

Dear Family and Friends,

December, 2016

It is common, as one gets older, to start traveling more. We're not sure why that happens: "Hey, Mabel, now that we both have trouble walking to the refrigerator let's climb Machu Picchu." But it does happen, and who are we to break tradition? So in January, it seemed natural that both of us should help Xandie move into her new dorm at Northeastern University. After all, she had traveled to Washington, DC alone for a high-school journalism program, to Schwäbisch Hall in Germany alone to study German, and to Dublin, Ireland alone for her first semester of college. Clearly she didn't have enough experience to find a dormitory in Boston! Geoff booked flights, and off we went. It was a good thing we did, too, because each ticketed seat came with a checked bag (\$20) and a carryon. That gave us six bags, five of which were filled with Xandie's book collection. *Much* cheaper than sending her by herself and paying excess-baggage fees!

We planned several days in Boston so that we could catch a concert, visit some museums, see friends, and oh yeah, unpack those books. The dorm room was nice enough, if "nice" means "no bedding," so off we went to Target to buy necessities. ("How will she get this stuff home in the summer?" asked Geoff. "Quiet," said Pat.) Three over-filled shopping carts later we were all set, except that Xandie belatedly realized she had forgotten to pack a pillow. "Use a book," said Geoff, always sympathetic.

Our Boston friends live a bit out of town, so we had to take a trolley to get there. Except it turned out that there was also a fast commuter train, so we took that instead. Geoff was careful to look up the schedules and fares and allow enough time to get to the station. The train was pulling in just as we arrived, so we hustled aboard and congratulated ourselves for making it.

"Tickets?" asked the conductor. Geoff dutifully pulled out the subway cards he had bought. "Those aren't good here," we were told. "Where are you going?"

"Newtonville."

"This is an express train. We don't stop there. Our next stop is West Natick."

In case you're wondering, West Natick is somewhere near the Mississippi River. And we're pretty sure it doesn't run through Boston. With no trains back, our friend Karen would have to come and pick us up. And did we mention that West Natick is the kind of "station" where there's nothing but a parking lot? And that it was approximately 357 degrees below zero? Well, we quickly learned about hopping up and down to keep warm. We hopped up and down so much that there's now a dent in the pavement. But when Karen eventually arrived she kindly turned the heat all the way up in her car, and two days after our visit we were thawed out and happy again.

Boston was such a success that Geoff decided to attend a conference in London. And since he was in London, he would go to Amsterdam too. Because, you know, why not? A friend's daughter was performing there and he could go watch her show. Sarah's part lasts for about five minutes, so it was obviously a wise use of his time. Or it would have been, if she hadn't pulled a muscle two days before the event. Geoff suggested that Sarah should go onstage anyway, just because he was there. She suggested that *he* should do it for her. It's a simple act that involves being hoisted about 300 feet in the air while hanging by your toenails and doing back flips. Geoff begged off due to a lack of hangnails (ha ha!) and returned to Claremont, disappointed but intact.

Spring came, and Xandie thought that college was so much fun that she should take summer classes. So she stayed on, and Pat and Geoff grew lonelier. Fortunately they had the new cat and dog to entertain them. The dog will leap off the couch ("Why is the dog on the couch?" Geoff asks) and charge at the cat, who then leads him on a wild chase through the house, under the piano, and three times around the living room. Then the dog hops back onto the couch ("Why is the dog on the couch?" Geoff asks) as if nothing has happened, only to repeat the whole thing two minutes later.

Xandie finally got home and took a job at the local violin shop, replacing a long-lost previous student of Pat's. She gained all sorts of useful retail experience and newfound knowledge. ("Oops, was that a Stradivarius I dropped?"). Pat, remembering how lonely Geoff had been the previous summer when

she and Xandie were away on a leprechaun tour, figured he'd be OK with Xandie and the animals, so she planned a six-week trek in Tibet (Machu Picchu was booked solid). Geoff grumbled and she settled for a week creating art with female friends in the quaint beach town of Cayucos instead. ("Best clam chowder on the West Coast!" says Geoff.) Pat never showed him any of her paintings, but she brought a cup of chowder back in her purse so he was eventually OK with it. Xandie says the paintings were too racy for Geoff anyway.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, one of Geoff's students got in touch with him to offer us a free pair of tickets to the San Francisco Opera. How could we turn that down? All of our costs would be covered, with the small exception of airfare, hotel, meals, and incidentals. It seemed like just the kind of jet-setting thing that old folks do ("Mabel, how about if we pop over to Paris and buy you a new muu-muu?") so off we went. Of course, it being San Francisco in November, it poured the whole time and we couldn't actually see anything beyond the taxi's front seat, but we still had fun. We think.

Finally it was almost the end of the year. But first Xandie had to get in another shot at traveling. So she flew to Miami for Thanksgiving and visited a friend there. We guess they had fun, although the only thing we heard about the trip was "Wow, I can wear shorts here!" This from the kid who complains about Southern California being too warm in the winter.

Anyway, it's been an eventful year, and somehow we managed to enjoy it despite the minor glitches. Next year we plan to stay home and get some rest.

"Hey, Mom, I'm going to study abroad in Salzburg this spring. Can you guys come visit me?"

Love,

Geoff Pat Xandie



College Student



Boston Weather



Artist at Work



Socal Weather