

Greetings!

It has been, for the most part, a horrible, terrible no good year. In a few short days 2014 will be gone, and I will not miss it in the least. When the bells toll and the ball drops, I will not be looking back in nostalgia, but looking forward with hope. 2015 can't help but be a major improvement over its direct predecessor.

In 2014 I lost two people very near and dear to me, my father and Doris (Mrs. Jo) Johannessen. Many of my friends lost parents in the past year, too. My homeland of Ukraine has been suffering, too, losing thousands of its citizens to Russian invasion and war, and suffering economic devastation.

My father was a kind and gentle man. He survived the terrors of collectivization, derkurkulization, the Holodomor and WWII, all the while protecting and preserving his family--his mother and his brothers. His entire life was centered around his family, immediate and extended, a lesson he passed down to us. He was a craftsman, building houses and furniture, and could repair anything. He had a keen mind; despite a lack of a formal education, he understood mathematics and finance, and kept up on world affairs. He doted on his children, and even more so on his grandchildren, who were the light of his life. His greatest gift to us was love--familial love, unconditional love¹.

Doris Johannessen, known as "Mrs. Jo" to several generations of Troy chemistry students, was one of my role models. She taught me chemistry, yes, but, even more importantly, she exposed me to the big world outside of the parochial limits of suburban Troy. She was the sort of non-family adult influence every young person needs at that point in their lives. We kept touch over the years and became great friends, going to symphony concerts together and having long conversations about life, the universe, and everything.

My mother is slowly getting used to life on her own, after 56 years of marriage. We spend time with her, as do her many friends and family, but it's just not the same. She is taking care of herself, at last, now that her responsibilities are fewer, and getting a second new knee in January; she will become our bionic Baba.

Bill and Laurie remain in good health, and are slowly getting accustomed to their almost empty nest. Bill works at Ford, Laurie at GM, and both are quite busy. Maria (aka Fuzz) is still at home, but busy with school. She studies hard, much harder than her father or I ever did, and has decided on a career in nursing. Despite her protestations that such a thing could never happen, she was accepted for direct admission to the U of M nursing program, and will become another Petrusha wolverine. Fuzz made the homecoming court this year, necessitating her presence at the Homecoming dance and an actual date for said dance; this was all made tolerable by her ignoring her date all night and instead hanging out with her friends. And Belle has finally, grudgingly, gotten to like and accept Fuzz, sleeping in her room at night, but Kalyna remains her one true human.

Nick is in his second year at MSU, and enjoying the college life, especially the all you can eat 24/7 cafeterias. Next year he will be living in a house with friends, and he will miss the food most. I've gotten him cookbooks for Christmas, and promised him cooking tools and lessons; more importantly, though, we will be getting him a set of large, really loud speakers for his classic retro analog stereo system. I pity his future neighbors..... His major? Well, education seems to be out, and entomology is long forgotten, but business is a possibility. If only you could major in pond hockey or make a living at anthropology.....

Kalyna is in her last year at U of M, and will be graduating this coming May with a degree in biology. She's been accepted to Teach for America, and will be working for two years with older (middle school or high school) inner city students in Detroit, where she plans to live. I have bought her cookbooks, too, but suspect she will continue to live on her basic diet of Kraft mac and cheese and instant hot chocolate. Kalyna plans eventually to go to medical school, and will be studying for--and taking--the MCAT exam in the spring. She's also found herself a nice boyfriend, a very bright (and liberal) Californian named Trevor. Kalyna's introduced him to the Petrusha family, and he has survived the experience, thanks to following my sage advice: don't talk politics, and never drink with the uncles and try to keep up!

¹ I've posted my eulogy of my father at <http://tinyurl.com/TatoEulogy>; you can see a slideshow of photos I selected for the funeral at <http://tinyurl.com/TatoMovie>.

I've been busy this year, too. In February I had hand surgery for de Quervain's tenosynovitis; it hadn't responded to more conservative therapy, and thanks to the operation, I can use my right hand again. My left knee continues to heal; I haven't used a cane in months, although I am still a bit slow on the stairs. Barring another ice-related injury, I should be able to hang onto it for a few more years. I spent much of the second half of 2014 studying for my OB/GYN board recertification exam; I took and passed it on November 6th. I'm set for the next six years.....except for annual busy work. And I traveled a bit, albeit not nearly as much as I would have liked, and much less that I usually do. I hope it's just a one time misalignment of events, rather than a pattern of future non-mobility.....

I spent the winter, the snowiest and coldest in recent memory, at home. Road conditions and my healing surgical site kept me there. It wasn't until May, when the snows finally melted, that I ventured out, to Traverse City and the UP (Upper Peninsula of Michigan). I spent a chilly two weeks in the Copper Country teaching pysankarstvo, cooking Ukrainian specialties, learning to make soap, watching the raptors migrate, admiring the scenery and just generally catching up with friends, old and new.

I was in Ukraine for most of July and some of August. It was a worrying time to travel, as an all-out invasion by Russia seemed possible. The success of the Maidan revolution had angered the Russian bear (which, we can only assume, was being ridden by a shirtless Putin), Crimea had been stolen, and "uprisings" (often involving Russian "tourists") instigated throughout the south and east. The troublemakers were dealt with, forcibly and often violently, by the local people in most of the country, who did not want war or Russian domination. They gained a foothold, however, in the Donbas (eastern Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), along the Russian border, and a Russian-fueled insurgency sprang up, releasing a flood of refugees. Elections were held successfully none-the-less, and the new president began an organized and successful offensive to recapture the terrorist held areas (the ATO).

That's when I arrived to our summer camp in the Carpathians, in the town of Vorokhta. We had some sixty children, orphans from the internaty of Ukraine, in attendance. We kept them happy, busy and distracted for two weeks in this safe little corner of Ukraine. They played games, hiked the mountains, wrote pysanky, arranged flowers, painted, acted, sang.....and danced at discos. We celebrated Kupalo with bonfires, songs, torches, demons and vinky (floral wreaths) in the river. In the midst of it all the Malaysian airliner fell from the sky.....

After camp I spent time with friends and family, gallivanting around Ukraine. What amazed me most in these travels was how united Ukrainians had become. We are a nation whose pastime is normally arguing with each other; the Russian threat had galvanized people, and brought out a level of patriotism that I didn't know even existed. I think they, themselves, were surprised. People, whatever their ethnicity, were proud to be Ukrainian. Anything that possibly could be had been painted in the national colors, yellow and blue: bridges, benches, light poles, fences, faces. Patriotic-and anti-Putin-sayings were everywhere: on billboards, in graffiti, on T-shirts, caps and refrigerator magnets. Everyone, it seems, now owned a vyshyvanka (embroidered shirt), and wore it proudly and often. And the standard greeting was no longer some version of hello or good day, but "Slava Ukraini! (Glory to Ukraine!)."

After my two weeks in the mountains, including visits to Kosiv market and Kolomyia (Pysanka museum and my friend Oleh Kirashchuk and family), I spent a few days in Volyn. I visited Lutsk and my mother's village with my goddaughter Darynka, and spent an afternoon in Sokal. I thoroughly enjoyed Lviv, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, where I stayed with my kuma Myrosia. I visited with Vira, Andriy, Sebastian and many other old friends, and made some new ones. Still, the talk everywhere was not banter about the arts and culture, but quite worried-would there be further war? Would the Russians invade? Would the elections bring needed change?

I visited family and friends in Kyiv, including a walk through central Kyiv, on the Maidan. The memorials to the fallen were everywhere, and reminders of what had transpired-torn up pavement, scorched walls, tires piled into barricades and enclosures with tents still remained, along with the huge Yolka, the Christmas "tree" festooned with revolutionary banners. Repairs were under way even then; though there were still people camped out on the Maidan, they were not those who had fought for freedom, but layabouts causing trouble. The Maidan freedom fighters were now on the front lines, protecting Ukraine from its enemies, and fighting still.

I spent long hours on night trains in order to make it down to Kryvyi Rih to visit my Ukrainian daughter Tanya and her family, including little Masha, now three and a half. It was incredibly, unbearably hot, and we spent our

day wandering through parks, by rivers, and near fountains. On my last day in Ukraine we had our annual family dinner in Zolotonosha, my father's one-time home town, with his side of the family; we drank a toast to his memory, and to the memory of all our relatives no longer with us.

I had a chance to visit Beth in Grand Rapids this year; unfortunately, I missed Art Prize, but did catch some very rainy weather. We conversed as we drove to nearby Paw Paw, a cute little town where we enjoyed the scenery (local jail and courthouse), tasted and bought wine, perused an art gallery and found a few good books in the used book shop.

In September, my mother and I drove to upstate New York, to the town of Little Falls, where her best friend Pani Alexandra lives. While the two of them caught up on gossip and shared photos of their grandkids, I took quick trips to New Jersey (Bound Brook, the Ukrainian Orthodox Museum) and Connecticut (to visit Tanya Osadca, a fellow pysankarka). In Bound Brook I was allowed access to the Moshchenko collection, including their hoard of Kulzhynsky pysanka illustration cards, and made plans to collaborate with them in the future. In Connecticut Tanya and I talked about life, the universe, and pysanky. My mom and I both had a lovely time, just hanging out with Pani A and and Halia, her daughter, visiting apple orchards and Amish shops, and having brunch at the posh hotel in Cooperstown.

We also took a short, overnight trip in October to Traverse City to see the fall colors. We drove west to Grand Haven, and then hugged the Lake Michigan coast northward, enjoying state parks and farmers' markets along the way. It was sunny, the colors were at their peak, and I found Golden Russet apples by the bushel. The Sleeping Bear Dunes were gorgeous and largely deserted. We popped in to see my friends Gary and Mary Anne in TC, and spent the next day exploring the Leelenau and Mission peninsulas: admiring the scenery, buying smoked fish and sandwiches in Fishtown, tasting the rieslings and chardonnays at the wineries, and enjoying one last bit of glorious sunshine before the winter gloom set in.

I've been home since then--studying, and preparing for the holidays. The tree is gorgeous, the tinsel and snowflakes dancing and glittering. The weather is not-wet and damp, more a British winter than a Michigan one. No worries--soon it will get colder, the lake will freeze, and all will be right in the world.....unless the climate scientists are right. In that case, all bets are off, and I am glad I live at 330 feet above sea level!

Wishing you and yours all the best in 2015!