

Greetings!

Well, 2017 is finally almost over, a year that made 2016 seem like the good old days. Ukraine is still at war, sanctions are not being imposed fully, and the Cheeto in the White House is doing his best to undo Obama's legacy, rather than creating his own. Deregulation is running amok--who needs clean water, clean air, safe workplaces, honest pay, equal rights, medical insurance, safe nursing homes or national parks anyway? Or a livable earth.....

I've had a fairly busy year, and not always in a good way. During the work up for my gall bladder last year, a cyst was noticed on my left kidney. In December or 2016 I finally (while recuperating from a cholecystectomy) had an MRI done, which revealed a renal cancer. After getting over the shock, I saw the best urologist in the area, and was reassured--early stage renal cell carcinomas are quite curable (98%) with simple removal. I had that done in February, and found the recovery to be much longer and more painful than I'd expected. I also learned never to have surgery on a Friday. While I missed the Appiah's Superbowl party, I did get to watch from B to E in TCM's "30 days of Oscar" from a hospital bed. My follow-up MRI in September was negative; I have to do these annually for two more years, and then I should be in the clear.

I still work as a hospitalist at Huron Valley, managing labor and dealing with pregnancy problems. I am no longer an employee, however; Tenet, in their infinite wisdom, decided to cut us loose, and have us work as independent contractors. I now get to pay the employer portion of my payroll taxes, pay my taxes quarterly, and pay for my own malpractice insurance. I already pay for my own medical insurance; rates have gone up a lot this year due to the fiddling of the GOP, and will probably skyrocket next year once the individual mandate is repealed. Retirement is looking better and better everyday--I just need to survive to Medicare.....

This year I lost two good people. The first was my good friend Helen Krywka's husband, Tom. I've been taking my mom to visit Helen's mom in Little falls, NY every fall for several years now. Helen and Tom would come up, and the five of us would have a nice time touring around the area. He was soft spoken, always the gentleman, and a great conversationalist; he loved to travel, got me visiting presidential libraries. Tom had multiple myeloma, which seemed to be well controlled....until it wasn't. We all miss him, my mom and Buddy especially.

The other was Tony, my brother's mother-in-law's partner. Toni and Tony have been together for several decades, and family events weren't complete without them. Toni was affable, loved a good drink and a good talk. He was a traveller, and loved reminiscing about his travels--Patagonia, China, Ireland. His dream had been to take Toni with him on a big trip; they finally went to Europe, on a cruise, and he developed pneumonia and died in France. The Petrushas will miss him greatly.

My mother, Sonia, aka Baba, is still living independently, and has become quite the reader. I brought back a lot of books from Ukraine this summer, and she is ripping through them, in between her Ukrainian magazines and newspapers. She loves historical novels and straight history, as well as poetry. She still goes to church to see her friends, but is now getting rides rather than driving. Between cataracts making her vision poor, and the general insecurities of age (she's 85), her driving is now quite local, and only in daylight and in good weather. New lenses are on the agenda for 2018.

Belle has slowed down quite a bit, as she is now even older than Baba (in doggie years). Her major accomplishment this year was surviving to 12, which is a ripe old age for a larger dog. Mobic keeps her moving, although not fast or far.

Bill has retired from the Troy volunteer fire department in 2016, after 25+ years of active service, but his retirement party was held this year, and he received the coveted big axe and a plaque, as well as the accolades of friends, family and the citizens of Troy. He still works at Ford, sometimes from home, and has kept busy hunting, fishing, and working on the hunting cottage in Harrison, which is now all his.

Laurie is still at GM, and contemplating retirement. She is on Mobic, too, which helps keep her moving, and has joined a golf league. She went to a wedding in the UP this year (Escanaba), and got to kayak Lake Superior. She and Bill flew out to California this year with Pam and Jack; they got to visit our old friends Barb and Gus, and then sightsee northward to San Francisco. Laurie and the girls spent four days in New York City--they walked a lot, saw "everything," and took in a Broadway show (no, not Hamilton--something called "War Paint"). A good time was had by all.

Kalyna has had a ridiculously busy year....again. She started a Future Problem Solvers program at her school last year, and two of her teams went to the state finals--quite an achievement! Kalyna also ran the first girls basketball tournament at her school and an after school club for girls called Young Female Leaders. She finished her Teach for America commitment, and her contract was not renewed for 2017-18 (charter school cost saving). She had decided that a teaching career was not in her future anyway, as she had succumbed to the siren song of medicine. Kalyna took a nurse's aid course last summer, and has been working at the former Bon Secours hospital in that capacity; meanwhile she aced her GREs and is taking prerequisite classes while applying to PA programs. Kalyna traveled a bit, visiting not just NYC, but also Pictured Rocks in the UP this summer. She and Trevor are still dating, traveling back and forth between San Francisco and Detroit.

Nick graduated with honors from Michigan State University in May. He then took some time off to relax and spend time with friend, after which he held three jobs within about two months. Marketing jobs can be hard to find, so he trained to be a barrista at Starbucks; before he could finish training and serve us coffee, he got a sales job at a closet company on my side of town. A few weeks in he got a job closer to home doing.....marketing. And he is there still, enjoying his work. He plays disc golf, traveled with his friends from the West Side 88s, and has been hunting and working "Up North" with his dad.

Fuzz is in her third year of nursing at U of M; she got honors in her first semester last year, and we attended her honors convocation in Hill Auditorium in cold, cold March. Baba was there to beam proudly, and I was there to embarrass her publicly; we both performed our assigned tasks. Fuzz is in her clinical years now, and did obstetrics and pediatrics this past fall, both of which she LOVED. Fuzz notes that she worked last summer a nursing assistant and got sworn at on a daily basis (by patients, not staff). Her superiors loved her--she was "employee of the week" in her first month there. She loved the trip to NYC with Laurie and Kalyna, where they navigated their way around with GPS and walked 12 miles a day. Her hair is continuing to thin (I am not sure why this is important, but Fuzz included it), and has had many "game changing" life experiences this year, including shopping at Trader Joe for groceries and Costco socks for work.

Roman, my cousin Andy's son, graduated from high school this year and, as is the custom in the suburbs of Detroit, had a huge graduation party. All the Petrushas in the Detroit area attended, his aunt Lisa flew in from Virginia, and we stayed and partied until the last bell. I took pictures, of course. Roman picked up the baton from Nick and is now studying at Michigan State University in East Lansing.

I traveled a bit this year, although less than usual, since I spent winter recuperating from surgery and autumn concerned about my employment. I spent much time fundraising, though; both to save summer camp (\$10,000) and to send books to Eastern Ukraine (\$2500). I've raised another thousand dollars (so far) for next year's camp selling books I shipped back from Ukraine last summer (many autographed).

In autumn I came to the realization that recovery from surgery and Christmas preparations weren't really compatible. I had my gallbladder out in November and, even though I went home the day of surgery and my incisions healed quickly, my body needed a good six weeks to heal properly--I was exhausted all the time and slept a lot. So I didn't put up a tree or throw a party; I decided instead to spend "Ukrainian" Christmas (which is in January) in Ukraine. My friend Vira had been telling me about how wonderful Christmas was in Lviv for years, and I finally decided to see for myself.

I flew in to Kyiv on the 4th, which happened to be my godson Zhenia's birthday. We (his parents and I) decided to surprise him; and the look on his face when I walked through the door was a mix of incredulity and shock. It took him some time to convince himself that I was real.....we celebrated him turning 18 together.

I left the next day for Lviv, hoping to spend Sviat Vechir (Christmas Eve) with my family in my mother's village. I hadn't counted on it being one of the coldest, snowiest winters in recent history in western Ukraine. My cousin's husband's car froze, and the roads to the village were piled high with snow and impassable due to a particularly windy blizzard. So we had Sviat Vechir in Lviv, instead.

For those who have never been there, Lviv is one of the loveliest cities on earth. It has an old city center, baroque in style, with no skyscrapers or modern monstrosities to ruin the atmosphere. It embodies, to me, the Renaissance ideal that "Man is the measure of all things." It is a city of cafes and bookstores, of hidden passages, trees, parks and walkable streets. And lions.....thousands of lions. The name of the city comes from "Lev" (lion in Ukrainian), and there are lions everywhere, large and small, from statues to door-knockers to architectural friezes.

Lviv is also a city with a temperate climate, much like that of London or San Francisco, so I had come prepared for a mild winter in a gray damp city. Instead there was a winter wonderland of snow.....and unusually bitter cold. There was a Christmas market in the Svoboda square, and smaller ones throughout the city, selling holiday souvenirs and hot mulled wine (hlintveyn). In Rynok square, in the heart of old Lviv, there was a skating rink. White fairy lights twinkled everywhere, and churches displayed their shopkas (nativities). In the many small cafes it was warm, the coffee aromatic, and live music played. And I learned that the slipperiest surface on earth is cobblestones covered with cold, fluffy snow. It appears to be frictionless. Walking with friends with locked arms is a basic survival technique.

I stayed busy with holiday activities. At my cousin Myrosia's home in Lviv we prepared for Sviat Vechir, with everyone pitching in to help make the many Lenten courses for supper. I learned to make vushka and varenyky, and watched Volodya grinding the poppyseed in the makitra (for our kutia). Once the first star was seen in the night sky, we ate. We offered kutia to the frost, and then everyone partook. The kids, who are both much taller than me or their mother, no longer roll around in the hay or make animal noises, but we reminisced about years past at their grandparents' houses in the village.

On Christmas Day I joined Vira and her friends--for many years they have had a huge potluck dinner while being visited by verteps. The vertep is a western Ukrainian tradition; carolers go house to house and act out a play utilizing a set mix of Malanka and christian motifs...and sing. Much preparation goes into the vertep--a script is written, songs chosen, roles assigned, costumes sewn. The nativity story is told, with standard characters like angels, shepherds, three kings, the devil, death, King Herod and his soldiers; kozaks are added for Ukrainian reasons, and there is always a goat who is sick or dying and then saved by the doctor (a Malanka theme). We were visited by several verteps--a children's vertep, a teen vertep, a comedic vertep, an artsy vertep--each group had its own variation on the standard theme, and had its own repertoire of songs.

The following week was a whirlwind of activity--dinners with friends, exploring the city in winter, and concerts. Days I visited museums and shops; the Sheptytsky Museum had an exhibit on Hutsul holiday traditions, and the Ethnogallery of Roksolyana Shymchuk was packed to the gills with traditional folk costumes. I spent one day at Svichado: Vira and I were supposed to travel to a nearby town for a book event, but the car wouldn't go (a common problem in this winter), so instead I retranslated the text on the plates of her folk pysanka book instead.

In the evenings there were concerts and music everywhere, and a few of the venues were even heated! Pikkardiyska Tertsia performed acapella at the opera house, and the Kryvorivnian Hutsul carolers sang and thumped their axes at the Sheptytsky

Museum. The highlight, though, was the many local and distant choirs of all ages performing at the Dominican cathedral every night. It was a festival of holiday music, koliady and shchedrivky, and each night there would be a youth choir, followed by three or more adult choirs. Some were marvelous, some "improved," and some needing improvement, but all sang their hearts out, and vied to find new songs to share, ranging from ancient Malanka songs to a Ukrainian version of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah."

One evening there was a get together in a bookshop: a women's group in full traditional costume, and with a star, led us in singing, and each of us shared Sviat Vechir traditions from their youth. Another day Otets Sebastian and Andriy took us to see a 16th century church in Staryi Skvariansk, and then we drove through a magical snowy landscape to his fazenda in Briukhovychi to prepare and share a meal with friends.

And of course there were many meals with friends and family, both in Lviv and back in Kyiv; I got to sample eastern and western Ukrainian holiday fare, all while enjoying the ambience of Austrian era apartments and Soviet era Khrushchovky, with pavuky, didukhy and evergreens of all sorts in the background. In Lviv, Vira's tree was tiny and up on a table, to protect it from her niece's mobile toddler; in Kyiv, Inka had an artificial tree with unbreakable ornaments to protect it from her cat.

In Kyiv, in the few days I had there before flying home, I visited the Pryateli Ditey office to see everyone and make plans for the next year, and the maysternia of Oksana Bilous to see her pysanky and printed cloth, and to buy gingerbread cookie molds for Mykolaychyky. And I had dinner with my cousin and her family in Borshchyhivka; back home in central Kyiv, my godson Zhenia fixed me a lovely steak with a mustard sauce.

.....In early May I visited the **UP** to see my old friends and watch the raptors migrate. I went much earlier than I have in many years; it was still quite cold, and I managed to avoid the bloodsucking blackflies. As a bonus, I hit the best three days of the season on Brockway Mountain. I had many sunny days with lots of birds, including many large kettles of broad winged hawks. A weather station was recently installed on the top of Brockway, which allows everyone to check the weather online. For the very first time, I didn't have to drive forty miles to see if the wind was in the right direction and if there was rain, fog or snow.

I spent a few days with Jane and Chuck on Lake Medora, and got to know Jojo, their new old dog. She was a friendly, happy soul who had a passionate dislike of the police. I saw Laurel and Hannah in Copper Harbor, and Mike, Joelle and Mark in Calumet/Laurium. I stayed with Lorri and Rick in their log house in the woods of Allouez, where I cooked Ukrainian food and we discussed the sad state of the world. My Yooper "niece" Kara came up from Wisconsin, and we got to spend much time together. She and I visited Joe Kirkish, who's in his 90s and chugging along, as well as Ed at the Calumet Art Center. We took in dinner and a movie with Lorri at the historic Calumet Theater, where Joe and Club Indigo presented the always hilarious "The Lavender Hill Mob." It was a lovely time.

In early summer I saw a bit more of Michigan. Fuzz and I drove up to **Flint** in June to visit the museums; there were a Titanic and Rodin exhibits to explore at the historical and art museums, and a nice farmer's market downtown where we found raclette cheese and huge cinnamon rolls. I popped over to **Grand Rapids** to see the Ai Wei Wei exhibit at Meijer gardens; Beth and I also dined downtown at a restaurant with hundreds of bottles of wine "on tap" and went cheese shopping. We also explored UICA, GR's museum of contemporary art, and shopped the farmer's market for vegetables, rabbit and pastries.

As has become our family tradition, our family spent the 4th of July weekend in **Harrison**, the middle knuckle of Michigan's mitten. We hit garage sales, enjoyed the local ice cream, had fires in the evening, toasted marshmallows, lit sparklers, and went to the Harrison fireworks. Bill, Laurie and the kids went kayaking while I took the Babas Amish shopping. The Clare-Gladwin area has become a huge Amish hub, and we found several general stores (one of which even sold buggies) as well as our usual jam and basket emporia.

In August I headed back to **Ukraine**. I managed to raise enough money from friends, family, and generous strangers on Facebook to have a small camp, because summer without UCARE tabir would be unthinkable. It was held the last two weeks of August in Vorokhta; we had twenty kids from the Sumy area (orphans and the children of soldiers) and about ten staff/volunteers, including the indispensable Darynka, my goddaughter. The kids were in kozak Valeriy's very basic tent camp up on Mahora, and the rest of us stayed in relative luxury (hot water and hot meals) in a private home a bit further down the mountain. Both groups enjoyed fantastic views, morning fog, cows with bells and fresh air.

We kept busy; besides learning survival skills, mountaineering and Ukrainian martial arts from the kozaks, the kids also dabbled in ceramics, pysanky, and painting; they learned floristry (and kept the dining hall looking nice), built and flew kites, acquired temporary tattoos, and made bracelets for each other; they rode horses and four wheelers, played cards (it rained a bit), and learned to dance from our own Anya. Dima led them in all sorts of games, to help them get acquainted and build social skills. We had two concerts, to celebrate Independence Day (August 24th) and the close of camp. The kids prepared and performed songs, dances and recitations. There were fires every night with games, conversation and singing.

Despite our limited budget, we arranged several outings for the kids, near and far. We traveled, as a group, across the mountains to Zakarpattia and the salt waters of Solotvyno, where the kids spent hours splashing around in pools. We stopped on the way home in Dilove, the geographical center of Ukraine for photos and souvenirs. The kids visited the resort of Bukovel, riding a long and scenic lift; they climbed Hoverla, Ukraine's highest mountain; and they hiked in to the waterfall Huk. And hey explored the tourist bazaars and rode the rickety chair lift of my old stomping ground in Vorokhta, Baza Avanhard.

While the kids were climbing Hoverla, the staff took a one day retreat to the Kosiv area--we went to the market in the morning, and then to my rizbar friends in Richka in the afternoon, for food, drink and general merriment in the mountain air. Darynka and Inna ended up with gorgeous embroidered shirts because I misheard the prices.....

Not all my time in Ukraine was spent at camp; there was much time for visiting old friends and exploring a few new places. I started out, as always, in Kyiv where it was, as always ridiculously hot outside. After a day acclimating, unpacking and watching cheesy movies with my godson, we went to my uncle Vasyl's house in Zolotonosha to visit my dad's family. We had the usual wonderful feast, with cherry varenyky made with the very last cherries from the tree out front. For a change, we spent the night, and after a huge number of family photos, with Vania in full Spiderman gear, drove that morning to Cherkasy, to my aunt Tanya's flat. The last time I'd been there her grandsons were quite small, and I caught one of them standing on a chair in the kitchen and eating smetana with a big spoon from a 3 liter jar with a look of absolute ecstasy on his little face; that tot is now in medical school. And went to the local museum; while 10 year old Vania learned about mastodons and our prehistoric ancestors, we toured the museum, which we had practically to ourselves. The woman in the ethnographic section was so excited to have interested visitors, that she kept taking down barriers so I could get closer to the exhibits and photograph them. There were many embroideries, folk costumes and even local pottery, but no authentic local pysanky....

In Kyiv itself I did little touring, but did visit with friends, and catch up with family at the dacha. And our "collective" from camp met at the pizzeria across the street from Inna's flat to see each other again and plan for next year.

I also went down to Kryvyi Rih from Kyiv; I explored options for any means of travel (e.g. buses) besides the night train, but could not find any. So it was travel on the night train which was, for some reason, almost fully booked. I could only get upper coupe berths in either direction. Luckily I was traveling light and, as an old woman, got people to switch with me for a lower berth....KR was hot, too, of course (it's August). Tanya and her family were doing well. She was still on maternity leave for Pasha (Paul), who'd grown to be a quite big two year old; Masha (Maria), now 6, was quite the big sister, and ready to start school in the fall. Pasha's main interest is cars: big ones, little ones, and everything in between. I brought him a small selection of toy cars, and that kept him busy. Masha takes after her mother, and is fascinated by handcrafts; I brought her an assortment of art supplies, including a variety of those little rubber bands used to make bracelets, which she immediately took to after looking up instruction videos on YouTube.

Most of our time was spent just hanging out with family, often at the dacha, where it was much cooler. The 9th, though, was a church holiday, the feast of St. Panteleimon, so we dressed up and went to church. It was a new church, run by a charismatic priest from western Ukraine, whose services were in Ukrainian and often included exorcisms and casting out of demons. On this day we had the blessing of water and oil and one demon cast out. Later that day, we went to a nearby waterfall where we watched local boys diving and worked to keep Pasha from joining them.

I spent time before and after camp in **Lviv**, with the usual visits to friends, visits to bookstores, and visits to the shipping company to send books home. As to the cafes--they were as lovely as ever and, due to the hot weather, I became quite the connoisseur of nonalcoholic mojitos. I was there for the first of September, a national holiday, and got to see my kuma's son Maksym start university. Vira took me to a vinkopletennia (garland weaving) in the open air museum in Lviv, where my California friends Askold and Nadia met up with us. Myrosia's family and I took a trip to my mom's village of **Kniazhe** to see her mother Zoya, and broke Volodia's car doing so. Darynka and I traveled to **Chernivtsi** for two days, a lovely city in Bukovyna, but a bit too Russian-speaking for her taste. We wandered the streets, visited museums and the university, photographed many hundreds of pysanky, got to know all the cafes, and stayed with her great-uncle (the artist) and his wife and their many rescue dogs.

In the autumn I drove my mom (85) to **Little Falls** in upstate New York to visit with her best friend Alexandra (88). They had a nice time talking and looking at photos for a week. Halia, her friend's daughter, came to stay, and we organized many small excursions to keep us busy: the heirloom apple orchard, farmers' markets, the goat milk guys shop, the Amish store, the Greek restaurant, a local winery. It was fun, but sad, too, as Tom, Helen's husband, who'd always been our cheerful companion on these trips, had passed away last winter. Buddy, Halia's dog, bonded with me while her new little kitten, Joey, fell in love with my mother and slept with her each night. The parrots just screeched a lot.

We attended several Ukrainian events--the church dinner on Pokrova, and the Ukrainian festival in Utica. At the latter I met a 92 year old pysankarka, their local expert, who was still demonstrating and writing pysanky. Pani Alexandra kept us well fed with all sorts of Ukrainian delicacies, and I made borsch one night.

I made a day trip to **Ithaca**, home to Cornell University and the new home to my friends Chelsea, Patrick and Pacey. They had just moved here from Berkeley, and were living on a farm with the biggest barn in NY while trying to buy a house. Chelsea, Pacey and I did a local tour, hoping for fall colors (which were weird this year because of the very late frost) and visiting waterfalls, Cornell's incredible campus (it's on an island) and the site of Barbara McClintock's laboratory.

.....Along the way, I photographed almost everything, and shared much of it with my Facebook friends and in my FB groups (especially the food). If you are on FB, look me up some time. If not, please stay in touch by other means (e.g. lubapetrusha@gmail.com or even real life).

As always, have a wonderful year in 2018; with luck, we may just avoid nuclear armageddon (fingers crossed)! I'll begin fundraising for camp again after our holidays, and plan to be there this summer, with other trips in between--it's been much too long since I've been to London, India, Australia and Wisconsin--I hope to get to a few of those this year. Hope to see you along the way!