

Dear Friends and Family,

December 2020

I keep thinking about how we all wished each other a happy new year at the beginning of 2020. Considering what came next, it certainly was a waste of breath. I ran across a poem called The Best of It by Kay Ryan at my Zoom poetry group in the fall, in which the poet says, *...it doesn't matter that our acre's down to a square foot...*

Those words ring in my head as I look across the landscape at all this loss. For us, it has primarily meant the loss of being with our children and grandchildren. Though we Facetime with the 6-year-old twins in France a couple



times a week, we haven't actually been with Hannah's family for 14 months since our spring and fall trips were scrapped. We are luckier with Sage and crew in California, whom we had last seen in mid-January. Not wanting to sit around in LA indefinitely, and looking to turn the pandemic into an adventure, they rented out their house and moved up to the other grandparents' place on the Oregon border, where they could do a lot of hiking and horseback riding. Aleigh does her film editing work online, and Maisie, 7, is in second grade in LA online. Now, happily, they have come to Minneapolis for a couple months, and then are going on to Iceland for a few months more. For now, they are staying in our place and we are staying in a borrowed unit till we can get tested and cleared to be together. We need to get to know Beatrix, 4, who is hard to capture on Facetime. We still do reading lessons with Maisie three times a week on Zoom, even though we are now just four floors down. Life has gotten so complicated and strange.

For us in Minneapolis, the horror of life with Covid was accelerated with the murder of George Floyd and the devastating aftermath. This wasn't the Minneapolis we thought we knew, and we were deeply ashamed. Deepened awareness of racism and the chasm in the American justice system is coming out of it, and that is good. But our boarded up and empty downtown; our rising crime rate; our battles over the funding and reforming of policing; the constant squabble over mask-wearing and shutdowns; the wildfires in California and the floods in the East; and the acidity of our politics... These are painful stressors. Thank God we have a new president, with a new National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, who was an IB student of mine in high school.

We know we are very lucky. We have stayed well. We have enjoyed the company of friends on summer and fall evenings in the park across the street. We did an enormous amount of biking and discovered whole sections of the Mississippi on cottonwood flood plain forest trails both up and downriver.



We did some conservation work in these same areas – cutting buckthorn, building exclosures surrounding experimental tree plantings that the park system is testing to see what trees will survive as we grow warmer, and reseeding prairie grasses.

Ten other women in the building and I cut and sewed 700 masks for hospitals and homeless shelters. I continued to play Mah Jongg weekly on people's patios. I baked a lot of banana bread because of all the bananas that turned black before my 7 am weekly trip to the grocery store. I finished transcribing, editing, and preparing for binding my grandmother's 84 letters written during WWI, and then in July we took a 4-day trip up to Detroit Lakes, MN, where my mother was born, to find more information at the historical society and the courthouse.

Barrs worked on his French, watched CNN, and read a lot. He underwent heart ablation surgery at the end of February and that ended his frequent atrial fibrillation episodes. He tried to and usually was able to log 15,000 paces every day. He dealt with a lot of the computer and billing messes that inevitably arise these days. He is still trying to learn to cook.

Hannah and family go in and out of “confinement” in France, but the girls have gone to school – first grade -- every day with no distance learning. Ehsan’s 4-year fellowship comes to an end this month, and we are all curious to see where they head next. If they leave Roscoff, we will miss their charming town, and if they leave France, we will miss that too. We’ve been able to travel to many regions which we have grown to love. But I would be very happy to have them back in the US, and that might actually happen now that the political coast is clear. Hannah continues her work in promoting biodiversity, and had an article published in the *Guardian* in late summer on a reforestation method she has convinced her town to undertake. She is now fluent in French, and the girls are learning to read and write in both languages. It is very funny when they tell jokes in English they clearly don’t get, but we all laugh uproariously.



SO, to friends and family, near and far, here’s the end of the poem...*As though our garden could be one bean and we’d rejoice if it flourishes...* Stay in good health, think positively, grab what joy you can, and flourish.

With all our best, Barrs and Holly



*The light at the end of the tunnel...there it is.
Photographed by Sage at Pluto Cave in northern California in October.*