

Greetings!

It's the holiday season once more, and tonight is the feast of Sol Invictus, the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. Beginning tomorrow the days will grow longer, and spring will seem a bit less distant. Tonight I have a fire burning in the hearth, candles flickering on the mantle, my Christmas tree all aglow in the corner and mediaeval carols in the air. And so I settle down to write this year's letter.

Each year I get a bit older, as do my friends and relations. I added no new relatives this year, as Victoria, Lisa's almost 2 year old, was probably the last production model of her generation, but I made many new friends, both at home and abroad. Tanya, my Ukrainian daughter, got married this year, and is expecting a daughter in January, so I will become a grandmother of sorts. I look forward to it.

We had a major milestone in our family this year—Kalyna, my brother's oldest child, and my oldest godchild, turned 18, and is now legally an adult. It doesn't mean that much—she can't drink legally yet, and has her last year of high school to finish—but it makes all of us feel that much older. Kalyna's enjoying her senior year; she was elected to the Homecoming court, and seems to pretty much run the school (as its social director). She is still in the process of picking a university; she's visited several and remains undecided. Bill and Laurie had thought they'd found the best major for her—business—as she enjoys running things and bossing people around, but Kalyna's recently discovered a love of biology. Perhaps there will be another scientist in this family after all!

Nick has begun growing, shooting up 4 inches in recent months and now towering over his former "twin," Fuzz. Nick turns 16 in January, and is inheriting my trusty old Jeep. While he's quit choir, Nick has stayed involved in all sorts of less cultural activities at school, and has much more school and class spirit than I ever did (by orders of magnitude). He still loves his sports, formal and informal, and will never turn down a chance to play baseball, basketball, football, soccer, badminton, catch, jarts, croquet... Nick went on the youth hunt with this dad again this autumn, and got his first deer, which is a huge milestone in a Michigan boy's life.

Fuzz, aka Maria, is in her last year of middle school, and blossoming into a lovely young woman, albeit one with attitude. (You go, girl!!) She sang beautifully in her school's winter concert, and belts out one mean "Holly and the Ivy." While she has not yet completely put away her childish things—she still loves her dolls and animal friends—she is spending more of her time with sentient beings, including sleepovers with giggling schoolgirls. Her high points of 2010 were meeting the Jonas Brothers at Walmart, her soccer team winning its championship, getting all As on her report card, and going to the state FPS championships.

Laurie and Bill are both gainfully employed, which is saying a lot in the current Michigan economy. Laurie is working as a credentialer at Team Human Capital Solutions, a new job for her, and Bill is still at Ford, Detroit's most solvent carmaker. Raising three teens keeps them quite busy, but Bill had time this year to win the Chinook Classic and kill Bambi's older brother.

My parents have been feeling their age; my mother's back pain has responded only partially to physical therapy and medical intervention, and my father has grown frail. Mom can no longer do many of the activities she loves, including working in my yard and gardens, and Dad no longer builds furniture. Neither one drives after dark or in bad weather. My father developed a chronic cough last winter which didn't respond to treatment, and studies this past summer showed that it was due to a bronchoalveolar carcinoma of the lung. Luckily for us and him, it is a relatively slow-growing tumor, and it responded well to chemotherapy this fall. Unfortunately, he didn't, developing severe side effects, and had to stop. But the tumor did regress somewhat, and he is doing well enough that this oncologist has postponed any further treatment until after the holidays.

I lost two lovely neighbors this year, Dillys and Joan. Both had been fellow symphony aficionados and had accompanied me to see the DSO. Dillys lived on the lake, taught piano, worked for peace and was a caregiver for her children and grandchildren. Joan lived across the street (when she wasn't off visiting her children), agreed with me politically, and had the most beautiful smile. I miss them both daily.

I've been doing alright. My back pain has gotten much better since I've lost a bit of weight, and asthma is under very good control. I managed to avoid any major injuries this year, except for knocking out my platelets with my antihistamine (since reversed, mostly). I'm still working at Huron Valley Sinai Hospital, one of the safest and most electronically advanced hospitals in the nation. The Detroit Medical Center merged this year with a for-profit hospital chain, and is getting lots of badly needed capital improvements to facilities as a result. We are told that the merger should not affect our department much, and hope for the best.

I did a lot more gardening and yard work this year than in the past, as my helpers have largely retired. I enjoy it, even the grunt work. I can honestly say that Thoreau wasn't quite right about firewood—it warms you THREE times, once when you cut and stack it, once when you burn it, and once when you drag it from the woodshed into the house in deep winter.



I haven't traveled as much as I'd planned this year because of my dad's medical complications, but did get around a bit. In February I visited **Australia**, and discovered that it truly is the hottest part of the year there. I spent most of my time in the west, with Christobel, Tom, Max and Rene. It had been more than three years since my last visit, and Tom (now 16) had grown a foot and become quite the ancient history maven. He's a joy to talk to, and to wander about Freo with. Max is quite the young lady now, a good artist, and she loves her animal "friends" as much as Fuzz does. Christobel continues to do wonderful work in breast cancer treatment and research, and has had a book—a patient guide to breast cancer—published by the Oxford press. She and Rene have built a shed on their bush block in Gingin, where we spent pleasant times, and they have started work on a house and pool.

I traveled around WA both with family (we took a great trip up to Broome, where we went to a pearl farm and bird sanctuary and courted heat stroke) and wandered about by myself. Barbara, Chris's mum, was visiting, and we went shopping, sightseeing and dolphin watching together. Christobel, Tom and I spent a few lovely days in Bridgetown with Chris and Dave and their sweet little doggies, and I got the full Malcomsen family experience (including manicure). I had a chance to see Ken Grinter when he was in Perth; next time I have to get up to the Useless Loop to visit him and Jenny in their remote abode. And I did a bit of birding, of course, ticking off a few new species.

On the way home I spent a few days in the Brisbane area with Jane, Jonathan and Jean-Michel. When I'd visited last Jonathan was a newborn; now he was a big boy, going on four years, and quite stropy. We visited Uncle Greggles up in Noosa and enjoyed his always gracious hospitality, fine cuisine and great company. I took the train down to the Gold Coast, where I had a lovely day with CMC Women pen pal Sharon George and got to meet her daughters.

Since I flew through **LA**, I had a chance to visit with Frank and Mike in Burbank. The weather was pleasantly autumnal, and Frank got us tickets to visit the Getty Museum of ancient art. Both the venue and the works were magnificent, as was our visit to the Frank Lloyd Wright house, with its view of the Hollywood sign.

In May I visited the **UP**, and stayed with Lorri and Rick Oikarinen at their lovely log home in the woods. I had a chance to visit with old friends, make several new ones, hang out with birders at the birding festival, go on a wildflower walk, tour the Estivant pines, cook a lot, talk a lot, drink a lot of tea, eat rum-soaked brownies and learn a lot. And I got to say goodbye to my old friend Laurie Binford at a lovely memorial ceremony on top of Brockway Mountain.

In late summer I traveled to **Ukraine**, where I kept quite busy. I spent two weeks at summer camp, teaching pysankarstvo, photographing the kids, meeting lots of new people, young and old, and playing mother of the bride. Four years ago I met Tetiana (Tanya) Romanenko in Kyiv and agreed to become her UCARE sponsor while she attended university. I (and the entire staff) got to know her quite well during the three summers we worked together at camp; she came first as a volunteer, but ended up running the camp her last two years, and was loved by all. Tanya graduated and got engaged this spring; when it turned out that her wedding would be during our camp, and none of us could attend, we decided to hold a UCARE wedding for her in Kolochava. Tanya and her family came out by train; she and her fiance were dressed in traditional wedding garb by the ladies of the village, and we held a traditional Ukrainian wedding, including all the wedding day rituals, including blessings from the parents (at the open air museum), a church wedding, and a feast with musicians and dancing. A wonderful....and enlightening...time was had by all.

After camp I traveled around, visiting Oleh and family in Kolomyia (where I donated several pysanky to the museum), Vitalik on Kosiv, and my Hutsul friends in Richka, up in the Carpathian highlands. I ran into Orysia Tracz, a longtime pen pal there; she was leading a tour group and Pan Mykola and his family were entertaining them for a day. I visited my mom's relative in Kniazhe, my ancestral village, and Sokal. We spent time in Chervonohrad, and were escorted around by Tolik, a fellow UCARE volunteer, who took us to meet his grandmother (a pysankarka), to visit the museum (with its wonderful Sokal embroideries and Horodetsky's pysanky) and a pysanka school. In Lviv, my favorite Ukrainian city, itself I spent time with my goddaughter, Daryna, who'd passed her exams and been accepted at the art school; we had a celebratory luncheon at the Chinese restaurant. Thanks to Pan Ivan, my cousin Myrosia's artist friend, I got to meet many artists and spent time in beer gardens, cafes and studios. And I had a chance to spend a lot of time visiting with Vira Manko, who lives quite close to Myrosia; we talked pysanky, showed each other our work, and compared our summers in the mountains.

Back in hot, hot Kyiv I spent time with my Dad's relatives; we went to Zolotonosha, where we had a fine family reunion. I shopped on Andriivskiy Uzvizd, where one of my former campers helped me find gifts for everyone. I spent a day at the dacha with my two cousins, Toma and Olya, and Kyiv relatives. I wandered around Kyiv with Ruslan, and we visited the Holodomor memorial, which was quite moving. And I taught Inna, Zhenya and Dima how to write pysanky.

In autumn I took a few day trips in **Michigan** with my parents to see the fall colors. We drove up in the Thumb area, picnicking on the shores of Lake Huron, and stopping in several parks to walk around and look at scenery and leaves. We spent a day out Grand Rapids way, visiting dunes and lighthouses along Lake Michigan.

And now it is winter and the snow lies in the fields, and the cold winter winds blow. As I sit here in front of a roaring fire, I think of friends, old and new, and remember the good times we had last this past year. I hope for more of the same in 2011, and wish you all the best as well. Wishing you a Happy Winter Holiday of your choosing, and the best of everything in the New Year!