

2021 Greetings and Update

This will be short as nothing much happened in our bubble. The exciting news was vaccinations. Onto the other news.

Dave is walking better with two new knees. His phone counts his steps and ascents, though not very accurately, to the annoyance of the scientific side of him. He'll walk a circle around the yard, trying to get to 10,000+ steps. Still, his perseverance is paying off, in spite of rupturing a tendon in his foot. He still enjoys consulting, and he received a 30-year award for docenting in the Open Space District. We still do the occasional Trail Patrol hike, though the 10-mile hikes are but a wish and a memory. Every other Thursday we have a date, and generally choose to hike, followed by a trip to the ice cream store. Most recently we have had high-end picnics (caponatas, tapenades, cheese and wine) at our dining table to watch the rain from a safe distance, and the many birds at two feeders.

Judy had a June ballet recital in a park, with "Giselle" dancers masked as they haunted the foothill oaks. No audience other than deer; we saw it on video. There was a bird solo, which we won't go into. That ballet school started workshops to teach several dances from "Swan Lake" and "Who Cares?" It's the first time in 7.5 years of ballet that this art form became enjoyable for Judy. Rather a long time to work at something with precious few rewards. Judy's other ballet school presented The Pied Piper for which Judy was a mouse (complete with tail), gleefully pouncing on dawdling and dazed toddlers to carry them off stage. She recently became a Sugar Plum fairy in their "Nutcracker," and was a mouse in that, too. Who knew that "mouse" was a role to covet! She and friends also made 10 pantaloons for the little dancers.

We are enjoying being next door to family (we are living in a cottage behind the main house, which we gave to Jeff and Victoria). Victoria is teaching at a high school; Jeff still works from home. It has been fun to share projects, conversations, and the latest culinary experiment. The grandsons (5, 5, and 7) arrive at 8:01 on weekends looking for stories, games or crafts. And food. We mischievously call them the weasels, and they are delighted to revel in the title. They are showing signs of civilization, thanks to indefatigable parents. (Only the young can do this parenting thing; grandparents last only a few hours.) Holiday dinners have been mostly within normal decibel levels. There is hope.

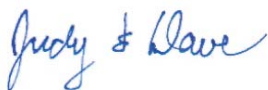
Other wild life included three visits by a Great Egret (who probably thought our dry "creek beds" were full of frogs), a wild turkey who flew in momentarily, but found the neighborhood populated by noisy bipeds, coyotes trying to snag a hen from the neighbor's coop, three kinds of owls (Dave is planning to build an owl box for the Screech owls), and the occasional Red-shouldered Hawk raucously announcing his presence. He competes with the crows who give him heck and raise a ruckus. A baby wood rat dropped out of an oak tree as it was being thinned. An opossum pilfers avocados. Haven't seen skunks or raccoons recently. And we continue to wage war against gophers and non-native gray squirrels. The egret got several lizards, but they must not have been worth a fourth visit. Egrets are very shy and aren't

comfortable sharing the site with humans. The coyotes' howling was enough to drive us out in the dark of night wondering what all the racket was about. They sound so weird, almost like a child crying! They have become regular visitors, and don't seem bothered by human presence, even in daytime. They eye us with careful, even scornful, boredom.

The apricots were fewer and smaller than usual; not enough rain. One of the avocados is so prolific that we are giving half of them away. We can only eat so much guacamole, and once is enough for avocado ice cream. The new landscaping is maturing. The roses never went dormant last year; here it is December again, and they have never been happier. Same with the petunias. The gingers and banana, both tropical plants, are looking better than ever. We need to dig up a dying apricot tree that I planted 37 years ago, a victim of Oak Root fungus, though I used resistant root stock. And an unproductive greengage plum, nearly as old, needs to be removed. Both trees will be replaced. The three avocado trees, the half dozen Bougainvillea and the Passion Fruit we planted this year are doing well. The orange cherry tomatoes were very tasty and popular. We pine for them now that they have lost their summer flavor, though they are still producing on a mountainous plant. Thank you, climate warming.

The Sierra cabin survived another year without a threatening fire. Stacy and Sal worked on paneling and flooring, bless their generous hearts and abundant energy. We supervised. We were visited by an aberrant mountain coyote (Jeff and another cabin owner were bitten in their sleeping bags—they got rabies shots; there is a large, gnawed hole in the bottom of my sleeping bag but no bite. He may have been put off by the feathers). We were officially told to shoot it, but none of us has a gun. Stacy and Sal are both working many extra hours in their hospitals. Their home remodel is finally underway after two years living in a converted garage. They live in a friendly neighborhood in San Diego that has an evening holiday bicycle parade every December, complete with portable lights. We miss them.

Despite the little bits of life slipping surprisingly and sadly into memory, there were many blessings to recount, friends and family to remember, pandemic or not. We hope you were also abundantly blessed.



Judy and Dave



'cots: cutting,
drying, bagging

Judy's birthday (she's special and gets four candles; Dave only got one on his birthday— maybe because he was so old that one candle per year would not fit on the cake), the twins (Julian on left, Andrew on right) and David in the middle.



Dave and Judy
before her scaled
down Nutcracker
performance
(called the
“Nutshell”)

