

Tax Day 2017

As with last year's tax day letter we have sad news to report: Sarah's dad, Harry, passed away last September. Sarah was fortunate to have been there with him at the end. Elle hosted a lovely open house, and several weeks later, family and friends gathered for a memorial in Rutgers's Zimmerli Art Museum (kayakero.net/link92).

Much better news after last year's letter: Aaron is doing very well, after taking time off and a semester of online classes from home: he's back in school again. And Sarah's job search ended very successfully, she is now evaluating programs designed to keep at risk youth off the street for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.



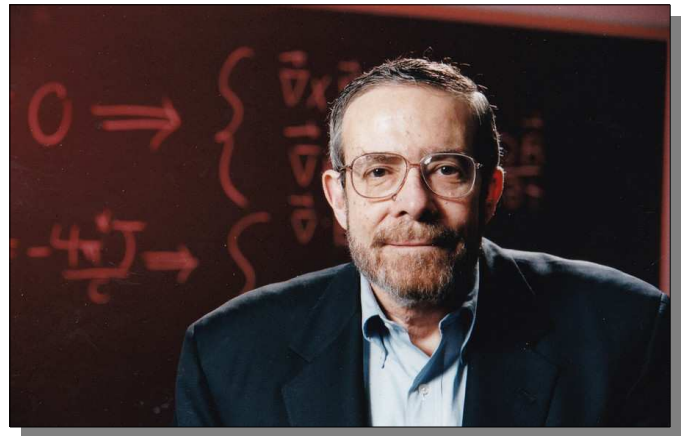
Sarah, astronaut, Robert

spent a lovely two weeks in Great Britain. Much of the time in Scotland where we saw the lovely scenery, learned a bit more history (and pre-history), rode the Hogwart's Express and enjoyed many chances to storm castles.

We flew into Edinburgh and spent a couple days adjusting to the time and touring the castle there. Then we picked up a car and drove to Kenmore, stopping at Stirling Castle. Kenmore is home to the Scottish Crannog Centre, and our taste of pre-history. From there we continued north to Urquhart Castle (sensing a theme?). Then we turned west and picked up a ferry in Oban to take us to the Isle of Mull, where we spent a couple days. Mull's castle was Duart (made famous in the Sean Connery film, Entrapment). Returning to the mainland, we drove to Fort William and rode the Jacobite train, famous as the Hogwart's Express in the Harry Potter movies.



Piper and Robert, Edinburgh



Dr. Harold S. Zapolsky

It's been a year of travel for us, looking back at prior tax day letters, that's not too surprising. Some of it local travel, like just after last tax day, we headed into DC for the Science and Engineering festival. NASA was one of many groups with booths and fun activities; the chance for a photo with a wandering astronaut (or someone in a space suit, anyway) was clearly a winner (kayakero.net/link93).

Some international travel: after school was out, we ran away from the DC area's heat and



Urquhart Castle

Leaving Scotland, we took a train down from Glasgow to London and connected with David Z., Lynn and Sam for some sightseeing (including the Tower of London). Another high point on the London leg: The Imperial War Museum and the ways the docents wove their stories into fascinating tales. The trip was perfect on many fronts, not the least of which is we're all interested in going back, seeing more and spending more time there (kayakero.net/link91). (We left lots of our to do lists for future trips as there is so much to do there we need a year to check it all off.)

We took boats out on the Potomac several times; while not as exciting as the U. K., it's a lot more convenient. And over the course of the summer, we've added to our flotilla: Sarah has a new Stand Up Paddle board (kayakero.net/link96) and David has a new canoe (kayakero.net/link97). The river remains a favorite way to get out of house and enjoy the weather (even when it's hot).

In July, we made our now annual trip to Assateague; this year the heat got to us and we decamped a bit early (kayakero.net/link98). After we returned home, we purchased some battery powered fans. Murphy's Law says it won't be too hot at the beach again (as long as we remember to pack the fans).

September saw us traveling up to New Jersey for the sad news about Robert's maternal grandfather. There were lots of stories and new people to meet from Harry's Rutgers crowd, but that did not make up for the unhappy occasion. We returned in November for the memorial, which was, of course, lovely. We'll all miss Harry (especially with the change in administration, he would have lots to say about our new president).



Tobermory, Isle of Mull



Robert, Sarah, David, Buckingham Palace

Robert started Seventh Grade this year (and now he's mostly through it, halfway through middle school). After settling down into the 7th grade routine, we offered him the option to take up SCUBA diving. He resoundingly answered, "Yes!" And so, after taking courses online and starting his confined water dives, we headed down to Grand Cayman at the beginning of winter break (kayakero.net/link94).

It was nice to get out in the sun as the winter blahs were just starting to show up. We did some diving, a bit of sightseeing (including the required visit to Hell). Now we're looking for a trip this fall to finish off Robert's certification requirements.

That was the second of the two big trips of the year. But in early February, the school took Robert (and his mom) skiing as a class bonding experience. Sarah reports that the kids did great; those who have been skiing were paired up with those less experienced to help get everyone on the slopes.



The Jacobite (Hogwart's Express), Mallaig



Robert and sword, Scottish Highlands

Robert and Sarah both reported the trip a success. And later in February, the school took Robert (and his dad) to Williamsburg for the Model UN conference. That turned out to be a great extracurricular activity. The kids took the train (from the station across the street from our house) down and back. David reports that over the three days, they did a great job representing their school (and he learned about parliamentary procedure by listening in on several sessions).

And just a couple weeks ago, for spring break, we

shipped Robert off to Space Camp. Well... Really, David drove him to Huntsville and did a little canoeing and sightseeing while Robert was learning all about being an astronaut. He had an excellent time and came back with a much greater understanding of what it takes to be successful in such a momentous undertaking.

They had two missions: On the first, he was LMS 5, Lunar Mission Specialist 5, on a mission to the moon using the new Orion capsule. On that mission, he had an ExtraVehicular Activity in a space suit to replace the oxygen and nitrogen tanks, repair the outside wiring and fix the rover. The busy EVA on that mission was followed by a visit to the moon base (which may be a jumping off point for future trips to Mars). On the second mission, he was GNC for the Space Shuttle going to the International Space Station. GNC stands for Guidance, Navigation and Control. It's a mission control position that, among other things, required him to keep the crew aware of their altitude and weather for take off and as they came in for a landing (kayakero.net/link95).



LMS 5 Robert, EVA



Laughing SCUBA instructor, Robert (DAB-master) and Sarah

While travel was a dominant theme for the past year, it was not the only one. There was a strong undercurrent of showbiz:

Sarah stumbled onto last minute tickets to *Wicked* while we were in London. We had great seats and the show was excellent; it was a great send off on our way back home. One of Robert's favorite ways to spend the summer is with the Synetic Theater; this year's show was *A Tale of Two Ghostbusters*. As he's becoming one of the older kids in the troupe, he had a starring role as Chuck Dickens, Ghostbuster. The Seventh Grade school show this year was *A 1000 Cranes*;

and with the school's arts and theater building being rebuilt, they arranged for the school shows to be in the Masonic Memorial's theater. It was a moving show in a stunning location.

Never getting enough theater work, Robert was in the Shakespeare elective at school and they were invited to perform at the Folger Theater in DC. Sarah arranged for all us to see *As You Like It* at the Folger a couple weeks before Robert and class took the stage. David was working but Sarah shared photos of Robert and his classmates on the stage. The school was very well received and held their own with the high schools also invited to perform. And our showbiz whirlwind for the year ended up with enjoying Ladysmith Black Mambazo at the Birchmere just a few weeks ago.

We love to loan out our spare room with access to Metro, Amtrak and airport. Over the last year, we've enjoyed folks stopping in when moving up and down the east coast, for weddings, protests and just visits. Please do let us know if you'll be in our neighborhood.



Zip Drive, our 19 year old cat is buried next to his favorite porch corner and watched over by a friendly gargoyle from David's parents.



Robert, Sarah and David

You can always keep up with us through Sarah's Facebook page ([kayakero.net/link76](https://www.facebook.com/kayakero.net/link76)) and David's blog ([kayakero.net/link74](https://www.kayakero.net/link74)).