



David Byrne's "American Utopia" at the historic Hudson Theatre



Palazzo Colonna, Rome



Frolicking in the dog park



Watering the plants, and a portion of the harvest

Greetings, friends!

Isn't it great to step back from our hectic everyday lives of reading novels, doing puzzles and organizing stuff, and spend the holidays reading, puzzling and organizing? It's been a challenging year for all of us, with a couple extra wrinkles in my case on the health front.

Our year started out splendidly. In January Alice and I went to the stage production of David Byrne's "American Utopia" – one of the best performances *ever* in my experience. We bought a third ticket and invited a friend, which added much to our enjoyment. We resolved to do that again the next time we see a live show -- but who knows when that will happen?

In February Alice made one of her (almost) annual trips to London for a week's retreat at the Penn Club (a Quaker establishment in Bloomsbury), then a couple weeks visiting old friends. I took the occasion to make another trip to Rome – there were so many sights I hadn't seen on my trip last October! It was delightful, again with excellent weather – lots of excursions by public transport from my hotel near the station, with a few good meals as well. By that time Covid was raging in Milan but had not yet reached Rome – cautionary signs started appearing on buses and trains a couple of days before my just-in-time return to New York.

In March I took a memoir-writing workshop with a local author and started a drawing class at the local college, but then the pandemic arrived, and everything shut down. Like everyone else, we hunkered down.

Alice continues her work at the Hudson River Bindery. She lost a few long-time clients to the economic downturn, but others have turned up, providing a steady stream of work.

I continue to serve on the Architectural Review Commission and chair Historical Society board meetings remotely. While the weather held out (well into October), we were able to meet with friends in various outdoor settings. We also made a long weekend visit to our friend Ralph in the Adirondacks.

We cultivated our small plot in the community garden about two blocks from home, where we grew sundry vegetables and some nice tomatoes.

In May a regular checkup revealed that, after 2 or 3 years hovering in the pre-diabetic range, my numbers had jumped up to place me firmly in full-blown Type 2 diabetes. That led to new meds, a radically restricted diet, and a rigorous exercise regimen – actually that part was not new for me, but now it was walking rather than the gym. An endocrinologist and a dietician also entered the picture. In a couple months my numbers improved greatly, but a fainting incident prompted a thorough round of cardio tests, which turned out to be fine.



On the rocky coast near Harpswell, Maine



An autumn afternoon at Slabsides, Milton NY



Picnic by the Hudson



On the steps of Crawford House, the 1830 home of the Historical Society

The diabetic regime didn't change the pandemic-dictated routine of staying home, avoiding crowds, wearing masks – as we all did for the remainder of the year.

In August we got away for another long weekend to visit our friend Deborah and her family in a cottage in Maine – a refreshing break. We even got in the water!

We also made shorter excursions to enjoy some of the beautiful spots of the Hudson Valley, such as Slabsides, a protected woodland surrounding a cabin built by the naturalist John Burroughs near Milton (about an hour north).

More seriously, in September a sharp abdominal pain led me back to the doctor, and new tests revealed the presence of a cancerous tumor on my pancreas. That led to more specialist consultations, including a surgeon at the Sloan-Kettering cancer center in New York City. Chemotherapy began in October. At this writing I have had two cycles of 2-3 weekly infusions; the goal is to have one more cycle and then re-test to see if the tumor has shrunk sufficiently to allow surgery. Fingers crossed for the next month or two.

This has all been sobering, but I believe I'm getting the best care available from specialists in the area. The medical group also helped me reconfigure my insurance – a critical component of the healthcare experience in this country!

Alice has been attentive, inventive and indefatigable, making healthy meals (I do a few.), going with me to doctor visits and treatments, and gamely accepting the changes imposed on her life. My three siblings and I hold a Zoom meeting every week.

We still meet friends in socially distanced settings, and many pitch in with food and care deliveries. College friends Loren & Marcia drove from Massachusetts just to share a picnic beside the Hudson! I feel loved and cared for – it is such a blessing.

In kid news, Sanford let go of production work and now teaches multimedia at a Catholic girls' school in Phoenix, while Courtney continues her career in social media strategy. In California, Emma works as a fashion consignment buyer and Ryan in real estate, while they raise daughters Parker (4) and Rylee (2).

One of my lockdown projects was to transform my website from a professional pitch to a more personal record. There are pages on design, writing, families, homes, etc., and an almost comical account of the 11 jobs and 7 freelance stints that made up my checkered career. There is even an archive of holiday letters. Check it out at www.hoekema.com

When we learned about the cancer and chemo, Alice declared that we should document my hair before it started falling out. (So far, it hasn't.) I said OK, but only if you will be in the picture. Thanks to the photographer, our friend Brian Wolfe.



Wishing you health & happiness...