

Dear Helen -

12-31-92

Sorry we haven't connected yet. We will.

Lance Patten

A Belated Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah , and Happy New Year  
1992-1993

I am composing this note to you on New Year's Eve, as 1992 becomes history. I am sorry that events last year at this time prevented me from writing to wish you joy and peace in the year that is now past. I hope you experienced more than your fair share of good things in 1992.. For the most part it and the previous year were good years for us. If you can bear a kind of postmodern Christmas letter, I'll try to bring you up to date on what we have been doing.

Christmas 1992 found Andrew, Heidi, and me--as we have been over the past several years--on the move. On December 23rd, the three of us gathered from our various points of origin to meet at Judy, Ted, Catherine, and Elizabeth's in White Plains. Heidi continued on to Boston that day to interview for a clerkship.

[**A bit about Heidi:** It is hard for me to believe it, but Heidi is now in her last year of Law School in The University of Michigan. She is especially interested in international law , and is an editor of Michigan's international law journal. During the summers of 1991 and 1992, she had the good fortune to work as a summer associate for two law firms with international interests: one in Chicago; the other in San Francisco. After graduation in May, she will join Crowell and Mooring, a firm in Washington, D.C., unless she accepts a clerkship. In that case, Crowell and Mooring will hold her position until her clerkship is over. Heidi wants to clerk, and I hope she has the opportunity to do so, but I must admit: I think DC will be an exciting place to be over the next few years.]

Christmas Eve found us all together for dinner in a bitter cold White Plains and for worship at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church. Ted sang in the choir, Catherine (who is 16 and a junior in high school) and Elizabeth (who is fourteen and a freshman in high school) served as acolytes, and Judy, Heidi, Andrew, and I celebrated the promise of Christmas with them and with children whose nodding heads nestled onto their parents' chests, an organist and several scurrying choir members who worked for the first half of the service to unstick a pipe-organ valve that accompanied hymns and prayers and the sermon with something like the high-pitched whistle of microphone feed-back, an alert youngster and his attentive young father whose misguided elbow sent a set of candles, poised high above his pew to the floor, and.... It was beginning to look, sound, and feel a lot like Christmas.

Andrew and I began Christmas Day in Connecticut visiting Grandma Stock at the home where she has been receiving nursing care since the beginning of December. The great sadness of this year for us has been Grandma's illness. It is so difficult to watch her health fade so rapidly. And she is not going "gentle, into this good night": She is fighting for her dignity in the face of illness that doesn't show much respect for human dignity.

[**A bit About Andrew:** During this fall as her health began to fail dramatically, Andrew was Grandma's primary care taker. When the Park Department in Sitka (AK) where Andrew was working began its restricted winter schedule in October, he headed east to be with his grandmother, making it possible for her to be at home for two additional months. Since he graduated from the University of Michigan in May of 1991, Andrew has worked in various sites of the US Park Department--Fort Spokane (WA), Little Big Horn (MT) and most recently in Sitka (AK). This work has given him the opportunity to pursue his interest in the history of Native American and Russian peoples and to live in parts of the country that have interested him. Currently, he is living in

Grandma's home in Connecticut, visiting with her daily, preparing for a trip to Russian this winter, a return to work in Sitka this spring and summer, and graduate school in the fall. He is also spending some time in Boston with a young woman who has emigrated from Leningrad. ]

Early Christmas afternoon, Andrew and I returned to White Plains for gift-giving and dinner. Weighted down with good food and lovely gifts, Heidi, Andrew, and I headed off to Kennedy Airport to put Heidi on a plane Italy where she is currently visiting with a lawyer who works in the Milan office of the firm she worked for last summer. Heidi, Stefano, and some of Stefano's friends are skiing in the Alps--even as I write. Andrew and I went on to Mt. Sinai on Long Island to spend Christmas evening with the my father, Carolyn, Binky, David (who is 26 and a officer in Chase Manhattan Bank) and his friend Kate, Krista (who is 22 and studying for a master's degree in elementary education) and her friend Chris.

Christmas Day 1992 gives you a sense of the pace and the character of our lives these days. It is busy. It is full. It is mostly good. As I pursue my own interesting life, I feel myself poised between Heidi and Andrew, who are fine people, growing up, moving out into worlds they are making--and making well, and my father and my mother-in-law who are slowing down, moving in, closer to worlds they have made.

I had planned to take my father home on the 26th and to spend several days with him in New Jersey. But it was not to be so. On the drive from Michigan to New York, I developed a problem that accompanied me faithfully during the holiday and sent me home on the day after Christmas. On the 27th, after driving some 2000 miles in seven days, I made a trip to an ondontist in Ann Arbor for a little root-canal therapy. Now, I'm back in East Lansing, ready to turn my attention back to my work.

**[A bit About Patti:** Work has really been exciting for me. (I smile as I write that. When has it not been so?) You may or may not know that I came to Michigan State to work in English education. I loved my work in Syracuse, but I missed working with students and teachers in K-12 schools. Ironically, events here have me working primarily in rhetoric and composition again. With its transition from a quarter to a semester system, Michigan State has revised its required writing requirement. Instead of taking three quarters of required writing courses at the introductory level, students are now required to take one semester of introductory writing and one semester of upper-level writing instruction in their fields of concentration. To assist faculty across the curriculum as they develop writing courses, writing assignments, writing instruction, and writing workshop support for their students, the university established a Writing Center. I am directing the Writing Center, and having a marvelous time inventing a program. I have the unique good fortune to be working with wonderful people, and we are doing exciting things--things that I realize I have been preparing myself to do for the past 14 years. And there is frosting on this cake: In the spring I accepted an invitation to become the next editor of the National Council of Teachers of English journal *English Education*. So, even though, I'm doing rhetoric and composition work at Michigan State, I can continue to do English education work nationally. Furthermore, a writing project that will link school teachers and their students with MSU faculty and their students will allow me to continue to work in schools.]

Things are with us as they have been. We are well, working hard, taking pleasure in one another, wishing we could see all of you, and even though we can't, we are thinking of you. We wish you peace and joy and love. We wish you the promise of Christmas--this day and all days.