

## ***2024 Holiday Greetings from Laurel and Brian***

Long ago, saber-toothed tigers became extinct. At some point there was only one left. It didn't know this. All the last saber-toothed tiger knew was that it was alive and needed to keep doing what it had always done. Likely it was lonely, wondering in its animalistic brain something like, "Hey, where did all those other tigers I used to see go?" Then one day it died, by itself. No more saber-toothed tigers.

This is pretty much how we see this Christmas letter, which, because we're not Christians and have a very minimalistic attitude toward this holiday, we call a "Holiday Greetings." (Yesterday it took us a whole fifteen minutes to bring a couple of small artificial trees with attached lights, plus two short strands of colored lights, from our garage into our house and set that stuff up. Decorating done!)

Writing and sending out a Christmas letter feels more lonely with every passing year. But we persist. Well, more accurately Brian persists, because he aspires to being one of the last of his Christmas-letter-writing species — sitting at the dining room table, folding copies of the annual letter so they'll fit in a Christmas card, licking the envelope, affixing a stamp, handwriting the address of a friend or family member.

(Explanatory note to denizens of the future who may come across this literary relic from the third decade of the 21st century: stamps were used to pay a government agency to deliver paper documents to desired recipients via a vehicle. Yeah, I know that seems crazy from your advanced technological perspective, but that's how we rolled way back when.)

What makes it easier for us to keep on with our Holiday Greetings is that we no longer care much about letting people know what's *changed* in our lives during the past year. Instead, we're pleased to report on what has *stayed the same*. That's one of the central themes of our mid-70s senior existence. If we can keep on doing what needs doing, whether out of necessity or pleasure, we're happy with the status quo.

In our younger days we'd seek out new places to go and fresh activities to pursue. Now we're pleased to report that Brian still enjoys his thrice-weekly Tai Chi classes, writing a daily blog post, and having coffee with an old friend every Sunday where they discuss sports, politics, and television shows. Laurel still enjoys her morning dog walk on the nature trails in our rural south Salem neighborhood, organizing and attending meetings of her Salem Atheists Group, and doing things with her women friends.

Our dog, Mooka, also is in a steady state at the moment. Thanks to a lot of physical therapy from a vet rehab clinic and Laurel, Mooka has recovered nicely for now from leg/hip problems that were causing her to limp painfully. Surgery was avoided. But Laurel couldn't avoid surgery for her own joint problem, a shoulder whose rotator cuff had almost completely re-torn after being repaired years ago. In October she had reverse shoulder surgery, where the ball becomes the cup and the cup the ball.

She's now getting physical therapy to recover as much strength and flexibility as possible in her right shoulder. Not fun, but way better than not being able to use her arm at all. We know that we're at the age marked by a downward trajectory, health-wise. However, as long as we're alive, we're determined to make the most of life, even if it mainly means sticking to the familiar rather than the novel. Familiar is good enough for us.

Best wishes for as pleasant-as-possible 2025. These are challenging times. Find enjoyment wherever you can. We all deserve that.