

Greetings!

Winter is almost here, and it is time once more to send out my holiday cards and letter. Tomorrow is the solstice, the first day of winter, and the longest night of the year. Snow covers the ground, the lake has begun to freeze, and it is very, very cold out.

First I must begin by apologizing for not sending either letters or cards last year. I traveled late in the season, and then developed a powerful case of writer's block. Before I knew it, New Year's Day had passed, and I was still trying to get my trip to Nicaragua down on paper. Thanks to all of those of you who sent me lovely holiday cards, photos and letters anyway!

The past year has been a roller coaster of emotion. First came the US election. I will say but one thing about it, as I am trying to keep this letter at a manageable length. In the words of a British newspaper, "How can 59,054,087 people be so DUMB?" I mean, really—they voted for endless wars of aggression, homeland insecurity, more tax cuts for the rich, trillion dollar deficits to be passed on to future generations, further degradation of our air, water, and wilderness areas, less funding for public education, further abridgments of our civil rights, and dismantling all the New Deal social support programs. And they call themselves "moral"? What, then, would be immoral? (If you want to know what I really think about it all, as to be put on my e-mailing list; drop me a note at lubamail@earthlink.net.)

What does give me hope, though, is the situation in Ukraine. I have been glued to the internet since November 21, when the second round of the Ukrainian presidential election occurred. As my friends in Ukraine had predicted, the current government resorted to massive fraud to attempt to retain power. Three million votes were stolen, in a country with a population of only 50 million. It had happened before. But this time the people said, loudly and firmly, "NO!" They came from all over the country and massed in the streets of Kyiv, camping out in snow and freezing temperatures, shutting down the government, and refusing to move. And the army and police sided with them, and refused to attack and move them. The Court lost its fear, and nullified the election. The Rada lost its fear, sacked the corrupt electoral commission, and passed electoral reform. It was the Orange Revolution.

And on December 26th, a free and fair election will be held.

My family has added a member since I last wrote. Little **Ava** was born to cousin Helene in August of 2003, and has turned out to be a sweet and well-behaved child, and brings our third generation up to twelve members. We have also lost a member—my **Uncle Ivan** died in April, after a long full life. He was my Dad's very slightly younger brother and best friend. They grew up together, survived WWII together, came to a new country together, built their houses and raised their children together, started a company and worked together, and socialized and vacationed together. They are apart now for the first time in their lives. This Christmas will be our first without him, and it will be a difficult one. (For a longer tribute to my Uncle, go to my website and look under "My Files".)

My parents remain well and active, and continue to help me with my gardens, house and Christmas tree. They also continue to enjoy their grandchildren: Kalyna, Nick and Maria. **Kalyna** is quite the preteen now, having turned 12 in October, and continues to love school with a passion hitherto unknown in either branch of her family. She was a finalist in the national Future Problem Solvers competition, following in the footsteps of her aunt Lisa. She traveled to Kentucky to compete, and her team came in third. Kalyna enjoys horrible teen television programs; she has also joined the Scrabble club at her middle school, and is memorizing all the two-letter words in the English language.

Nick, soon to turn ten, is still Mr. Happy, with a genial disposition and outgoing personality. He loves sports, any sports, and I expect to find him practicing jai alai, rugby or curling any day now. He started flag (non-tackle) football this fall, and quite enjoyed it, although he was one of the smaller players in his age group. We're still waiting for his growth spurt. **Maria**, aka Fuzz, Fuzzy or "MARIA!", remains true to herself. She is, one might say, full of personality. Fuzz is in school now, all day, and enjoys it, but likes the days off better. She is seven, and clever as clever, and looking forward to eight. She reads well now, and still loves keeping a journal, although now she actually writes in it instead of just scribbling. I suspect she may be the traveler in her family, but not any time soon.

On the technological front, I have made huge strides. I have high speed internet, a wireless network in my home, and my own web site (<http://homepage.mac.com/lubap>). I now use a digital SLR to take photos, and those many pesky envelopes of photos have been replaced by small stacks of disks. I love the instant feedback, and the ability to crop and manipulate photos. You can see lots of them on my website, and I have an archive of old Christmas letters and other writing there, too. Go have a look.

I'm still working at Huron Valley Sinai Hospital, on the Obstetrics unit. It's not a horribly exciting job (except for those moments of sheer terror), but I like most of the doctors and nurses, and I can get lots of time off to travel. I'm also still involved with UCARE as a board member. We've changed our direction in the past two years. Because of difficulties with customs in Ukraine, and the sheer expense involved, we've decided to stop shipping used clothing and toys to the orphanages. Instead, we will purchase what we can in Ukraine on a "need" basis. We will continue with two other programs: 1) medical—helping orphans with disabilities to get surgeries performed and 2) scholarships—helping orphans attend university and trade schools. For more information about our activities, go to www.ucareinc.org (which, I am promised will be updated any day now to include a secure donation site).

And I've travelled a lot these past two years—Nicaragua, Ukraine, the UP, the Western USA, Canada, Cameroon, and Australia. I had thought I would have time to write things up before Christmas, but I haven't been able to, because of a horrible cold and cough that keeps me from sleeping well at night or functioning during the day. I've made a lot of progress, but am not quite finished. To those of you who are not yet wired, I will send a copy when I finish; to the rest of you, I'll e-mail it, and post it on the internet for download.

During this holiday season, pray fervently for peace, and enjoy your holidays with friends and family. And always remember the inspiring words of our glorious leader:

"And so during these holiday seasons, we thank our blessings. ..."

—Fort Belvoir, Va., Dec. 10, 2004