

It is Christmas Eve, the perfect time for a procrastinator to write a Christmas letter, though, as you know, my communication could be from Halloween to Easter! In a day full of Facebook and Instagram, letters hold a warm place in my heart. My mother recently returned letters I wrote to her in college, that trip through time was a treat. Each of your letters and pictures are thoroughly enjoyed by the light of the Christmas tree with a good cup of coffee.

Time is moving quickly! Talia is a junior at OU. She continues to amuse and amaze me as she marches boldly forward. After lots of saving and some help from Gramie and Granddad, she spent her spring break in Rome, exploring the culture with a history study abroad program. She managed to bring home Italian wine – and even found gluten free pasta! She has moved off campus into a small house with two roommates. She has become quite the hostess, cooking for countless friends, my old roommate Kelee, Gramie, her old teachers, and her family. This year Talia became the Fellowship Chair in her Honors Fraternity, which allows her to explore Athens with various events for her “brothers”. She’s still working at the University restaurant, and recently became a student leader (or manager). Continuing her double majors in history and psychology, it’s now that time to start looking in to graduate and doctoral psych programs – eek!

Olivia graduated high school, fifth in her class this spring. She opted to go to OU, much to her father’s delight! Grandma Loewke would have been thrilled as she was also selected to give the class speech, which was stunningly received and moved many. Biz, Mek, Mom and crew came to watch her graduate – it was an impromptu party! She was also selected as prom queen, though I’m not sure the crown was as important as playing with her friends and the sash prior to the dance. We celebrated in force in July, with our entire extended family including cousins and friends from Virginia, Illinois, Oregon, New York and far and wide in Ohio. It was a joy to see all of my family mixed among our friends in our backyard. It is a rare event in my life to be able to mix all the people I love in one place! Olivia headed to Athens for school in the fall, starting the semester off with a weeklong backpacking trip. After some serious mountains and mud, she began her classes working toward an English degree. Along the way she has picked up some good friends and a few new hobbies, including rock-climbing and writing for a school magazine. It was a thrill to see her name as a byline! She also completed her first ½ marathon: The Air Force Marathon in September.

Sophia has become an only child, and so busy that we hardly see her! She is a percussionist in the marching band and concert band. She has a new band director and there have been a lot of changes, but it is nice that she gets to earn her own niche. She has also joined drama, helping behind the scenes in the fall play, and has scored a roll for Winter One Acts. She has a lot of drama to share, making her advisors laugh out loud! She continues her love of the arts with a photography class. She has also joined swim, which may be my all-time favorite sport to cheer! Sophia is also the vice president of her class and enjoys being busy and distracted (just like her father). She does bring home a posse of friends, and I love the noise of their giggling. She will be eligible to get her permit in the spring and I am excited about her being able to independently arrive at her events!

Christopher is still working for Philips. It has been a difficult year due to FDA remediation. He is looking forward to 2015. He made trips to Texas and Chicago. In Texas, he did seismic testing on hardware he supports. Chicago was his annual work on the RSNA show and a lovely visit with family. With Sophia's band entry, Christopher was once again recruited for prop building and band schlepping. This year, they built 12 medal hoops, ranging from 6 to 12 feet in diameter. It required new toys; I mean tools, and the recruitment of many hands. I am still working at Crestwood, as a third grade teacher. I struggle with the disillusionment of where education is headed currently. We have inherited crazy administrators and one of my most challenging classes ever. On the positive side, I have some of the most awesome and dedicated co-workers. The power of children continues to amaze me though, after finishing a recent unit on caribou (including Uncle Jimmy's antlers), students answered several non-fiction facts about caribou, but when asked why Santa chose caribou to pull the sleigh their answer: because how else would the sleigh fly?! I have kept busy being the team photographer for several of the kiddo's events. I also have recommitted to my walking, recruiting new friends and old to join me. We completed several small events and did the Air Force ½ Marathon in the fall. Krissy, Jimmy, Mom and family joined us for the Christmas Story 10K in early December; we are going to return in costume next year! We are also considering doing the Cleveland ½ Marathon in the spring. I continue to love cooking in my new and improved kitchen. My book club is in its 15th year, and is the backbone of my socializing. I am blessed with an extended network of strong women to fill in daily for my family that is so far away.

We have continued to travel. Biz, Tara, Mom and some of her old friends, and I went to watch Eili lay the wreath at Arlington National Cemetery in late winter. She had won the spot by writing a wonderful speech that Granddad had been proud to hear. It was powerful to be together. Mom, Olivia, Sophie and I also took a trip to Williamsburg, thanks to a timeshare lone from Uncle Mike. The girls deemed it the Disney World of History. George Washington was stiff competition for Mickey Mouse; A clear nod to Granddad's love of history/travel and wonderful teachers. Sophia and I took a two week trip to Europe in June with Biz, Eili, and Tara (Biz's OU pal – and honorary family member) and her daughter Jayme. We started in London, where we drank tea in the royal tea house and took in the sites of the city and Windsor Castle. We took the Chunnel, boarding in Kings Cross Station near platform 9 ¾ and headed to Paris. We then meandered south through the Basque country into Spain. The sights were stunning and wonderful, but the ability to breathe the same air as my sister, and giggle with the girls and old friends is a priceless gift given to us by my parents. Our love of family and travel is being further encouraged by our eminent trip to Memphis, New Orleans, and a cruise to Mexico with the entire Walsh clan, leaving tomorrow!

The best gift left to me from Daddy – and Mom – is the gift of treasuring and celebrating family, as well as making family out of friends – to you and yours: Happy New Years

The Cobb Family