December 19, 2011

Dear family and friends,

I am starting this letter from our little house in Santa Fe, where Roy and I have been staying since Thanksgiving Day. The patio outside, where we had so many wonderful dinners last summer, is covered with snow. It has been colder and snowier here during the last three weeks than in Minnesota, but there have been few days in which we haven’t been able to venture out for walks, and the surrounding mountains look even more beautiful with their blanket of snow.

Santa Fe is lovely at this time of year, with farolitos (called luminarios in other parts of the state) shining from many rooftops and the Plaza ablaze in light. A week ago Sunday, we walked down to the Plaza (a six-minute walk from our house) to see Las Posadas, a reenactment of Mary and Joseph’s unsuccessful search for a place to stay in Bethlehem. As their modern counterparts walked around the Plaza knocking on door after door, gaudily-dressed devils would appear on the roof above, shouting out their refusal.

Families carrying candles followed the modern Mary and Joseph, singing their praise for the Holy Family in response to the devils’ taunts. The final door, leading into the courtyard of the Governor’s Palace, opened, welcoming Mary and Joseph and all their followers. When I didn’t quite catch the words to the song, I turned to the Spanish-speaking woman next to me, who began translating them into English. When I told her I spoke Spanish, she gave me the words in Spanish so I could begin singing along.

One of my pleasures in being in New Mexico is that there are few days when I don’t stumble into a conversation in Spanish. It is a state of three cultures.

Tomorrow we return to the balmier climes of Minnesota, leaving our chance for a white Christmas behind! On the twenty-second, we are looking forward to welcoming Lewis home for a week with us, while Meredith heads south to spend Christmas with her family. Since they expect to be outside the country (Beijing, starting in July) for the next few years, they each wanted one more chance to experience the holidays “at home.”

Our year has been busy and filled with
both happiness and challenges. Highlights have included Lewis and Meredith’s “real wedding” at a beautiful little sustainable farm in Lovettsville Virginia in October, reunions with family and friends, and both Roy’s and my 70th birthdays. The most recent challenge was Roy’s doctors’ discovery in early November that the spot on his lung that they’d been watching for quite some time had begun growing. As Roy’s oncologist said when he began our last office visit, “We’ve got work to do.”

Fortunately (we think), an option existed this time that wasn’t available two-and-a-half years ago when Roy had his first recurrence. Instead of the very invasive surgery that he had last time, seriotactic radiation surgery did the job this time – in three sessions on the three days before Thanksgiving. The only external evidence of bodily assault was a small radiation burn on his chest, and there has been some fatigue. Side effects can take a while to present themselves, but so far, Roy is doing really well.

Roy has begun his phased retirement at Carleton and although he taught in the fall and will be teaching again in both the winter and spring terms, he is down to one course per term. In the fall, he took on other college-related assignments, however, that turned out to keep him even busier than usual. The wonderful Minnesota public radio host, Gary Eichten, who has so often invited Roy to be a guest on his public affairs program, *Mid-day*, is retiring in late January, so another part of Roy’s life will be changing.

I continue to work on issues related to gun violence and hope that 2012 will bring a better climate for improvement. With each high-profile tragedy such as the Tucson shootings, I hope that we will see change, but the casualties continue. When one tracks gun violence, it is hard to accept the premise of the new book, *The Better Angels of our Nature* by Steven Pinker (which I have yet to read), but I would like to believe that humanity’s overall trend is towards less violence.

My joys include writing (each week with a women’s writing group), reading (with another group of friends who meet when we manage to finish reading the books we’ve assigned ourselves and plan movie nights when we haven't), novice knitting (graduating from rectangles in all their manifestations to baby hats), walking, and spending time with friends and the wonderful young people who so richly populate our lives.

The event of the last year that has given me the greatest faith in humanity involves the coming together of a remarkable young couple, Kathryn and Jesse Steed, and the Hispanic teenager whose tutor and mentor I have been for the last nine years. When it appeared that my young friend and her little boy were about to become homeless, Kathryn and Jesse took them in, and they have become like a family – for each other and for our family too. And so far this year, Sarai is making straight As.

We wish you joys for the year ahead, courage for the challenges that life brings to all of us, and peace in your lives and the wider world.