



Dear Family and Friends,

December 2020

The example of others who sent their holiday letters gave us the inspiration to share some of our own reflections as we celebrate this holiday season and look forward to a sunnier, funnier new year. We have learned how to deal with the past year's isolation and constraints, acknowledging the good as well as the bad in our own way.

As most of you know, the two of us have been favored with the addition of a third family member. Ilene noticed Oliver, our kitten, first during a July visit to the humane society and we both invited him to become a member of our family. Norm, because of his cat allergy, was reserved at first, but it did not take long for him to say, "Who cares about an allergy? Oliver is adorable, adaptable, and adept, and he is here to stay." Oliver also became demanding and has learned to ring a bell whenever he wants a snack or a snuggle. (Note: you can revisit many of Oliver's daily exploits on Ilene's Facebook page.)



Norm looks for daily distractions to satisfy his need for stimulation. For exercise he either bikes across campus, uses his home-office treadmill, and/or takes walks with Ilene. A favorite place for us to go for walks is nearby Forest Hills Cemetery, a beautiful wooded, hilly site where masks are not necessary, since virtually no one there is susceptible to COVID. Norm has satisfied his creative urge through various forms of writing – music, a family cookbook, two books on history (Tyler family history; transcontinental travel), even an article for Model Railroader magazine. He also taught his online course on downtown planning one last time and really enjoyed interacting with EMU planning and preservation students.

Ilene has benefited from weekly online guided meditation and yoga sessions. It has become increasingly important for her to structure opportunities to think about all that is happening in a calm and reassuring environment, well-separated from mundane daily activities and the constant news media presence. Keeping a daily journal since March keeps her grounded in the present moment and brings her joy to see on paper the year's accumulating experiences.



One of the things she has "savored" most has been discovering new ways to buy food – ordering online for curbside pickup or delivery, discovering who does takeout meals exceptionally well, and receiving treats to go along with Zingerman's food tastings and classes. We have carefully returned to weekly shopping at the Farmers Market, appreciating that our local food sources remain viable, and we love the extra time available for cooking and baking, even creating a muffin-making video on YouTube.

Perhaps our biggest disappointment this year was not being able to take our long-planned family trip to Italy to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Instead, the kids in California joined us on June 14<sup>th</sup> for an extended family Zoom session when we simultaneously prepared and shared our versions of an Italian feast. Ilene has not completely given up on the idea of traveling to Italy in the future, however, and continues her online Italian lessons 2 or 3 times a week in the hopes of eventually having the chance to throw three coins in the Trevi Fountain.

Looking back over 2020, we ask ourselves if we have done enough to alleviate the pain and loss felt by so many others. The pandemic has not been a big burden on the two of us, now that we are retired, but we recognize one of the most important contributions we have made is to have stayed home, period. Hopefully that will not be necessary for much longer.

During this Christmas/Hanukkah holiday season we wish you, our family and friends, all the best hopes for a peaceful, healthy, and rewarding New Year.

*Norm 'n Ilene*