

April 16, 2012



Robert on his speeding bike

Robert wanted to send this picture out in January but David explained that our tradition is to send our annual letter on tax day to make a less fun time of the year more fun. (David didn't go into the details of how getting a Christmas letter together in time for Christmas never seemed to work out.) The interesting thing about this picture is it was entirely Robert's idea: while we were in New Jersey for Thanksgiving, and walking off some delicious meals, Robert said, "Hey, how about a picture of me riding my bike really fast, maybe blurry, and we could send it out in January and say that the year is going by so fast."

The years are going by so fast, and it was a great idea he had to illustrate it. That must be a sign of the mind of a second grader working. Robert continues to enjoy his school (and Sarah and David keep looking for ways to join the staff there) and the cool things he is learning: understanding fractions, an introduction to Japanese culture and how to spell better than his dad are just some of the things.

Last spring, his first grade class trip to the West Virginia campus of his school, known as the Cove, was fun and interesting: the kids were studying history and the big event for the trip was a re-enactment of the Underground Railroad. After dinner, the kids broke up into pairs and, with parents as backup, they had to follow the sign of the drinking gourd (strategically placed cardboard signs showing the big dipper) to escape to freedom in "Canada". On the way they had to sneak past "Old Man Whitaker," a bounty hunter on the prowl for runaway slaves; meet a nice Quaker who helped them find the ferry across the "Ohio River" – (the pond), and hide in the attic of a cabin to avoid another bounty hunter before they safely arrived in "Canada" – the big field – where they all could eat



Welcoming new arrivals to "Canada"

dessert. I can't imagine a more visceral way to bring that part of history to life.

Outside of school, last spring Robert enjoyed T-ball and must have remembered a lot as he jumped right into coach pitch baseball last week. We're looking forward to another fun year; Robert's team this year is the Hill Cats.



Robert, safe at first on first day of practice

Of course, we have chair cats at home. These two

cuties joined us in May. Panzer is the tan guy and Pinker is the dark one. Robert named them: Pinker, because that fits for a girl and Panzer because it sounds sort of like Pinker but is a better fit for a boy. All the animal names he was coming up with last spring ended in “-er” – like Fuzzer, the caterpillar he found. That's the biggest news of year: Zip Drive has new friends at home. Mostly, Pinker and Panzer chase each other around and Zip Drive watches; sometimes they chase him and he gets annoyed.

After school let out, we took a few trips: camping on the C&O canal at Antietam Creek; Long Island, New York to catch up with the Rosensweigs; the now annual Assateague Island beach trip; Atlanta to catch up with the Southern family, and lots of trips on the Potomac River.

Just after Robert started second grade, we took a quick trip up to Boston for the T & T wedding:



Robert as the last duckling

back in early November as part of the closing work detail. It's a very nice place and Vinni, who runs it, is a fun character to hang out with. There was plenty of work to do, but also some fun, like jumping into the hay pile.

As mentioned at the beginning of this note, we spent Thanksgiving in New Jersey this year. It was a bit shocking for Sarah to see the For Sale sign in front of Harry and Elle's house. They found (and now have moved into) a very nice place a bit further out of town with fewer stairs and in a community with indoor and outdoor pools along with a billiard room. It was sad to think that the endless hours of



Panzer on the left and Pinker on the right, about a month after move in day

Sarah's friend Terry from Clark married Tanya on a Cape Cod beach. Of course we had to check out the public garden, scene of one of Robert's favorite books, *Make Way for Ducklings*. The weather was great and we really enjoyed both strolling around Boston and the Cape Cod beach scene – not to mention catching up with Clarkies.

Robert's second grade class took their first trip (second graders get two trips – I don't think third graders get three) to the Cove in October. They ended the two and half day session with a rousing game of *Oh Deer* – a great way to clearly see the impact deer have on the environment when they have no natural predators. Again, a really visceral lesson, this time in ecology. We went



430 Harrison up for sale



Sam and Robert

chase up and down the almost circular stairs at 430 Harrison were coming to a close, but we took a tour and even were able to play some pool in the billiard room. The new place will be fun to visit also.

Christmas this year was spent up and down the East Coast: we started with early Christmas in New Jersey with Sarah's family including David and Ian (Ian is now at Columbia University in New York, so he was pretty much local) and David's fiancé, Lynn, and her son, Sam. Harry and Elle did a great job hosting (still in 430 Harrison but starting to plan the move). Then we came back to Alexandria and Robert

was able to open presents from under his tree on Christmas day. To round out the Christmas season, we headed down to Atlanta for a huge celebration of Sam and Oscar's college graduation. It was a great party with the Williams clan and friends from raft guiding days. We decided the drive back could use a break so we spent the night at the Hotel Jefferson in all its Christmas regalia. That was an excellent way to round out the season.

In February, David took a quick trip back to Atlanta to celebrate his mom's 80th birthday. It was a small family gathering at Loren and Susan's house and she seemed to really enjoy it and all the attention. And it gave Loren, Steve and David a chance to discuss how she was doing at The Court and what changes might be good for her. As she has slowed down some and is generally less manic, there was a chance to move her back to Arbor Terrace. She moved down there from Boone but didn't fit well as she got more agitated and was



Steve, Sarah Williams and Loren at her 80th

but didn't fit well as she got more agitated and was still very mobile. They have an Alzheimer's floor that had a vacancy and the three brothers quickly agreed that a move back there would be a good thing. Loren and Susan arranged the move shortly after her birthday and it's clearly been for the better.

For spring break, David and Robert met up with Steve, Helen and Aaron at Merchant's Millpond, a North Carolina state park, just south of the Great Dismal Swamp. A night in the tent, a morning canoeing on the swamp and then a trip to Deep Gap (outside of Boone) to visit for a couple of days followed. Sarah was saving up vacation time for August, when we plan to head out to Washington State and join in the



Steve paddling bow while Robert snacks

celebration of David Z. and Lynn's marriage.

We rounded out the last year with a chance to see Jamie and Adam from the MythBusters TV show. Sarah arranged tickets to an afternoon show at the Warner Theater. There were mock explosions, and video of explosions but no actual explosions – probably a good thing. They did, however, show off their Lexan protective walls when they took out the anti-aircraft gun retrofitted to shoot paint balls. The Lexan wall was set up at the front of the stage, a lucky member of the audience, dressed in a full suit of armor, stood in between that and the anti-aircraft paint ball shooter and they delivered a very nice outline of the armored audience member. We had affordable seats, the view was fine and we were not at risk of being painted or soaked (from another experiment). Robert, needless to say, had a blast!

We hope this note finds you well and shows that our nuclear and extended families are doing fine. May your tax bill be small and your travels safe and pleasant in the coming year.



Sarah, Robert and David on a short Difficult Run hike



Proof that we get to enjoy Robert's school too – the fund-raising auction

You can keep up with our doings here: kayakero.net/news/blosxom and here: [facebook.com/szapolsky](https://www.facebook.com/szapolsky)



Robert on the harmonica serenading at Sam and Oscar's graduation party