

One of the great benefits of an academic job is the concept of the sabbatical, where a professor is kicked out—er, given a year away from teaching—to do something that is actually useful, such as developing a deep tan. Traditionally, sabbaticals take place every seven years, which is why it has been eight since the last time Geoff had one (he's not too good with arithmetic).

On our previous sabbaticals we moved overseas, which led to some great can't-happen-in-LA adventures (Riding a trolley! Driving on the other side of the road! Ordering espresso!) and permanently infected Xandie with the "travel bug". But this time Pat put her foot down. "It's not that I hate jet lag," she explained. "It's the part about stuffing the couch into a suitcase." So instead we decided to stay in Claremont.

Staying home made a huge difference in our preparations. Previously, we would rent a dumpster, discard a few unnecessary things ("My underwear! Where is all my underwear?" screamed Geoff), put most of the rest into boxes in the garage, and hop on an airplane. This time we rented a dumpster, discarded a few unnecessary things ("What happened to my collectible T-shirts?" cried Geoff), left the garage mostly untouched (including all the boxes we still haven't unpacked from the last sabbatical), and hopped on an airplane.

"Um," you point out. "I thought you were staying home."

Technically that's true. But you forget Xandie's travel bug. Rather than spend the spring in a boring college dorm, she took advantage of Northeastern's co-op program to secure herself an (unpaid) internship in Jodhpur, India. So while we were preparing for the rigors of a year at home, we simultaneously felt obligated to visit her. After all, what if something terrible happened? She might learn Hindi! Or get colored powder dumped on her head! Or be eaten by an elephant!



HMC Elephant "Mascot"

stay in India forever.

Pat, her sister, and Xandie took the same tour, but a longer version (which simply translated into spending 70,000 Indian rupees more and an extra 36 hours sitting in a Delhi traffic jam, an experience not to be missed). They also made it to a nature preserve where they were lucky enough to see a wild tiger and her kill (sorry, it wasn't an unpopular politician). In the end, everybody was glad to get back but Geoff regretted having spent \$49.95 on the "genuine Rolex watch" that was too good a deal to pass up.

The June trip also coincided with Pat's retirement. She taught her final elementary string class and told her numerous cello students to go away (Geoff is amazed that she stuck to her guns, and proud of her determination). But with no more cute little 9-year-olds knocking on her door, Geoff had to find something new to entertain her. So off we went, Xandie in tow, on a summer road trip through the Southwest. The Grand Canyon is great for distraction, although Pat nixed Geoff's suggestion that we could see more if we skateboarded to the bottom.



Sunset at the Grand Canyon



Last Pre-Retirement Concert

The Santa Fe Opera was a special treat (did you know that it involves singing?), but Geoff's favorite diversion in Santa Fe was Meow Wolf, which is best described as "Disney meets LSD, but family-friendly." After exiting the fireplace and a short detour through the refrigerator, it doesn't even seem odd that the washing machine has a slide inside. Geoff decided to skip the slide, but Xandie tried it and wasn't seen again for a full week. (Nearly all of this is true, and if you visit Santa Fe you should *definitely* go. Just don't tell them we sent you; they threw us out after Geoff started hopping on one leg, screaming "The aliens stole my foot!" [They returned it before anybody came to help him, which is why nobody believed us. But Xandie is convinced he's as honest as the day is long. On the dark side of Mercury.]



Xandie Looking at Fires Across the Grand Canyon

New Mexico is full of things to do, and with our typical planning brilliance we missed most of them. But Carlsbad Caverns was fun, if your idea of fun is being a zillion miles underground while worrying about earthquakes. Pat took one look at the 14-mile walk and called a Lyft driver (his name was Sneezy). Geoff and Xandie set out gamely and took two days to get back to the surface—oddly enough, they exited through a washing machine.

Pat still hadn't properly settled into retirement, so on the way home we stopped in Tucson to see a movie. Oh, and to visit Saguaro National Park. There are so many iconic cacti that if you threw them all into the Grand Canyon, you could make a wonderful cactus soup. Either that or all the river rafters would sink when the needles hit their inflatables.

Whew! "That was a lot of driving," said Geoff, falling asleep at the wheel. The car ran off the road and we briefly wound up in Alaska, where everyone wears sombreros. Or something like that. Pat took over and eventually got us safely home.

But Pat was *still* at loose ends! There was only one solution: wait until Xandie was comfortably settled in Boston for the fall semester, and then "drop in" unannounced to "see the fall colors." And of course to make sure she wasn't having too much fun. We did indeed see fall colors, in the sense that it was fall and green is a color. Our search for brilliant leaves took us through all of Massachusetts, half of Vermont, and a bit of New York; it turns out that it was the "worst year in history" for autumn tree viewing in New England. Even so we had a good time. Xandie says she'll forgive us when she's 47.

And now winter is approaching, and Geoff is planning new ways to keep Pat happy. She's thinking about hot eggnog with a nice warm blanket and a cuddly dog on her lap. He says it's summer in Antarctica. . .

She has a hammer out and is nailing his foot to the floor.

Love,

Geoff *Pat* *Xandie*



Wintry Geoff



Fall Colors Found!



At the Taj Mahal