

Here's a belated update from the Bruce family. I hope you'll forgive the accounts of our above-average children. We always enjoy the stories that come from all of you—and wish we could drop into your far-flung households—but this is the best we can do.

This summer we had the opportunity see old friends in Edinburgh, whose teenage children we only knew through holiday cards, so I am resolved to keep in touch despite great distances.

### *Our extended family*

We are happy to report that everyone is well, in Texas and California, though with some ups and down on the health front. All the members of my family, save my brother Mike, were here in July to welcome my sister and her husband to the University of Chicago, where he's taken a teaching job in Computer Science. We're delighted they've made this move. For the first time ever we'll have family within two hours' drive, not to mention a cheap *pied-a-terre* in Chicago.

Many in Chip's family were with us for the holidays, though his sister Karen had to stay at the state health department in Texas to monitor the bio-terrorism situation. We're ever grateful for people who don bunny suits and do the kind of work she does.

### *Our over-committed children (Chip is their unfortunate role model)*

Here's Stephen's abbreviated list: piano, cello, chorus, madrigals, theatre, mentor to younger students. He reads the dictionary when he's supposed to be writing history papers. He's also launched into studying Russian on top of French, and plans to use both on school trips at some point in 2003. Currently he's confined to saying a few words in Russian to some of Chip's visiting students, who confirm that his accent, at least for "pleased to meet you" and "how are you," is most excellent. This summer, he underwent surgery to remove a birthmark from his leg, complete with skin graft, and he spent three weeks totally in bed---a challenge for all of us, but he was remarkably good-natured about it. While abed he did some volunteer work for one of Chip's colleagues, enhancing a web site in a way that remains a mystery to me.

And here's part of Emily's list: piano, violin, swim team, voice, madrigals, theatre, biweekly column in the local paper on web sites of interest to teens, radio editing at the local NPR affiliate, running the school's mentoring program, math tutor. She spent some time this summer volunteering for the Center for Children's Books. I think she hoped to simply sit and read some of their huge collection of kids' books, the largest in the country, but instead she spent hours translating computer files from old formats to new ones for their Bulletin. Ah, the world of work! The payoff came when she received a regional volunteer award, for this and some other projects, and got to lunch at the country club with some local notables in November.

Yes, Chip is over-committed, as well. As I wrote this, he was in Savannah with his mother and step-father visiting some of the Georgia family, and then heading on to East Lansing for a few days' work. He writes, he gives talks, he is haunted by students and their long dissertations. He probably needs to retire, but he enjoys his new department, and is trying to figure out how to write a book before the endless other projects and obligations take over. I edit his work from time to time, and together we wrote a book chapter in the spring, but otherwise I seem to be the oil that keeps this family engine from seizing up. I've become a professional volunteer of the modern sort, with work-like activities but some flexibility. Check back in two years when the kids

leave.

### ***Our travels***

I missed Emily's award ceremony because I had to travel to Paris to spend a week with my sister and brother-in-law. (No sooner did they arrive in Chicago than they took off for four months in Paris, an opportunity not to be missed.) With a half-empty plane and few tourists, November was a cold but perfect time to drop into France. It was particularly bleak in Auvers where Van Gogh died and is buried in a simple grave next to his brother, Theo. (This was meaningful since I had seen not long ago the *Studio of the South* exhibit in Chicago, a poignant account of Van Gogh's nine weeks in Arles with the arrogant Gauguin. I hope some of you were able to get to this, one way or another.)

In the summer, we all managed to squeeze in a trip together despite my worst fears about our conflicting schedules. We spent a week in London at a flat in Bloomsbury owned by an art historian, one of those serendipitous finds on the web. Then we headed north to try to recapture some of our distant past, by traveling a route Chip and I had walked twenty years earlier. In 1981 and with younger bones, we hiked 235 miles up the west coast of Scotland, carrying huge packs, along with the occasional haggis and potato. In 2001, we could only manage to show the kids our starting point, and then drive in a rental car to Durness in the far north, with several day-hikes and stays in youth hostels to recreate some flavor of the former trip. The kids got a little tired of our stories but were kind.

Emily rounded out the summer by going to a youth leadership program in Washington DC, sponsored by the aged actor, Hugh O'Brien (some of you may remember Wyatt Earp?) She was sent as the Central Illinois representative, all expenses paid, and though we knew next to nothing about this, it seemed something she couldn't pass up. She had a terrific time, despite the conservative leanings of some of the speakers. (Yes, I know, it's very useful to listen to all points of view.) This group of 300 kids from all over the country, and another 30 from around the world, created quite a stir at the Supreme Court, the State Department, and on Air Force 2, as you might imagine. Her in-box is now cluttered with email from Taiwan, Hawaii, and New Jersey.

Looking ahead to future travel: college is very nearly upon us, at least as far as the modern child is concerned. The frenzy seems to begin junior year. This past weekend we made our first official visit, to Oberlin College in Ohio, where Emily and a friend stayed in a dorm and learned all about the college scene at a small school in a very small town. In the summer of 2002, we'll have to pursue this question in earnest, which probably suggests a trip to the northeast and elsewhere. (Emily idly wonders, what about the University of Edinburgh?) We hope, thus, to see many of you then. I've promised Chip a canoe trip in Maine if we do a few colleges. We'll let you know next year how all of this works out---and, of course, we'll be doing it all over again with Stephen.

When we first moved to the Middle of the Country, we sent a holiday letter with a pig logo, and later we made a web site with photos, but this is a plain sort of year. Let's hope by the time I send this (a month after writing) we will have managed to at least do a run-in photo with our camera timer, so you can see our cheerful aging faces.