saratoga CA, which was so *not* Silicon Valley, and I was delighted to see some old friends. Earlier in the summer we spent a month, half working and half canoeing in Maine. Emily joined us at the end, after spending six weeks on a travel fellowship in Ireland, for an oral history project focused on education.

In October, my sister and I and two of her friends rented a place in Eastern Tuscany, from which we made forays out to follow the Piero della Francesca trail. A few photos from our travels, as well as some family photos can be seen at <http://web.mac.com/susanpbruce/iWeb/Site/Holidays.html> .

Chip's parents are doing well, despite losing many close friends recently, and we hope to see them this spring, when we travel to Austin for the wedding of our niece, Julie. My mother continues to live at home, with wonderful neighbors, other friends nearby, and a summer visit from her 1930's classmate Olivia (the movie star, remember her from your careful reading of the last letter?)

But our year is ending in sadness, with the death of my father in late October. My mother called at 2am and by afternoon my sister Karen, my brother Kent, and I were together with her. We later saw my brother Mike, who lives with schizophrenia, so we were all in one place for a bit. Dad's death was not unexpected, but we're still getting used to the idea.

On December 30 we'll have a celebration of his life in the house he built. I wish instead that we could get him here to replace the faucet in our basement, or celebrate the slightly-better November election, from his point of view. (He once wrote Jimmy Carter a letter, or at least drafted one, with advice about how to deal with the economy. When the doctor asked him a few years ago who the president was, testing his failing memory, he replied *Buuuusssh*, with fervor and some displeasure.) He was a shy Nebraska boy who ended up with a bunch of fast-talking California women and learned to hold his own. He was very wise in so many ways and we'll miss him. We feel blessed to have had a good long time together.

On that note, wishing all of you a good long year.