

Dear Family and Friends,

December, 2015

One of the most fantastic things about raising a child is that you get to go through years and years of agony. No, we're not talking about teething rings and diapers. We're talking about college. Last year we related the tale of "college tours," a new American tradition in which you spend tons of money finding out that your kid hates every campus you visited. This year we got down to the serious stuff.

We finished off 2014 by submitting Xandie's college applications, a fun-filled exercise marked by lengthy forms and numerous essay questions. (Sample: "Many college applicants are environmentally active. In 50 words or less, tell us about a time when you rescued a whale from certain death. Include a discussion of the whale's species and migration patterns, and of any Presidential medals you received as a result of your efforts. Attach a photograph of yourself with the whale and a notarized copy of the whale's birth certificate.")

In the end, Xandie applied to eight universities. In keeping with tradition, she chose a few "stretch" schools (The University of People Who Think Stephen Hawking Isn't That Smart), a few "sensible" ones (The University of Normal, If Somewhat Nervous About Getting In, People), and one or two "safety" schools (The College of We'll Take Your Money and Run). Geoff was confident that she'd get into Williams College (remember that from last year?) because of the fantastic essay she wrote, and rejected from New York University (more accurately, he sent a small bribe to NYU to arrange that rejection, since they're just about the most expensive school in the country—after Harvey Mudd).

While we waited for answers, Pat decided that since she was part Irish ("See? The third freckle on my right arm. That's obviously an *Irish* freckle!") she and her sister should book a tour to Ireland in the summer. Women only, no guys allowed.

"Hey, I'm a woman," piped up Xandie. Geoff allowed as how that might just possibly be true, so the sisters' trip became a women's trip. They all went out to buy raincoats and came home \$1000 poorer. Geoff knew better than to ask questions.

After what seemed like 37 months, the college acceptance letters started to come in. In case you don't know, a thin envelope means rejection, and a fat one means you have about three days to decide whether you want to go to that school. Except for the thin ones that put you on the waiting list (also known as "rejected but we like watching you dangle").

The most interesting letter came from Northeastern University. It went something like this: "Hi! We like you but we don't have room for you yet. So we'd like you to spend the fall somewhere outside the United States. OK?" Instead of packing her bags and flying across the country to spend three months living with strangers who never wash their clothes and taking courses in subjects nobody ever heard of, she would fly halfway around the *world* to do the same thing. Because what could be a better cure for homesickness than being in a completely different country with people who speak in incomprehensible dialects and use funny money?

So of course Xandie said "Yes" to that. And then she decided that the city she would study in was... Dublin. Yup, she, Pat, and Carolyn would fly to Dublin in June to spend three weeks there. Then they'd come back for four weeks, and we'd ship Xandie back again by herself. Geoff pointed out that it would be cheaper to just put her up in an Irish dog kennel for the extra month ("We could glue on a long furry snout and say she's a setter!") but Pat was having none of that. So Pat and Xandie went shopping for umbrellas. Geoff went shopping for frozen TV dinners to eat while they were gone.

So after high-school graduation, Xandie, Pat, and Carolyn gallivanted off to the British Isles to find out first-hand whether normal humans can understand Irish brogue. The tour went swimmingly (and we mean that literally... that place is *rainy!*). Xandie re-met her Welsh cousin Jake (a very cool fellow) and noted the location of every bookstore in Dublin. Meanwhile, Geoff took advantage of their absence to sleep. (He takes advantage of *everything* to sleep!)



Two Proud Graduates

In addition he did a few long bike rides, attended some conferences, and had three detached retinas repaired. (Since the mascot of his introductory CS class is a five-eyed alien, he figures he still has two to go.)

When everybody was back home, we went down to the animal shelter and found a bouncy dog and a cuddly kitten. Pat figured that if they grew up together, they'd be friends. The dog was three years old. "He's still growing up and will be easy to train," she explained. We love watching him bound across the yard, chasing the cat, birds, squirrels, the gardener, or anything else that moves. If only we could get him to fetch the leaf blower on command.

At the end of August, Xandie climbed on a plane and vanished across the ocean. She'd been in Dublin for about six hours before she called home. "Mom, they speak an unintelligible language here!" We explained that it was basically English (albeit with a strange accent) and she'd be fine as long as she didn't use words like "awesome" and "OMG" and "totes" (short for "totally"). She stopped sobbing long enough to say "OK, but I miss the cat!" and hung up. The next thing we knew she was so busy exploring Ireland that she'd forgotten about everything else. Including classes.

Nor did she decide to limit her travel experiences to Ireland. Apparently Ireland is close to Europe. Who knew? And there are cheap flights to everywhere. So away she went to Norway (one day), Wales (five days), Scotland (three), and Germany (three, with one revisiting her old haunts in Karlsruhe). Geoff is convinced that someday she's going to miss a flight and wind up spending an entire winter in Moldavia. But we're pretty proud of her ability to fend for herself internationally. Or we would be, if we could ever get her to stop traveling and studying long enough to talk to us occasionally. (Actually, we did receive a postcard or two. Or twenty.)

Back at home, things were less exciting. Pat continued to teach eight-year-olds how to play "Jingle Bells" on the cello so that they could impress Grandma. Geoff bought earplugs so he didn't have to listen to out-of-tune cellos all day. Then he discovered that the earplugs also helped him handle questions from the students at Harvey Mudd (i.e., he didn't have to answer what he couldn't hear). The dog is learning not to bark when the heater comes on. The feline has grown from an adorable little kitten into a full-sized monster who wants an entire bag of cat food every night. Xandie got home on the 19th so she could spend a few typical college-kid weeks before we take her to Boston. And so far, the cat hasn't tried to climb the Christmas tree.

Life is good.

Love,

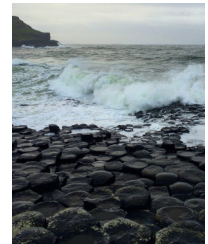
Geoff Pat Xandie



7Churches Cemetery



Sunny Ireland



Giant's Causeway



After a Cold Ride



Pizza with Xandie, Pat, and Carolyn



Dreaming of a Castle



Pony Ride



Sendoff to Dublin