

Greetings!

2015 has been, to date, a fairly unremarkable year. At my age, that is not a bad thing. My friends and family have made it through the year pretty much intact and in reasonable health. There have been no additions to the Petrusha clan this year, but no subtractions, either.

My mother is relatively hale and hearty, and still living on her own. She had another knee replaced last February, becoming the Bionic **Baba**. In the summertime, we discovered she had a gallbladder packed full of stones when one of them decided to block her common bile duct; this necessitated a stent placement, hospitalization and cholecystectomy. She's recovered fully, and is back to her usual activities. Her gardens are ordered and trim, and her house immaculate and in perfect order; it's hard to believe sometimes that any of us are actually descended from her. She helps make varenyky at church, dotes on her grandchildren, and travels with me once a year to upstate New York to visit her best friend, Alexandra Krywka.

Bill and **Laurie** remain in good health, and have become true empty nesters. Bill works at Ford, Laurie at GM, and both are quite busy. Bill is retiring this coming August from the TFD, where he has served the City of Troy as a volunteer firefighter, after 25 years of service. He hunts and fishes in his free time, but he still hasn't achieved his long held ambition of appearing on Michigan Out Of Doors' "Big Buck Night." Maybe next year. Laurie is looking forward to all her kids completing their education, so that she can quit working; in the mean time she is a valued member of her GM team, and got to travel to China this fall for work. She spent most of the time in factories working with her Chinese colleagues, but had time to climb the Great Wall, explore the Shanghai Bund, and buy counterfeit luxury goods.

Maria (aka Fuzz) graduated from Avondale in June, with honors and medals, several of which she created herself. She had a huge graduation party on the wettest, rainiest day of 2015. Fuzz was convinced that no one except family would show up ("40 Petrushas and no one else," as she put it), but everyone did come, and it was the party of the summer. I took hundreds of photos, as Fuzz posed with all her guests. This summer the two of us finally made it to what is left of the Heidelberg Project, and stopped by Hamtramck Disneyland as well. Fuzz has since left the nest, and settled comfortably into her dorm in Ann Arbor, despite initial bouts of homesickness. Nursing school agrees with her; she's aced her biochem final, gotten all As this semester, and looks damned good in scrubs and a stethoscope. Her mom did have to hem the scrubs, though. Fuzz hasn't had any actual clinical experience yet, but is looking forward to hospital rotations.

Nick is in his third year at MSU, and living with a group of friends in a house near main campus. He has learned to cook a bit, and, unusually for a college boy, his room is immaculately neat. The sloppiness of his roommates and the rest of the house disturbs him. His hipster side is evident in his love of vinyl and analog stereo. Nick has finally chosen a major: marketing, advertising, or something like that: no long hours in labs are involved, or back-breaking work....unlike last summer, when he had to take a landscaping job.. He now fully understands the value of hard work, and the importance of avoiding it in the future, although he did have a nice tan.

Kalya also graduated this year, with honors in Biology from the University of Michigan, as an Angell Scholar. She signed up for Teach for America, and is working for two years in an underserved area of Detroit. She works with mostly Arabic students in a charter school, getting paid very little to work really hard teaching middle school science. She also coaches volleyball, and has learned several Yemeni phrases. Kalya is living with two old friends in an apartment near Eastern Market. Her boyfriend, Trevor, is finishing a second degree at U of M, where he tutors Fuzz in biochemistry. They see each other at weekends in Ann Arbor, which means that, despite her being back in Detroit, we still rarely see Kalya. Maybe next year.....

In June we celebrated our Aunt Dusia's 90th birthday with a huge family party and a trip down memory lane on the party bus. We visited sites from her past – Michigan Central station, through which she first arrived in Detroit; the country building where she took her vows of citizenship; Belle Isle, where she spent many summer days; and the houses in Hamtramck and Troy where she lived. We even stopped at the Martha Washington Bakery to sample her favorite "Seven Sisters" cake.

The year has flown by for me, too, although it doesn't seem as though I did very much. I toured the Fisher Building with Kathy Beswerchij in January, and the Cranbrook Institute of Art in February with Fuzz. I got a chance to hear General Wesley Clark speak at the Detroit Economic Club (on the subject of Ukraine) in May, and got to shake his hand and get his autograph – on my Clark for President sticker from 2004. I hosted Beth Kozak on my couch in April (we went to the Kahlo/Rivera exhibit at the DIA), and Jan Klemp in June, but never made it to Grand Rapids. I worked on my pysanky, worked at my job and worked around the house. And I traveled a bit, although not nearly as much as I would have liked, and somewhat less than I usually do.....

In May I was thrilled to head north to the **UP**. I made my usual stop in Tahquamenon to see the upper falls and admire the dogtooth violets and spring beauties, and then drove north to the tip of the Keweenaw peninsula, Copper Harbor, where I spent a few days with Jane and Chuck Miller and their dogs, chickens and cat. We drank wine, ate good food and walked on the beach.

The rest of my time in the Keweenaw was spent in Calumet with Rick and Lorri Oikarinen in their beautiful log house in the woods. The weather was lovely in late May – no snow or ice floes – but that meant the black flies came early this year, and had us waving them away. I cooked, as usual, feeding not just my Yooper friends, but helping Lorri feed the many hungry participants in this year's "Bike the Keweenaw." As always at this time of year, the Chassell Friends of Fashion held their annual show – this year's theme was "Streetcars of the Keweenaw" – Lorri participated, the local high schoolers watched, and I photographed.

Kara was in town, and I got to spend a lot of time with her for a change. Maddy and Jesse came to visit and reveal that they would be parents by year's end (and we're still waiting for Baby Poissant to make an appearance). I had a chance to visit with Mary Baron, who's selling the old Baron mansion and moving to Florida, and to drive the back roads of the Keweenaw with Mark Klemp. I also had time to visit with Mike Shupe down in Hancock, with Laurel and Hannah Rooks in Copper Harbor, and to see most of my birding buddies up on the top of Brockway Mountain, along with a few late spring raptors.

I was in **Ukraine** for most of July and a bit of August, attending camp, as always, and visiting family and friends. The situation was still tense, but it was a stable sort of tenseness; there wasn't the fear of imminent Russian invasion that had predominated last year. The war went on; I had friends at the front, as did everyone I knew. And everyone was involved in some sort of war relief, doing what they could, small scale fundraisers for scores of causes.

Our camp was held in a hotel at the foot of **Hoverla**, Ukraine's highest mountain. Because of all the war refugees – Ukraine has about 1 million internally displaced persons — many of the “bases” that we had used for summer camps in the past were not available. Maryna found an amenable hotel owner who let us use his hotel for two weeks to hold camp. It was a beautiful building in a scenic location, and our kids did not destroy it. They were a more difficult lot this time – half of them were displaced orphans from the Luhansk region, who had been evacuated to orphanages in Odesa – but fewer in number, as our facility was small.

We kept quite busy for two weeks. We didn't travel much, due to bad local roads, but there were excursions in buses or vans to Bukovel (a ski resort with modern lifts, fake lakes and souvenirs), Yaremche/Vorohta (tourist sights and souvenirs), and Hoverla “base camp,” from whence our kids climbed the highest mountain in Ukraine.

We stayed busy on site. There were lots of activities, both handcrafts (embroidery, beadwork, decoupage, pysanky, floristry) and more physical pursuits (football/soccer, swimming, environmental clean-up, hiking, mountain climbing, camping), along with music and dance. And thanks to donors in the US (of cameras and money), we were once again able to teach photography, resulting in my having almost 15,000 photos to edit (it is a work in progress).

After camp, I traveled in **Volyn** with Darynka and Marija Ivanyshyn; we visited Lutsk, Berestechko, Lesia Ukrainka's home, Kniazhe, Sokal and Chervonohrad. I spent time in Lviv with Myrosia and Vira, and we had lovely dinners and outings with Andriy Khomyk, including a tour of the castles of Lvivshchyna and a picnic by a lake.

Kyiv was quite hot, and **Kryvyi Rih**, where I went to visit my Ukrainian daughter Tanya Romanenko and her family, which now included a newborn son, was even hotter. We walked on rail bridges, visited parks and fountains (where little Masha played in the water), and relaxed at the dacha. I met two pysankarky in person for the first time in **Kyiv** (Sofika Zielyk and Tanya Konoval), caught up with many old friends, and learned that Andriy Drofa was working on TV and Ruslan Masnenky was getting married. I had a reunion with my camp buddies in Kyiv, including my roommate Nadia Haywas. Dima, Inna and I made our annual trip to Zolotonosha for our family reunion, and we had a nice afternoon with family at my cousin Toma's dacha near Kyiv. And I got to taste Ukrainian sushi, which is often served with melted cheese....

In the fall, my mother and I went to upstate **New York**, to the town of Little Falls, to visit her best friend Alexandra. While the two of them caught up on gossip and shared photos of their grandkids, I spent time with her daughter Halia, went to the Iroquois museum with Tom, and explored small towns in the area. We all had a nice time going to the Greek restaurant in Utica for lunch, shopping at the antique mall and the Amish shop, cruising on the Erie Canal, and having brunch at the posh hotel in Cooperstown.

A week later, I packed up the Escape and headed west. One of my best friends from high school, John Sonego, was getting married, and I was going to the wedding—in **California**. It was a great excuse for a road trip. I headed southwest, stopping in Missouri to visit Truman's Presidential Museum, and Eisenhower's in Kansas. I enjoyed the scenery in Colorado, and drove on rimrock in Colorado National Monument. Utah was gorgeous, and the Valley of Fire in Nevada was superb. I spent a night in Oceanside with Nadia and Askold Haywas, and then headed to LA for the wedding, detouring via Palomar, the Salton Sea and Joshua Tree National Park. I stayed in Glendale with my friends Mike and Frank, who took me to the Getty, and who put up with me. The wedding was lovely, even in the 100+ degree heat. John and Tom had three busy days; I met their friends, caught up with John's family, and had fun.

I headed north from LA along the coast. I visited many missions, drove up and down on twisty roads through the coastal hills, trekked through the Hearst castle, and viewed elephant seals, and lots of coastal seals and birds. I even saw three California condors flying wild overhead near Big Sur. I saw the golf courses of Carmel, the canneries of Monterrey, and walked the boardwalk of Santa Cruz. I detoured to the far east of the state, to Lake Mono, with its wild tufa outgrowths, and crossed the Sierra twice doing so. I saw both sequoias and redwoods growing majestically. I spent the weekend in Berkeley with my old friend Chelsea and her family. I taught her daughter Pacey how to write pysanky, ate some wonderful meals, watched the sun set over the Golden Gate Bridge, and went wine tasting in the Livermore Valley.

And then I headed home. I drove long distances through empty landscapes across northern California and Nevada. I detoured north through Idaho, past the Craters of the Moon NP, and was reminded how beautiful the Salmon River Valley was. I drove under the big skies of Montana and North Dakota, past the tiny lakes of Minnesota, and the dairy farms of Wisconsin. I stopped to visit Lynn Zais in Marshfield, and revisited my childhood in Neillsville. I drove home through the Upper Peninsula, to avoid Chicagoland traffic, and realized I hadn't missed the fall colors after all. I got home just in time for Kalyna's birthday celebration and Garry and Loraine's annual Halloween party. And then I rested.

I've been home since then, recovering from viruses and preparing for the holidays. Tomorrow night I will greet 2016; I hope the New Year will bring peace, health and happiness to us all!!!!!!