

Greetings!

I had planned to write this letter much sooner. I'd set aside the day (a quiet one at work) to jot a few notes about this past year. When I opened my laptop to begin writing, I became distracted—horribly, shockingly distracted—by the events in Newtown. They were just babies, and they were mowed down by a boy with a high powered rifle. The refrain from the gun nuts began before their poor little bodies were even cold: “Guns don't kill, people kill.” Yes, people with guns. I hope that, this time, something will come of these deaths, some sort of rational approach to gun ownership in America. How many more innocents need to be martyred on the altar of the second amendment? If this is American exceptionalism, I've had enough. I'd prefer to be unexceptional.

There has been some good news in the past year. President Obama was reelected. The Senate remains Democratic. And my mother has a new knee. I've not needed any major repairs around the house (fingers crossed), and my garden thrived this year, except for the fruit trees. Thanks to our very mild February and March, all the fruit trees in our state bloomed prematurely, and then were decimated by frost. No fruit in my yard (except one apple and a handful of pears) this year, and very little in our state. No Michigan apples this fall in the stores or at the cider mills. This was bad news for our agricultural region, and there is no reason to think that global warming will get any better any time soon.

My family has remained happy and relatively healthy this year. My parents continue to age, and their lives have become more demarcated. They no longer drive after dark, in bad weather, or far from home. **Dad's** lung cancer is stable, no better or worse, with an irritating (to him) cough. He finally got hearing aids this year, and is still getting used to them, but we all LOVE them, as we no longer need to shout. My **Mom** had her left knee replaced in March, and has made a great recovery, regaining most of her mobility. She's back out in her yard working away, raking and gardening....and, most importantly (to the grandchildren), back in the kitchen cooking her family favorites (pancakes and city chicken).

My brother **Bill** is still at Ford, and continues to spend his free time stalking and killing small animals and waterfowl (deer continue to elude him), and disagreeing with my politics. He has added fishing to his outdoorsman repertoire. My sister-in-law, **Laurie**, is still at GM, although as a real employee now, not just a temp, and is busy raising two teenagers. She will have another graduation to deal with next spring, and two kids in college next fall. Laurie turned 50 this year, and celebrated with a group of similarly aged friends at a beach house in South Carolina. I assume much liquor was consumed.

Kalyna had the best and most interesting year of anyone in our family. She travelled to Tanzania this summer, to the village of Lupanga, where GO (Global Outreach), a group she's been involved with since high school, had helped build an orphanage and clinic. She got to know the children of the orphanage and many of the villagers, and visited other projects in the area. She came home even more enthused to, as her dad puts it, “Save the world.” She also came home with a pair of chigoe (sand) fleas burrowed into her foot. Kalyna is in her second year at U of M, working hard and earning good grades, and is trying to decide on a major. So far, anything “hands on” medical (e.g. nurse, doctor) is out.

Nick is now a senior in high school, and continues to major in congeniality and school spirit, and to be enthusiastically involved in everything the school has to offer....except academics. He spent his summer working odd jobs, and enjoying the good life with friends, knowing it was probably his last real summer vacation. His biggest accomplishment this year, I am told, was catching a 52 inch muskie. Nick is currently applying to colleges. I must add that I am impressed at how neat and clean he is; I had a chance to ride in his Jeep, and it was spotless inside and out. Why do people assume teen boys are messy and teen girls neat?

Fuzz (aka Maria) is not only a proud high school sophomore, but class president as well. She enjoys high school life, especially running and organizing things. She continues to moon after her new favorite teenybopper band—the rough, tough, tea-sipping “One Direction.” Fuzz played both soccer and volleyball this year, and competed in Future Problem Solvers again. Her FPS team competed in the FPS international bowl in Indiana (woo hoo!) and won a semifinal award. The high point of that competition was meeting real life kiwis (people, not birds or fruit). And lastly, Fuzz is learning to drive—she has a permit, and can actually drive while supervised on the roads of Michigan. Fellow Michiganders, beware.

Belle spends her days diligently protecting her home from squirrels and chipmunks; she rarely catches them, as the invisible fence limits her mobility, except when they miscalculate her bounds. Belle is an old lady now, in her 50s in dog-years, and it shows: she sleeps most of the day, chases thrown objects much less exuberantly, and has quite a bit of gray around the muzzle....a bit like her similarly aged (human) aunt.

I'd been doing OK health-wise, but this year age—or bad luck—caught up to me. I've had a series of weird medical conditions: salmonella, which led to Sweet's syndrome, an unusual and very, very itchy skin condition. High dose steroids for a long time took care of the itch, but brought on frequent hot flashes, fatigue and sleeplessness, and may have contributed to a pinched lumbar nerve in May which required crutches and netted me a handicapped parking pass. The steroids, though, did get rid of all those age-related aches and pains, and allowed me to enjoy the company of cats all summer long. Now I've developed a De Quervains tendonitis in my right hand, making it painful to do much of anything constructive, sciatica on my right side, and managed to pierce the nail of my right index finger while fiddling with a stuck drawer. Will this horrible year never end?

I haven't traveled much this year; my mother would prefer it that I never leave home, but that's NOT going to happen. I did stay home in February for her knee surgery (which got postponed to March), but got to wander a little bit. I drove out to Grand Rapids to spend a weekend with Beth. It was winter, and cold, so we didn't venture out too much, except for downtown, where we had a nice lunch and visited the art museum (reciprocity of membership with the DIA!). We also made it out to Meijer Gardens, staying indoors

to appreciate the newly hatched butterflies, cactuses, orchids, and a sculpture exhibit: "Essence: The Horses of Deborah Butterfield." I'm not much of one for horses, but these were interesting, constructed of found objects, including driftwood, and industrial and scrap metal. I also got to see the David Chihuly installation in the cafeteria—a dazzling ceiling sculpture called "Lena's Garden." Huge, multicolored glass flowers (weighing a ton altogether) hang in bouquets overhead to gorgeous effect.

In May I drove to the **UP (Michigan's Upper Peninsula)**, despite a pinched nerve that didn't allow me to stand upright, but did allow me to sit in my ergonomic driver's seat. I made it out to Tahqamenon Falls on crutches (the park is quite accessible), and then I spent almost a fortnight at Rick and Lorri's log house in the woods. It was a busy week, and I managed to catch up with many of my friends, young and old, throughout the Keweenaw. I wrote pysanky, as always, with Maddy, and got to meet her sweet fiancé, Jesse. The Copper Harbor birding festival was postponed because of a local wedding, so I missed out on guided walks and birder talks, but I did get some birding in, mostly on top of Brockway Mountain, including one day in the fog with hundreds of local schoolchildren. The Keweenaw National Park visitors center finally opened, and Lorri and I walked through—the exhibits were great, and gave me an appreciation of local history that I hadn't had before. I love the Keweenaw for its scenic beauty and its tranquility; in its heyday, though, it was and loud, noisy, crowded and polluted industrial center, with smokestacks, clear cuts and toxic waste. Deindustrialization has been a good thing. I cooked a lot—borsch, bigos, stuffed cabbage, pad thai and a variety of Indian dishes. I helped Lorri with her weaving class at the Calumet Art Center, and photographed the Girl Scout 100th Anniversary fashion show in Hancock that she had helped organize and participated in. And I got to experience a Calumet First Friday, wandering in the evening through the coffee shops and art galleries that now populate Main Street.

Instead of heading directly home from the UP, I detoured through **Wisconsin** and **Chicago**. I spend a day with Lyn and the Zaises in Marshfield, including a Mothers' Day fish fry, and then drove to Chicago to celebrate Jamie's belated 50th birthday. Paul threw her a lovely (non-surprise) party and did a brilliant job of it, including a marvelous photo slide show. I sat up late into the night with Jamie and her other old friends, reliving old times, and then shared a bunk bed with Ayla (she kindly let me have the lower bunk).

In July I was off again to **Ukraine** and UCARE summer camp. Our camp was in **Kosiv** again; it is a small town in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, and a center of Hutsul arts and crafts. And what's not to love about hot and cold running water and a pleasant staff? My goddaughter, Daryna, took part again, and her mother, in her incarnation as Dara Korniy, author, came and stayed a few days. The staff from Kyiv all came, and Yulia and Lyusia from Kraft helped run things again. We hosted 45 orphans from various parts of Ukraine, and kept them busy for two and a half weeks. I set up my "maysternia" in the camp library and taught them all how to write pysanky, and Vitalik brought clay and his potters' wheel and taught them to throw pots. There were also classes in origami, painting, appliqué, straw work, animation and social theater. The latter was most useful; it taught the older kids how to approach real life problems and deal with them. They would act out difficult social situations, and then propose—and act out—possible behaviors/responses.

We organized many excursions for the kids, too. There were lots of things to see and do locally: visits to town, with its many monuments, byways, shops and churches, to the ethnographic museum, to the ceramics "factory," to the big wooden church (on Sunday), and to the river (for swimming). We had two bus trips. The first took us to **Pistyn'**, where we visited an ancient church with its miraculous fountain. The kids then marched through the hills to St. Nicholas's homestead in the national park; there we enjoyed a picnic lunch, and got to meet the saint and tour his home and workshop. A second bus excursion took us to **Kolomyia**; we visited the Pysanka Museum, and presented them with examples of our children's work: pysanky in lovely ceramic baskets. We also toured the Ethnographic museum, and then wandered through town and picnicked in a local park (with a special treat—pizza!).

There many organized activities at camp throughout our time there. We cleaned up the area quite well, including our campus and the local stadium where our boys played soccer. Besides the regular evening themed discos, we had opening and closing concerts, talent shows, a masquerade, a kite-flying competition, bonfires, and athletic competitions (including our very own Olympics, complete with Greek gods). We had a competition for Mr. and Miss "Karpatski Zori," cross-dressing competitions, karaoke contests, dancing contests and Dima's station game. In my free hours, I visited Oleh and his family in Kolomyia, and took our senior staff on a visit to Richka, where we "rested" in the mountains with my Hutsul friends, and enjoyed the mountain vistas, shashlyky and horilka.

After camp I visited friends and family throughout Ukraine. Myrosia and I traveled again to **Volyn**; we visited several museums in **Lutsk**. The newly built Icon Museum was world class, and had an impressive collection of regional icons, some quite ancient. The "regional" museum, with its Soviet era displays of ragged stuffed birds, animals and fish, was quite another story. The staff have been working to update it, and have created some wonderful historical and ethnographic displays. I had been told that they have a huge collection of pysanky; they confirmed this, and offered to let me explore their archives, only to find that the woman with the key was on vacation. Maybe next year.....Myrosia and I wandered through town, to the cathedral and to the statue of Lesia Ukrainka, and found a lovely gift shop for souvenirs—she collects bells, I collect pysanky. We visited family and friends in **Sokal**, ate pelmeni, and watched the sun set over the Buh River...and Poland. I also spent time with my aunt Zoya in our ancestral village of **Knyazhe**, eating, drinking and reminiscing.

I wandered around shops, monuments, churches, and museums of **Lviv**, my favorite city, with Myrosia and Darynka, and frequented quite a few cafes with them as well. I was lucky to spend time with my good friend and fellow pysankarka Vira Manko; we exchanged photos, and she showed me new additions to her collection, including the bird pysanky and ceramic whistles from her new book. She and Myrosia discussed other books they have in the works, and complained about the Ukrainian publishing industry. She fed us quite well, too, as one would expect from the author of several cookbooks. Andriy, Vira, Myrosia and I visited Otets Sebastian at his "fazenda" just outside Lviv, sharing food, drink and delightful conversation, and admiring his dahlias, berries and apples. We also visited him (and a large number of Polish-Ukrainian priests and Plast members) at his flat in Lviv.

Because camp was longer this year, I had little time to travel in the east. I travelled by night train to **Kryvyi Rih** to spend a day with Tanya and her new family. I had supported Tanya, an orphan, through university, and gotten to know her quite well at summer camp,

where we both volunteered. Everyone loved Tanya, and we threw her a Priyateli Ditey wedding in Kolochava, with the entire camp taking part, including me as mother of the bride. Tanya was now the proud mother of Masha, my “granddaughter,” a very cute, happy and precocious 18 month old. As is common in Ukraine, she and her husband lived with his parents. I had brought Masha a small present, a baby doll, and she quickly named her “Katia,” just like all of her other dolls. I got a driving tour of the town, and then we visited Masha’s favorite playground, where we played a long time. Afterwards we walked across the river to their dacha, where we picked apples, enjoyed the fresh air, supped alfresco and got to know the grannies.

Another night train brought me back to Kyiv, from which Dima drove us to **Zolotonosha**, to our annual Petrusha family reunion. We all met at Uncle Vasyly’s. This year the family from Rivne couldn’t make it, so it was just us and the Cherkasy crowd. We feasted on varenyky and other delicacies, and drank a bit too much. We drove out to **Bohoslavka** to visit my Aunt Lida’s grave and my Uncle Vasyly’s farm, and picked tomatoes and dug up potatoes. In **Kyiv** proper we spent an afternoon at cousin Toma’s flat; cousin Olya was here from Donetsk, so we got to enjoy her pelmeni and photograph ourselves. On my one free day in Kyiv Zhenya and I had planned to go downtown; instead we had hurricane force winds and rain, and stayed safely in our flat all day. Even my evening plans got washed out—Ruslan got flooded and couldn’t come to dinner, and Vitalik barely made it.

In August we had our annual family trip to **Harrison**, where we spent the weekend at the hunting “lodge.” It was a short getaway, but we did do the requisite things: ice cream, cards, bonfire and flea market. Nick and Toni and I hit the local garage sales and resale shops, and chanced upon the annual Harrison street fair. No fireworks or parade, though.....

In late September I got to realize one of my life’s ambitions and saw Blondie live in concert. I had somehow missed seeing them back in the late 70s, but Beth had tickets to the **Grand Rapids** show, so I jumped at the chance. I enjoyed the music but it was an odd experience—Debbie Harry still has the voice, but looks her age, which is greater than mine. All the other musicians are youngsters, new to the band, except Chris Stein, who mostly just stood there most. Many of Blondie’s better-known songs are better suited to a twenty year old, and Debbie wisely avoided most of them. The audience was largely antiquated, too; the show started at eight and was done well before ten. Not like the old days at all.

Beth and I had a nice time in GR. It was ArtPrize weekend, though, which meant the downtown was packed. The weather was pleasant, and we wandered around, checking out galleries and outdoor art installations. There was art everywhere, even in the river, but there were also huge crowds and long lines. Next year we’ll come on a weekday..... Meijer Gardens was also on our itinerary—there were some interesting ArtPrize sculptures in the galleries and gardens, and many lovely orchids in the butterfly house.....but no butterflies, as it was the wrong time of the year.

I also dropped into **Holland** (MI, not EU) since I was in the area. My friend Linn lives there, but I had never been to her home....in Michigan. I’ve stayed at her house in Madanapalli, and she’s visited me in Vellore, but we’d never seen each other outside of India, despite living only a few hours away from each other. We had a lovely lunch, and walked down to the beach, Lake Michigan’s shoreline, just a block from her house. Linn was packing for India, and had Indian guests coming that night, so I was lucky to catch her.

In October I drove my parents to **Little Falls** in upstate **New York**, where we stayed with her old friend Alexandra Krywka; they’d grown up together in their village in Ukraine and then DP camps in Germany. Mom and Mrs. Krywka spent the time catching up on old memories, talking, reliving their youth and looking at old photos. I got a VHS/DVD player hooked up and we watched old videos from Ukraine (travel, family, and concerts), along with Super 8 movies from the 60s and 70s that her son had transcribed. We spent a day at Cooperstown; I revisited the Baseball Hall of Fame while they lunched and shopped (souvenirs for the grandkids, of course!). I drove around the countryside a bit, enjoying the fall scenery and the small towns. It was sad to see the destruction of the old downtowns, as Walmart moved in and drove out smaller businesses. Helen and Tom returned home at the end of the week, and we all went out to lunch together in Utica, bought apples from Helen’s favorite orchard and baskets at the Amish store, and just enjoyed driving through the Adirondack Mountains.

I took a side trip, and drove to **Connecticut** for a day to visit Tanya Osadca, a well-known Ukrainian-American pysankarka. She is also a pysanka historian, and has a huge collection of books and documents, all annotated, about pysanky and pysankarstvo. She showed them to me, along with her collection of traditional pysanky, many housed in lovely antique wooden embroidery floss cabinets. I photographed and recorded what I could, and learned a lot about pysanky, about Tanya, and about her uncle, Zenon Elyjiw. She is a lovely woman and I had a marvelous time.

After I’d gotten my parents safely home, and having successfully smuggled a bushel of apples across Canada, I decided to go on the road by myself. I decided to combine my love of pre-Columbian archeology and caves with my love of barbecue, and make a road trip of it. My destination being Mammoth caves, I started by heading into the wrong direction—west. My friend Laurie Charmoli was visiting her parents in western Michigan, and the only day that I could meet up with her was the day she had promised to take her mother to the casino. Thus I ended up in the dark confines of the **Gun Lake** casino where we had lunched and chatted away. Afterwards I popped by Beth’s house (just a few miles away) to drop off a jar of Bailey’s, and found her and Dave both at home. We had tea and regretted that we didn’t live closer so we could just drop by more often.

From there I drove to southern **Ohio**, where I bought new wiper blades and visited several Hopewell and Adena sites: the Hopewell National Historic Park sites, Serpent Mound and Fort Ancient. The mounds were in various states of preservation, but the attached museums were all quite good. They were part of the Woodland Culture/Tradition, the ancient civilization of eastern North America that lasted from 1000 BC to 1000 AD. It was characterized by the building of huge ceremonial mounds and complexes, thousands of which survived into the 19th century, but most of which have been destroyed since by settlement and agriculture. Serpent Mound, which is a long mound with spirals at either end, has been well preserved, and has a viewing platform from which it can be seen in its entirety. Fort Ancient, which overlooks the Little Miami River, is the largest prehistoric hilltop enclosure in the United States with 3.5

miles of walls in a 100-acre complex; on this lovely fall day I had it all to myself.

Next was **Kentucky**, where the history I experienced was a bit more recent. Here I got to know our 16th president a bit better. I visited Lincoln's birthplace, Sinking Spring Farm, although nothing of Lincoln himself remains here. He was born in a modest log house that was dismantled long ago; on its site is a huge marble edifice, with 56 marble steps leading up to it. In this marble temple is a cabin similar to that in which Lincoln was born, but reduced in size to accommodate tourist foot traffic. Down the road a short distance is Knob Creek Farm, where Lincoln spent part of his childhood (and nearly drowned). Here, too, nothing of his remains, although a house similar to the one he lived in has been reconstructed, along with early 1800s style farm fields.

Mammoth Caves were next. I arrived early and signed up for two tours.....the only way to see the caves. Wandering around unguided is not allowed. I had two nice walks through the depths, "Historic" and "Frozen Niagara" tours, with a reasonable number of steps. I learned a lot of history and some geology and ecology. The caves are huge and impressive, and there are some impressive formations, but few gorgeous crystalline features. I did see cave crickets, so there's that.....

There was lots to see and do in Memphis, **Tennessee**. I had been told, by several friends, that I HAD to visit Graceland, so I was there when it opened in the morning, waiting in line with a gang of Norwegian bikers and numerous international Elvis fans. The parking was expensive, as was the ticket for the basic tour (I passed up the opportunity to visit his cars and airplanes). We were forced to line up, and have our picture taken in front of a painting of Graceland on a concrete wall (I demurred), and then driven across the street from the tourist complex to the mansion itself. We were given headphones and set off on a self-guided tour.

I think what impressed me most is how modest Graceland is. Compared to today's McMansions, it's just not that big. And, while the decor may be somewhat tacky, with the exception the Jungle and music rooms, it's pretty standard 70s fare. The outbuildings have been turned into a museum documenting Elvis's career, and housing his gold records, outfits, photos, album covers, movie posters and other historical minutiae. What was a bit odder was the memorial garden—Elvis is buried there, next to the pool, along with his parents and grandmother. There is a small memorial marker for his stillborn twin. Nearby are floral tributes from around the world with heartfelt messages from fans abroad.

I found the National Civil Rights Museum, which incorporates the Lorraine Motel, much more interesting and much more moving. The curators have done a wonderful job of documenting the Civil Rights movement, with documents, photos, movies and artifacts, large and small, including whole buses. The room where MLK spent his last hours, and the balcony on which he was shot, are particularly moving....as are the rooms across the street, also preserved, from which the assassin shot.

I visited two Mississippian sites, one in Memphis (Chucalissa) and another in **Arkansas** (Parkin/Casqui), and then drove on to Hot Springs. I spent the day there with Lorrie Popow, a fellow pysankarka. She and her husband showed me around the town, pointing out historical Clinton sites, and taking me to the National Park and Garvan Gardens, where I got to meet Bob Byers, and see the plantings, chapel, chrysanthemums and preparations for the Christmas light show. From there it was on to Little Rock, where I spent a day at the Clinton Museum, reliving the 90s, and Little Rock High School Historical Park.

I had been missing the autumn colors, arriving too early in most places. Driving through the **Ozarks**, I saw them at their peak. The rolling hills and gorgeous leaves made the drive quite pleasant. I stopped in St. Louis, **Missouri**, to see the Gateway Arch, and rode the little trolley to the top. It is 630 feet tall, more than twice the height of the Statue of Liberty. I then crossed the Mississippi and found the archeological site I'd wanted to visit ever since I'd heard of it—Cahokia. In its heyday, Cahokia covered about 6 square miles and included about 120 man-made earthen mounds in a wide range of sizes, shapes, and functions. Cahokia's population at its peak in the 1200s was as large, or larger, than any European city of that time. As with most such sites, much has been destroyed, but several large mounds remain. I spent the afternoon here, climbing mounds and soaking in history; from Monk's Mound, the largest at the site, I could see the Gateway Arch in the distance.

I spent a couple of days in Illinois, visiting Hannibal to learn more about Mark Twain, and visiting Springfield to become better acquainted with the adult Lincoln. I visited the Lincoln museum, his house, and his monumental tomb. In the Quad Cities I learned about Blackhawk and the Sauk and Meskwaki traditions, and started to drive up the Great River Road—only to be discouraged, once again, by rain. Every time I try to drive the GRR, it rains. I visited a few more sites in Iowa, Mines of Spain (which is a lovely park) and Dubuque, where I rode the funicular and tried a "Maid-Rite" hamburger (local delicacy, apparently). I then dodged back to Illinois to visit lovely historic Galena and U.S. Grant's home.

I'd finally reached **Wisconsin**, where I visited the Dickeyville grottoes, an incredible feat of folk art; it is a series of religious and patriotic structures built in the 1920s and 30s, and covered in shells, stones, tiles, wood, glass, gems and geodes. I spent a few days with Trish and David at their woodland home in Gays Mills. I did some touring, sampling Pete's burgers in Prairie du Chien, visiting the original Pike's Peak, Wyalusing SP and Effigy Mounds NP, and a few locks on the Mississippi. We did some local gadding about together: apple orchards, junk shops, and Amish markets. I brought home several bushels of apples, including heirloom varieties like Winter Banana. David cooked, we drank lovely wines, and watched movies. It was a relaxing visit.

I next spent a day and night in Neillsville, at the farm, with Ruth and Dan Clark. I slept in my grandparents' old bedroom, toured the farm, and spent the evening gabbing with them and the Bradlows. On the way out of town I visited the Wisconsin Pavilion, bought some Amish souvenirs, stopped at the Linn dairy for stinky cheese for my dad, and then headed reluctantly home.

.....And now the year is almost over. My tree is up and lit, a fire burns in the hearth, and only this one holiday task is left to be done. I hope 2012 was good to you, and I wish you only the best in 2013. Have a wonderful holiday season, and do keep in touch!