

Greetings!

It's cold out, and has been since mid-November¹. There's snow on the ground (more than I've seen in many years), snowflakes in the air, the lake has frozen over, and my sidewalks are icy. It's winter in Union Lake, almost two months ahead of schedule.....

I'm beginning to feel festive: my outdoor roping and lights are up, my tree is all decorated, and there's a fire on the hearth. My party was a success, and I had a chance to see many old friends. I still have gifts to wrap and food to prepare for our family get-together on the 25th. And, with luck, I will actually get around to sending out my holiday cards out this year *before* Christmas². As to when you will actually receive them.....

It's been an interesting year. The world economy is crashing around our ears, but hope abounds. American voters finally spoke out and cleaned house a bit in Washington, voting with their better angels rather than frightened inner demons. Let's hope that our new president can save us from the disastrous consequences of the last eight years.

It's been an interesting year in Union Lake as well. In June we had either a tornado or straight-line winds pass through my neighborhood, with dramatic consequences. Not only was my power (and, as a result of being on a well, my water) out for about a week³, but I lost an old, hundred-foot tall spruce from in front of my house, and several big branches from one of my oaks as well⁴. I was lucky, though, as many neighbors had damage to their houses and, in Dilys's case, even to her piano.

It's been a mixed bag with my family as well. No new Petrushas this year, although Lisa is expecting a daughter sometime in February of 2009. Little Halyna Daryna Kalyna Maryna Bohdanka Ivanka Mia Maya Hawkins will have an interesting time growing up in a house with white carpets and beige furniture, and breakable items always within arm's reach. Does spit-up go with designer suits? Lisa will soon be able to tell us.

The Petrusha clan had all of our usual get-togethers this year at the major holidays, and held a weekend-long family reunion in Valhalla, MI. We ate, drank, marveled at flying squirrels and went boating on the Pere Marquette River. At Easter absolutely everyone showed up, it was nicely sunny, and we got a great family picture.

My parents are healthy, doing well for their ages, but my father underwent his third heart operation this year, replacing one valve and getting repairs on two others. It was a difficult October for him, but he is regaining his strength, and taking over driving from my mother, which means they can now travel after dark, on busy roads and even in inclement weather.

My nieces and nephew continue to grow and prosper (figuratively speaking). **Kalyna**, the oldest, is now "sweet sixteen" and a sophomore in high school. She was quite stunning in her homecoming gown⁵ this year—quite the young lady! To her father's great relief, she expresses little interest so far in either dating or driving. She is quite driven, though—she works hard at all her subjects, plays on two varsity teams (soccer and volleyball), and is involved in various projects both at school (dances, etc.) and church (building houses in Mississippi). She made it to the state finals of Future Problem Solvers again this year (but, sadly, didn't continue to the nationals). And her favorite leisure

1. The vagaries of weather will always perplex me—the last few winters have been fairly mild in parts, and often the lake hasn't frozen over at all. Global warming predicts wild weather swings, and not just an overall warming of the climate. Northern areas may actually end up with COLDER winters as well as hotter summers. Arrrrgh! And Brrrrrrr!

Interestingly, it was sunny and 70° out on election day, thus insuring much higher voter turn-out. Not that we needed it—the voters were pretty energized and itching for change—but it certainly didn't hurt to have Mother Nature on our side.

2. I didn't last year, as my short letter morphed into a hugely long one that didn't get finished till almost February. I did send out a pdf version to all my friends with known (to me) e-mail addresses. If you're interested, it can be downloaded from the web, or read on line (with pictures). You can go to lubapetrusha.com, look for "Christmas Letters" in the main menu, and click through from there. If you have any trouble finding it, e-mail me for a direct link lubap@earthlink.net

3. I soon tired of the sound of generators, which everyone but I seemed to have. With gas at \$4 a gallon, they were fairly expensive to run, as well as smelly and quite noisy. I made do by taking my perishables to my parents' house (and freezer), eating out and showering at work or at relatives' houses. And my Coleman lantern was invaluable.....

4. It wasn't simply a matter of trees being uprooted, although a few were. Many were just snapped off of their trunks and tossed around. My spruce was snapped off some twenty feet from the ground, and thrown six feet—just enough to miss my house, although it crushed my flower bed and took out half of a mature magnolia. The oak branches that came down were huge, and I had to saw them off to be able to pull them off of other plants. My neighbors had a hundred foot oak broken off a few feet above the ground and tossed ten feet over. It was weird.

The oddest part was the lack of warning. My power went out, and, a few minutes later, my sister-in-law called to cancel our family night due to weather. While talking on the phone, I looked out the window to see large branches flying sideways, and then heard a "thump," which proved to be my tree bumping against the house on its way down. Some fifteen minutes later, when all the neighbors were outside surveying the damage, the tornado sirens went off.

5. Quite a change from her normal high school "uniform"—sweats (including a hoodie, even in summer) and her hair held up on her head with a large clip.

activity is sleeping.

Nick, thirteen, the middle child, continues on his affable way. He is gregarious to a fault and, like his father, has more friends than he can count. He still loves sports, but, in his case, it is more a love of the game than a simple need to win. Nick is playing organized baseball and football, and unorganized everything else. His health continues to be an issue—his Crohn's seems to be well controlled now, but his growth still lags. Luckily, his insurance company OK'd a growth hormone regimen, so he should begin to catch up with his schoolmates. Nick was a finalist in a local Optimist Club speech competition, where he spoke about overcoming his illness. He is still my favorite shopping buddy, as he enjoys the chase, and he has recently discovered the irresistible siren call of rock and roll (in the exploration of which I am abetting him quite ably).

Fuzz (aka Maria) is now eleven and in her last year of elementary school. She achieved her life's ambition this past summer when, on July 5th, she attended a Jonas Brothers concert. OMG!!!! It was more exciting than all three parts of High School Musical put together!!!!!! Maria is still a determined little athlete, playing both soccer and volleyball (a true Ukrainian at heart). She's following in her older sister's footsteps by becoming involved in FPS, and her group made it to the state finals as well. "Miss Maria" still runs Petrusha Elementary School in her free time, but hasn't enrolled any new pupils recently. Her godmother (Aunt Vera) has been hinting about a trip to Build-a-Bear, so it is possible that enrollment will expand in the next semester.

Bill and Laurie have been kept busy chauffeuring their children to their various activities and just generally raising them. Laurie is still working part-time, but no longer for UPS, while Bill still has a job at a Ford (the most solvent of the Big 3). The family vacationed in the UP this year, in Les Cheneaux Islands, where they had a lovely time doing sporty outdoor stuff. Bill and Nick went hunting together this fall for the first time. Nick passed his hunter safety class, so was able to hunt legally. Sadly, November was quite cold this year, so he froze in the snow and didn't get a deer.

I've been busily working a lot, both for pay (at Huron Valley Hospital still) and for none (running my both website and that of UCARE, taking photos at our Ukrainian School events, and volunteering abroad). My travels were a bit limited this year—no autumn visit to Australia that I had really been looking forward to.....but there's always next year.

INDIA: In February I visited India, and stayed in Vellore with Prasad and Jiji. Since my last visit, they had moved house. They are still on the main CMC campus, but moved out of a flat and into one of the few remaining staff houses⁶. Jiji had hired a gardener, and spent a lot of time directing plantings and shopping at nurseries. We also celebrated two birthdays, both Tarun's (albeit three months late, as moving had made it difficult to throw a party any sooner) and Avinash's (a sleepover for some forty ten year old boys). Jiji has perfected her pizza recipe using local ingredients, and has gotten quite good at chocolate cake, both talents that helped tremendously. I was assigned the job of decorating Tarun's birthday cake, and did a relatively good job of it, considering a) I'd never done this before and b) raw materials were limited. It turned out surprisingly well⁷. And I got to know Avi much better, sharing rock music with him, and teaching him and his friends how to make pysanky and how to blog.

Mostly I spent a lot of time at the LCECU (Low Cost Effective Care Unit) of CMC hospital, working with Sara and her wonderful group of doctors—Kiruba, Sushil, Sunil (her senior staff)—and everyone else, including Guru, Sashi and Sushila. There were three medical students with us, including two from my alma mater, Wayne State University. I spent much of my time in chart review, going through two years of obstetric records, to try and figure out what our transfer rate was and what the outcomes of transferred vs not transferred patients were. Based on my analysis, and in consultation with the staff, we developed protocols to begin labor induction and augmentation at the LCECU.

I had time, on this trip, to get to know Sunil well, and to discover a fellow music lover. We traded music, and I've promised to bring him much more on my next trip. I also had a chance to see Mathews Matthai, a perinatologist who left CMC a few years ago to work for WHO⁸ in Geneva, and who was visiting Vellore for a few days. Lastly, I finally got to meet Linn Gann, with whom I've been corresponding for many years. She is a fellow Michigander, from the western part of the state, and works for the CSI in helping run their mission projects, as well as running a small NGO of her own⁹ (Mission Partners).

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6. There used to be much staff housing like this on the campus, but space constraints have become significant as the hospital has continued to expand. Small buildings have been torn down and replaced with high rises. Most of the senior staff have moved out to the college campus in Bagayam, where there are lots of trees and flowers, nice houses with big yards and a quieter environment. Unfortunately, it's a long ride in, especially when there is congestion, and Prasad and Jiji prefer being able to quickly walk over to the main hospital buildings when called at night.
 7. Using chocolate frosting and an assortment of cookies and candies, I constructed a train with an engine, two cars and a caboose. Jiji was so impressed that she didn't allow anyone to eat it for hours, only to admire it. In the end, the children attacked it, stripping it of all its candies, and we enjoyed the cake itself for days.
 8. He co-authored the WHO guide to obstetric care for developing countries, and donated a stack of the books to CMC. It has been our obstetric bible at the LCECU, with many of our protocols taken almost directly from its pages. Sara and I were able to bring about many changes and ban common practices (enemas, shaves) by pointing to the book and saying "But the WHO says....."
 9. MPI, Mission Partners International, not only runs a nursery school (started by Linn's aunt many years ago), but also aids adults through its give-a-cow and tailoring programs. You can find them on line at <http://www.mpi-inc.org/> I've purchased

I didn't do a lot in the way of tourism, although Jiji and I tried. She now drives (a brave undertaking in India) and has a minivan, so we made a few forays away from Vellore on weekends. We drove out to Madanapalli, where I had worked with Patti and Samson back in 2000; sadly, the hospital there has fallen apart and been shut down since they left¹⁰. The drive was interesting, as we got a bit lost a few times, and traveled on rustic back roads. We stopped on the way home at Palmaner, which is well known for its roadside pottery shops, and filled the van with pots for Jiji's garden. I spent a day with Prasad's internal medicine group at an Indian water park, with pools, fountains, and sprinklers. And we all visited Chennai (Madras) to see Prasad's parents, shop, and take a family trip to the Vedanthangal¹¹ bird sanctuary, where we saw lots of nesting birds (storks, pelicans, herons, spoonbills and the like) and were attacked by hungry monkeys (Prasad's mother brought lots of snacks¹², and they could smell them).

UP: In May I visited the Keweenaw for my annual UP trip. I like to visit in the off season, and May is after the winter season (snowmobiles and cross country skiing) and before black flies and summer. There's not as much to do, true, but that just leaves more time for visiting with friends.

There is the birding festival, though, a recent attempt by the Copper Harbor community to attract tourists in early May. I made it for this year's, their third and my second. Through the festival, I've gotten to know (and spend time with) many more folks from the harbor (population 80), especially the birders. The weather rarely cooperates, although the snow and rain were worse than usual. Only a dedicated few of us made it to the bird walk. The evening talks were good, my spicy peanut noodles were a hit at the potluck, and I got to meet a bunch of Chicago-area hawk watchers. They (and I) did get one good hawk day, spectacular by downstate standards, but only so-so by Brockway standards. Sadly, I didn't get a chance to see my birding buddy Laurie this year—he'd had appendicitis and an appendectomy, and had to delay his arrival until after I'd left for home. I did get to spend a lot more time with Laurel, and to get to know her daughter, Hannah, who's recently moved back to the UP, better.

I had time to catch up with most of my friends in Calumet, though, and to express amazement how much their children had grown. There were two big graduations this year, as both Lieschen Klemp and Maddy Baron completed high school with honors. Lieschen will be attending Grand Valley State (in Grand Rapids), while Maddy will be studying at Michigan Tech. All of my friends' kids are growing older and moving on. Henry Baron, who's gotten quite tall and handsome, still remains, and he'll be finishing high school before I know it. We are all getting old.....er.

Kara Oikarinen is still up in the UP, at Tech where I had a chance to visit her, and see the closet she call her room at the sorority house. Sadly, I learned that my friend Jan Klemp is moving down to Grand Rapids for a few years to work as a pediatrician there. Copper country medicine is spiritually rewarding, but the hours are tough and pay small. I'll have more opportunities to see her down here, but I'll miss our time together up in the big drafty copper baron mansion. Mark, her husband, will still be there, so I'll still have a Klemp to visit with.

And I had time to spend with my other family, the Barons. Rick and Mary Baron are still living in the big gray Baron house, the one that looks like it should be on a Christmas card. Rick works at his wood shop, and Mary works for the hospital. Rick and Lorrie Oikarinen, proprietors of Cross Country Sports, expanded into Houghton last year, and are busy running two shops as well as biking, skiing and preserving Calumet's architectural heritage. They still have their beautiful log house overlooking Lake Superior and filled with Lorri's quilts and antiques, pleasant conversation and many cups of tea.

UKRAINE: I spent a good bit of time in Ukraine this summer. I was there in the summertime, along with lots of other tourists¹³. It's become more of a challenge getting around, as trains are often booked way in advance, especially the

several sewing machines for the program, and would encourage others who can to do so as well.

10. Patti and Samson had taken the hospital (MLL) and really built it up; she is an OB/GYN, and he a community medicine doctor. It was a hive of activity, providing good care to the poor of Madanapalli, and employing many local people. Sadly, the doctor at a competing mission hospital chased them away (although I am unsure of the exact details). Since that time, both he and the former head nurse have been prosecuted for fraud and imprisoned.
11. I first visited Vedanthangal in 1998, on my first trip to TN. I hired a car, and went out on weekday, when there was no one around but me and several park guides. The reserve is an old village tank, which has filled in with trees for nesting and even a few small islands. The villagers protect the birds, as they know that "the large numbers of birds translate into droppings which turn into a lot of guano – one of the finest natural fertilizers known to mankind. The birds also devour a lot of insects, pests and rodents which would otherwise harm the crops."
This time it was quite a different trip. Prasad had gone on-line and gotten good directions, which got us right to the reserve. And it was quite crowded, with lots of families coming to spend a nice Sunday outdoors. We were among the few who had binoculars, and the only ones who had a bird book (field guide).
12. I've never been hungry on any trip I've taken with Indian friends. Indian ammachis always pack lots of tasty, savory snacks, and the entire trip is spent munching on one or another type.
13. It's become common, in recent years, to see foreigners—and backpackers—around, even in places besides Kyiv. The Carpathian mountains have become quite popular among European climbers, and you often see them hiking around or using local transport.
I am assumed by most Ukrainians to be Canadian, because I can speak Ukrainian and do so with a North American accent (apparently). The "Americans" they are used to seeing are earnest and (usually) young evangelical volunteers trying to tell them, via a translator, about Jesus (and how much he loves them). Most Ukrainians are not impressed by them, as Ukraine is

night trains to and from L'viv. I've gotten stuck taking the "Kyiv trolley" (as the daytime "express" train¹⁴ is known) more than once, and wasting considerable time doing so. Luckily my kum in Lviv has a dependable car, and was willing to drive me around western Ukraine, while my kuma Inna in Kyiv knows her way around the march-rutky.

I spent two plus weeks in the Carpathian mountains, in the Zakarpattia village of Kolochava. I spent with with many of my old friends from Priyateli Ditey, with many of our UCARE-sponsored college students¹⁵, and with 60 orphans from every corner of Ukraine. We had a wonderful time, despite the torrential rains and flooding. I taught health, and had hoped to teach pysanka-making as well, but was unable to find any beeswax¹⁶. The children went on mountain hikes when we had sunshine, and learned crafts and life skills when we didn't. We had excursions to the castle in Mukacheve and to the old city of Uzhorod. In the evenings we had discos, movies and slideshows (the last two courtesy of my laptop). There were masquerades, much singing and dancing, and lots of good times.

After camp I went on a driving tour of Volyn oblast, to visit internaty (government boarding schools). The government has, in the past few years, provided much more help for orphans, but very little to special needs children. I visited six such special needs internaty, met the staff and, at some, the children, and assessed their needs. In the fall our UCARE volunteers visited the places I had been to and brought them aid, friendship and hope.

I spent time with my cousin and her family in **Lviv**. Daryna, my goddaughter, has gotten to be quite tall and quite a sportswoman, excelling at tai kwan do (she had beaten up all the boys in her father's village). She is also quite the artist, and has been making some very nice pysanky. Her brother, Maxym, prefers his computer and nintendo. We visited Myrosia's mother in my mother's old village of Kniazhe, and other relatives in Sokal. And, on our drive back from Kolochava, we had stopped to visit Ruslan's uncle in Chernivtsi, his parents in Strilkivtsi, and to tour Borshchiv and its museums. We also had a good look at the flood damage throughout the region, which was pretty severe. Myrosia and I wandered around Lviv, visiting museums and bookstores (our mutual weaknesses), where I found many more heavy but beautiful books with which to exceed my luggage allowance.

I had a chance to catch up with several old friends while in Lviv. Andriy and Sebastian served me a lovely lunch and took me to visit a magnificent village church with all the wooden walls painted with wonderful folk icons. Ernie Ewaschuk, a fellow OB/GYN I had met in China some fifteen years ago, and I had a lovely supper at the Leopolis. Feeling the call of his Ukrainian roots, he had recently tracked down distant family members in Ukraine and learned to speak the language reasonably well. I made some new friends, including Vira Manko. I had gotten her phone number from a mutual acquaintance, and Vira was kind enough to have lunch with me. When she learned I lived just down the road from her in Lviv, she invited me to her house and showed me her newest pysanky and research materials¹⁷.

On my return to **Kyiv**, I spent a lot of time with my father's family, although I did make on foray into tourism by visiting the last of the Seven Wonders of Ukraine, Sofiyivka in Uman. (Do not visit in high summer when it's 90 degrees out!) I saw all of my relatives in Kyiv, and Inna and I took a bus to Zolotonosha, where we had a grand family reunion at Tyotyia Lida's house. I got to spend a lot of time with Zhenya, my godson (a bit too much, perhaps), and to shop and wander around Kyiv. And I saw Andriy, and Ruslan, and so many other friends.....

.....Well, that's all the news that fits these few pages. If all goes as in previous years, I will expand this short (for me) letter, add photos and place it on my website. If I have your e-mail¹⁸, I'll probably let you know when I do that way; otherwise you can check the main page of lubapetrusha.com under "Christmas Letters."

Wishing you and your family the best this holiday season, and throughout the coming year. Pray for peace, and for our new president to succeed because, if he doesn't, we are all in really BIG trouble.....

Luba

a Christian nation and has been since 988 AD. That, and most Ukrainians don't see any harm in singing, dancing and having a bit of vodka with friends.

14. There are true express trains in Ukraine now, but this is not one of them. It makes very few stops, but is still slow compared to the Kyiv-Odesa train. Instead of compartments with comfortable seats and a table, as the old trains have, this has seating like a bus or trolley, row upon row. Thus the reference.
15. Including my own sponsored student, Tetiana Romanenko, whom it was a pleasure to really get to know. You too can sponsor a student—check out our UCARE website for more information www.ucareinc.org
16. I brought dyes from the US, bought styluses in Lviv, and had booklets printed up there as well. I had assumed beeswax and candles would be easy to find. The candles were not a problem, but as to the wax—there was none. Zilch. Not at the shop that always had it, not in the market, not in any of the churches I visited. It was quite odd. Next summer, perhaps.....
17. Vira is someone whose work I have admired for several years. She wrote the best book on pysanky currently in publication, "The Ukrainian Folk Pysanka," and is quite an expert on the subject, one which she quite obviously loves. She is also very sweet, and very hospitable. I'm hoping to work with her, and perhaps help her with translations in the future.
18. If I don't, send an e-mail to lubap@earthlink.net and I'll have it.