

April 15, 2009

For those both familiar and new to our annual tradition – here it is, the annual Tax Day Letter. The good news: the year started and ended with the Zapolsky–Williams household all together and well, cozy in our Alexandria enclave. Most of our other news is good as well, though tempered by the loss of two family members.



Last April, David was enjoying his sabbatical (voluntary unemployment), and in May he took the opportunity to travel down to North Carolina to visit for his dad's birthday. He and Robert picked up Martha in Richmond on the way, and while Robert and David had a very rare day at Tweetsie Railroad with Steve Helen and Aaron showing how best to enjoy the great weather and no lines, Martha and David's parents had a nice chance to relax and catch up. There are some photos on our web site, <http://kayakero.net/link1>.

AARP sent Sarah to Miami later in May for a conference, and Robert and David went along.

We extended the trip with a weekend in Key Largo where we enjoyed lazing in the sun, a little mangrove kayaking, excellent seafood and just general relaxation: <http://kayakero.net/link2>.

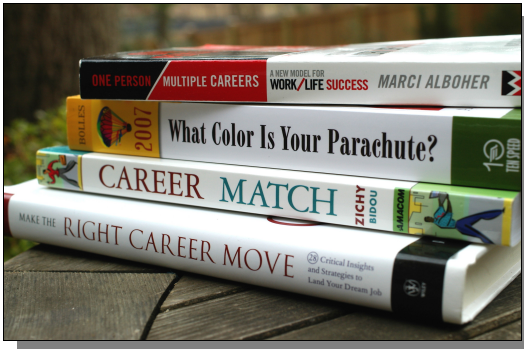
In July we drove up to New Jersey for a quick visit with Harry and Elle. They took us to the Liberty Science Center which was lots of fun for all involved: <http://kayakero.net/link3>.

About the time of the Liberty Science Center visit we learned that Lindsay, Sarah's sister-in-law, was diagnosed with cancer. It turned out to be very aggressive and she died in her home, surrounded by her family at the end of August: <http://kayakero.net/link4>. That was our first close encounter with Hospice care this year and with all that they can do to ease a very painful time. Unfortunately, it was not our only encounter. David's dad, Loren, was diagnosed with cancer in June of 2007; he lived well until just before Christmas. However, he died January 12<sup>th</sup>: <http://kayakero.net/link5>.



In both cases, Hospice allowed death with dignity surrounded by family and friends. But, it's very hard to see any death in a positive light. Lindsay's passing was hard because it was so sudden and unexpected, Loren's because he was kicking the cancer for over a year, and then he quickly declined.

Those clouds shadowed our lives this roller coaster year. After he left AARP, David had lots of time to enjoy hanging out with Robert. But watching the economy turn sour just as he was



starting to look for the next career step was hard. That job search ended in August and now he can say, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help." David is happy with his walking commute to the US Patent and Trademark Office where he works on their web sites: <http://kayakero.net/link6>.

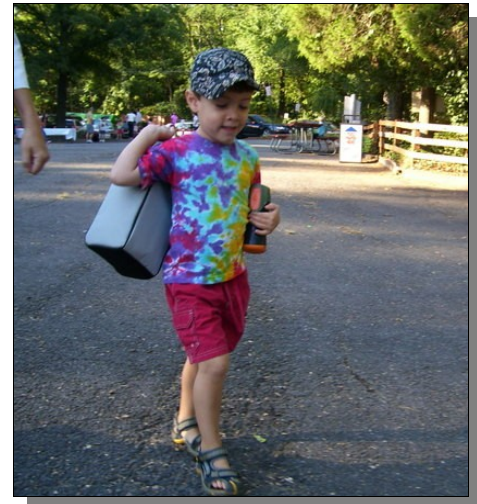
That same worsening economy dealt harshly with AARP. After a reorganization moved Sarah from a position she really enjoyed to one she really didn't, Sarah took a generous buyout just this month. Now it's her turn to relax

at home and enjoy Robert's company. And it's her turn to watch the weak economy as she begins the search for *her* next career step (she wouldn't mind a walking commute either).

Robert has been oblivious to the economy as befits a busy four and a half year old (well, four and three quarters now). But he has experienced his own big change: he moved from day care to Junior Kindergarten in the fall: <http://kayakero.net/link7> and <http://kayakero.net/link8>. We really like the school and as long as they like us, Robert can stay there for years to come. While it's not walkable from our house, it's not too bad dropping him off and picking him up (except for that one time...).

Amid the changes in our lives the past year we have had some other chances to travel:

We joined Sarah's Dad and Elle along with Oriana, Tom and Sebastian for a September week at the New Jersey beach. The weather was not quite as nice as last year but that didn't stop us from having a great time.



In November, we headed out to Seattle for Lindsay's memorial service: <http://kayakero.net/link9>. Taking Robert was a very nice distraction: we visited the Children's Museum, Seattle Center and the Space Needle. The memorial service was all Lindsay and David Z. could have wanted: lots of friends came together to reconnect and remember all the good things Lindsay did with her life and the great influence she was on everyone who knew her.



In December, we all headed down to North Carolina for a somber Christmas with David's dad in the hospital. Sarah and Robert drove back to Alexandria, then on to New Jersey for New Year's while David helped shuttle folks between hospitals. After the last tests ruled out the treatment plan, David stayed with his family and helped settle his dad into Steve, Helen and Aaron's house and Hospice care. Sarah and Robert came back down for that memorial service where again lots of family and friends shared stories of all the wonderful ways Loren had impacted their lives.

Closer to home we helped to lure our friend



Janek to Northern Virginia from the University of Wisconsin, played a lot with our new canoe (<http://kayakero.net/link10>), visited the Smithsonian carousel, enjoyed a private zoo tour courtesy of Suz (<http://kayakero.net/link11>), found some excellent puddle jumping spots (to test out Robert's new boots), Robert started and stopped swimming lessons, we picked blueberries at Cox Farms, said, "Hi," to the animals at Oxen Hill Farm and even managed some sledding and skating.

We also enjoyed lots of visitors:

- Robert's first slumber party as Romeo stayed with us while his folks went to "pick up" his new baby brother at the hospital.
- David's parents, Sarah and Loren, helped us celebrate Robert's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday; to help the firefighter theme, Loren even borrowed a set of turn-out gear from the firehouse in Seven Devils where he used to volunteer: <http://kayakero.net/link12>.



- Loren III, David's oldest brother, stopped by and that occasioned a surprise birthday party for Henry (Robert's godfather).
- We hosted the Zapolskys for Thanksgiving (and really missed Lindsay's presence): <http://kayakero.net/link13>.
- Neil, Lindsay's brother, stayed with us while he toured around DC: <http://kayakero.net/link14>.
- And our Aussie friends Nannette, Adam and Taylor (the older woman in Robert's life – by three days) came back for an extended visit (hard to come for a short visit from Western Australia):

<http://kayakero.net/link15>.

- Finally, just as this letter was taking shape, Loren III, Susan and niece Sally came up. We were the first stop on Sally's northeast college tour: <http://kayakero.net/link16>. This may seem innocuous but she was a year younger than Robert when this tax day letter tradition started – now it's hard to think of her leaving her nest and heading off to college.

Speaking of which, higher education provided one of the high points of the year as Sarah earned her Master's in Non-Fiction Writing from Johns Hopkins – a program she started before Robert necessitated an extended break: <http://kayakero.net/link17>. And just a couple months after reading one of her papers in a ceremony with the rest of her thesis class, she sold her first article to *Brain Child*; it's scheduled to appear in June.



Clearly we've had a very busy year but all the activity doesn't help fill the gaping holes left by the loss of dear family members. We did not expect Robert to be so well versed in the reality of death at his early age. It's sad to think how much he knows about it now, and hard sometimes to answer the questions asked by such an articulate 4 year old (four and three quarters). If there is a lesson for us from this past year, it's that change is inevitable – embrace it, and don't assume the status quo will last.

We're looking forward to a less eventful year coming up as we envision a smooth transition for Robert from Junior Kindergarten into “real” Kindergarten, a nice break for Sarah, and David continuing to settle into his new career. We hope this tax season has not been too hard on you, that last year treated you well and that next year will treat you even better.



Ian, Lindsay, Sarah and Robert in Tuscany, 2005



Sarah, Loren and his firewood in Seven Devils, 2007