

After a couple tumultuous years, we are back to the annual Christmas letter. So ... where to begin? Well, I can fill you in on what I know. In early 2013, I arrived like a lot of stuff does these days - by delivery truck. Thank goodness I am a good listener and enjoy cozy spaces, because I spend nearly all of 2013 in a box. At the start of the year, things were really quiet. Hans left for Germany a couple days after Christmas 2012 to visit his Dad. After almost 60 years of marriage, Opa was learning how to be a bachelor again. He was getting pretty good at it but enjoyed company, especially on his Birthday (New Year's Baby). Cathy and Katya stayed in Vermont enjoying long sleep-in mornings before the new busy year spun up again. As for me, I was in Cathy's office. She was always talking to someone - sometimes in person but more often through the computer. She was preparing to take a bunch of students to Barrow, Alaska. When she wasn't on the phone or moving boxes, she was packing, organizing, building or testing something. Katya was her number one assistant with even more stuff moving around in the garage below me. When she headed out in March, things quieted down for about a month except for the scramble of Hans and Katya struggling to get to work and school each morning and home again each night. When Cathy got back, things were hopping again with office hours, networking, contracts, repacking, and then out on the road again - this time to Myrtle Beach for Hans' conference. Katya and Cathy joined in for a Spring-Break road trip to wedge in some family time. They stopped along the way to catch up with old friends, see the AMAZING aquarium at Myrtle Beach, and Brookgreen Gardens.

May and June went by FAST! This was the time of Katya's big events. Spring concerts, recitals, and most of all graduation from Grammar School (5th Grade). The transitions were many and the family was away often. They came back one day to recount the tale of adventures in Boston to renew German Passports for Katya and Hans. It was their oddest encounter yet. The Germany Embassy had moved to a new and more secure location - a shopping mall!! Instructions received by secure letter told them to enter the shopping mall, proceed to a specific elevator, and then push an inconspicuous LEVEL 2 button. The elevator doors opened onto a narrow bridge followed by a cordoned-off platform where a receptionist sat. They could see the whole mall promenade beneath them but a James Bond entrance in front of them with nested walls made of bullet-proof glass, double doors, and security cameras everywhere. After clearing airport-level scanners, they made it into a multi-glass enclosed set of rooms for processing. The people were extremely friendly and very accommodating especially to Katya, but the setup was surreal. The visit to the Boston Aquarium afterward seemed so pleasant and simple in comparison.

Summer heat slowed things down considerably with the family gone from end of June through July. There were many short trips to family graduations and saying goodbye to friends leaving the upper valley for new jobs elsewhere. The family left for nearly the whole month of July during some of the hottest and muggiest weather Vermont has seen in a long time. Cathy had a meeting in the cool mountains of Davos, Switzerland where the family was able to head to the mountains directly from the village conference center and be at the peaks of Parsenn, Blümlisalp, and Jakobshorn thanks to funicular passes for the week. From there, the family took the train to Germany to visit Hans' family. The timing was fortunate but also sad with the untimely passing of Onkel Günter (Nov 1928 - July 2013). This sad event followed by the joyous baptism of little Nora of Frederik and Maren reminded us all of the circles of life and the importance of any and all family visits. Cathy had to continue back to work in Bern, Switzerland; the summer heat even hit there. After one particularly

hot day, her research team joined thousands of Swiss locals who were cooling off as a human flotilla through the deep glacier-fed river that surrounds the city of Bern. The water temperature of the river had risen to an unprecedented 75°F due to air temperatures in the high 90's (°F).

The end of summer started to show the strain of this high-paced road life. The house, pets, and garden were cared for lovingly by a summer caretaker but the studio and basement were closed off. I was grateful to only be subject to high heat while basement storage was hit hard by a mold attack. Everything in the basement was hauled out and sorted with half of it packed up for the dump. It was the delivery truck to the rescue for a dehumidifier and some dear friends with expert plumbing abilities that saved the day. Humorous language was especially noted during repairs between the cobwebs and attaching a drain line to the septic system. I got to hear a great deal of the commentary because these home improvements finally included the opening of boxes, including mine!! I finally met a number of fellow light fixtures. While I didn't make the cut for installation, I could finally see what was going on.

In the Fall of 2013, more transitions started. Katya started Middle School with a whole new routine including electronic grading system, gymnasium and cafeteria still under renovation, and a confusing schedule. A bunch of boxes arrived at the office. Most of them were old. They came from Cathy's contract job at a Government lab. "Things are a-changin'," the old file box said. "Back in the day, hard work and knowledge was something people wanted, but not anymore." That's when I realized that Cathy was setting up a new home office - a Vermont Field Station - for education, research, and communication. Hans was teaching part-time, grant writing, and on the road more times in between. The time of change actually came as a bit of a relief. With less travel, more stuff was finally getting done around the home. Cathy spent more time preparing manuscripts for publication and getting her first educational film premiered¹. Trips were more local to help a friend on his sail boat on Lake Mascoma.

With the help of Cathy's sister and Katya, the last of the lights finally went up on the ceiling, including me☺ Visitors finally had a place to stay as the boxes became fewer and pieces of the house started to come together. We enjoyed local hiking to Cardigan Mountain, Halloween, Pie Night, Thanksgiving at Cathy's sister in Connecticut. Best of all, I got to go on my first road trip. I was transported in blankets to church. Thanks to Cathy's knot abilities, I was suspended 20 feet up in the rafters to provide light during the Advent Season. My traditional points were complemented by a new-age diode bulb that shines in four different directions. Time in the box was worth the wait. Now I am not only part of a family, but also part of a community. And I make the visit each Advent Season and back again to watch the lives of a family that continues to unfold with visitors old and new. People that Cathy and Hans have known for years slowly reconnect and re-scope their lives back to the basics and long-term lasting efforts.

May the light of Christmas that is in me reach your heart and share in your joy of wonder.

Peace from the Moravian Star of the Studio
Love from Hans, Katya, Cathy, Max, and Koby

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LeOUkjOVpg>