

Dear Family and Friends,

December 2015

Forget about the snow; the weather in 2015 was often fair, and we were able to enjoy it spending time outside for most of the summer into the fall. Working in the gardens keeps us in touch with the daily rhythms of the land. It is good to engage in serious digging and weeding to take our minds off worries about the Syrian refugees, the mass shootings, and the wacko rhetoric of some of the political hopefuls. Still, like the weather, the arrival of crops is often unpredictable.

We love to eat meals out of doors. We don't have cookouts so much anymore; instead, the focus is on salads with greens and cut up vegetables, like cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes that we plan to serve straight from the garden. But, as it often happens, we can never be sure what will be available when. Lettuce was not prolific enough for more than one or two servings in June. Cucumbers were very late. The cool nights in July might have been the reason the tomatoes waited until after Labor Day to ripen. The corn was also very late. The grape vines produced the most abundant bunches of grapes we have ever had. A tiny portion of these were turned in to grape jelly and jam. The remaining fruit is still there, attracting the herds of wild turkeys who wander through to sample them a few times a day. They also like the fallen seed on the ground at the base of the bird feeders and seem shocked when we shout at them to go away.

We are still trying to get grass to grow over the bare spots in our yard, and still trying to figure out ways to transform grass clippings and leaves into compost faster and more efficiently. Does anyone have a good use for fallen tree leaves? Once our compost bins are full, we haul them away to the town mulch pile, which seems to be running out of manageable space. We repaired the fascia boards behind the gutters facing south in hopes that four-foot icicles will not form there again as they did last March. Will I ever pick up a rake and not be reminded of the special long-handled one we bought last winter to pull snow off the roof?

The days Kaelen, Ibrahim, and Noor came to visit in July were ideal for sitting outside and enjoying the summer temperatures. A few weeks later, however, when we invited John's extended family for an afternoon picnic, it was hot. But as soon as we sat down to eat outside, a breeze came up from the east, and we were delighted.

It is our good fortune to be in good health. Of course there are setbacks, like John's occasional joint aches, and Joyce's Lyme disease at the end of the summer. And sometimes our inventiveness gets the better of us, and we must conclude that our garden might be too big to keep weeded, our lawn too dry to keep green. We have traded the gliding motions of our cross country skis for the more practical march of snow shoes. We can complain as much as the most disgruntled pair.

Music remains to be central in both of our lives. John plays his standup bass with Driftway Jazz at First Fridays every month in Scituate Harbor and with a bluegrass jam in Hull every week. Joyce sings classical music plus some jazz, gospel, and Broadway favorites with the Broad Cove Chorale. Their program of Christmas music "Forbidden and Revived" included Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, which was a transformative piece to perform. She continues with her poetry and Web site at www.poetryporch.com.

Ibrahim's work as an investment banker sends him traveling to Africa for specialty clients, while Kaelen teaches a class on Art Criticism at the American University of Beirut and writes about culture and the arts for a number of magazines on a freelance basis. Her most recent essay has just come out with *Aperture*, part of which you can see online (aperture.org/blog/lecture-performance). Their second baby, a daughter, is due in January, so stay tuned!

Best wishes for the New Year!

Joyce & John