

December 29, 2008

Seven deer just raced by my window as I began this note, and they looked a bit romantic against the snowy background of our front yard. In this season of peace and generosity, I should feel more charitable towards them, but all summer long I chased them and their many cousins, and wept as I watched what they ate. They think it's amusing when I wave my arms and throw things at them, moving along only when I'm near enough to see their noses twitch.

In any case, they are a sign of the season. If our kids were home, they'd be sledding down the driveway, but they're marching through their academic careers. Stephen has one more semester at Yale, and then launches into some sort of work...we hope. This semester he's studying Sanskrit classics, French history, Russian literature, and a little German, so you can see he's doing exactly what he loves. And singing in three groups. His Russian Chorus is touring in Montreal in the spring, and the Glee Club is singing in Brazil and Argentina in the summer, so he'll get in some travel before he has to kiss the good life goodbye. This past summer he did some Russian translation, and was a field intern for the Obama campaign in Illinois/Indiana, where he learned a lot in a short time. (In August he conscripted Emily and his mother to campaigning in Terre Haute, and we now take credit for turning Indiana blue for the first time in decades.)

Emily is in the second year of her PhD program in History at Minnesota, living with three other grad students, and also singing in her spare time. I caught an impressive choral performance of her group, Vocal Essence, when I visited in October, in the lovely and enormous St Paul Cathedral. There she was, way up in the back, a small face and a big voice, along with 130 others. They performed earlier this fall with Garrison Keillor, so they're kind of a big deal in a Minnesota sort of way. She's hoping to go to Germany this summer to work in an archive and improve her German, since Modern European History is her area.

Chip has mostly stayed put since we arrived back from Dublin in June. But we managed to tuck in some travel before we left the other hemisphere. He popped over to a Scottish island to work for 48 hours and we did a little April in Paris to satisfy my yearning for a brief return there. We also went to meetings in Greek Macedonia and Spanish Catalonia, and tacked on some wonderful few days to explore each of those regions. One of his talks was about Ubiquitous Learning, which is very appropriate. Ireland felt like another home by the end of the year, and we didn't see nearly enough of it.

In September Chip had one more foreign adventure, another Fulbright visit to Turkey and Cyprus. I didn't go along, which I regretted when I saw the photos. But I had the Jail as consolation...I'm still very involved with working at the local jail libraries, and also sending books to Illinois prisoners. It's a great group; we have lots of fun while sorting donated books, reading amusing and grateful letters from prisoners, and filling book orders.

We managed to get to California to see my family and to Texas to see Chip's this summer. As some know, we also spent lots of time earlier with Catherine, Chip's

mother, because she broke her hip in Ireland while visiting us in February. A six day trip turned into very nearly six weeks. She's recovering well, heroically, though she won't say that.

My mother is enjoying the company of my sister and her husband, who are spending their sabbatical this fall in California before going off in the spring to Europe. It's nice to know a family member is there house-painting and cooking, when we can't be.

So that's the quick summary. Coming up: Chip's outlining a book, and I'm going to celebrate finally reaching 60 with a solo trip back to Paris in the grey of January. Chip wants to paddle the Nahanni River in Yukon next summer, but also do work in Nepal, Turkey, Spain, Netherlands, and Haiti. And finish the book. We'll keep you posted.

Ending with the wildlife theme, I must mention that we fished out tree frogs, salamanders, and a squirrel from our pool this summer. A pair of mallards swooped in one afternoon and looked briefly confused. A dozen Canada geese chicks waddled up the driveway behind their parents. A wren got into the enclosed back porch. And a raccoon fell through a skylight at 3AM. For details on that last, see Chip's blog, through which he ponders the state of the world.

Here's the raccoon story:

<http://chipbruce.wordpress.com/?s=raccoon>

And here's the most recent:

<http://chipbruce.wordpress.com/>

There are a few more photos if you'd like to see them:

http://web.me.com/susanpbruce/Site/Xmas_2008.html

We, and all our wildlife, send best wishes for a very good new year.