

## Christmas 2016 at the DOGS' House

*When fall comes to New England, the sun slants in so fine. And the air's so clear you can almost hear the grapes grow on the vine. The nights are sharp with starlight, and the days are cool and clean. And in the blue sky overhead, the northern geese fly south instead, and leaves are Irish Setter red, when fall comes to New England.*

*When fall comes to New England, and the wind blows off the sea, swallows fly in a perfect sky, and the world was meant to be. When the acorns line the walkways, then winter can't be far. From yellow leaves a blue jay calls, grandmothers walk out in their shawls, and chipmunks run the old stone walls, when fall comes to New England.*

*The frost is on the pumpkin; the squash is off the vine. And winter warnings race across the sky. The squirrels are on to something, and they're working overtime. The foxes blink and stare and so do I.*

*'Cause when fall comes to New England, oh I can't turn away... from fading light on flying wings, and late good-byes a robin sings, and then another thousand things, when fall comes to New England.*

- Words (and Music) By Cheryl Wheeler <[https://youtu.be/f9\\_Fij0mW48](https://youtu.be/f9_Fij0mW48)>

Sometimes we stumble upon poetry that literally paints with words; images and sensations leap off the page and splash across our minds so powerfully that it creates a synesthesia of the senses. It is then that mastery of the language becomes evident. The above lyric/poem is one of the finest examples. Ms. Wheeler paints a mental image of our just-passed season of such strength it makes me pause every time. The URL leads to Ms. Wheeler's audio performance of the song on YouTube, which only enhances the effect.

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We'll skip the usual light-hearted tantrum about chatty newsletters and years going by faster and calendar pages turning too quickly. All true, and all inevitable. Oh well!

Our top news of the year is delivered with a hint of sadness and a resigned sigh... the wedding is off. Audrey and Todd split up over Labor Day weekend. They gradually grew apart, and independent activities became an annoyance and a source of distrust... not a good footing for a lifelong relationship. The one silver lining is that they discovered this sooner, rather than later. Audrey has endured, and is flourishing in other ways. More on that later...

Lynn is well and continues to recover from the automobile accident – now two years in the rear-view mirror. Her wrist is pretty-much back to normal, and quilting has resumed with the usual vigor. She has a bit more arthritis in the hand and wrist, possibly accelerated by the accident but it's hard to tell. Her rebuilt ankle is more problematic, to the point that she's seriously considering having the hardware removed because of the heightened sensitivity and sensation in that area. The ankle itself tires easily and aches enough to require occasional icing. Her neck arthritis has also flared up this fall, so she's working on that with a physical therapist.

We managed 25 weekends and a few week-long visits to the Ballot Box in Newcastle ME this year, for a total of 105 days when the Ballot Box was occupied by one or both of us. Our usual pattern – which we held to most of the time – was to go up every other weekend. We would head north on Thursday after Gene's work. Gene would tele-commute on Friday (good internet connectivity is important) while Lynn would spend time with her Maine "Fiber Fridays" sewing friends. We'd do chores and enjoy the area Saturday, and then pack up and head south on Sunday. Luckily, we contracted out for the main repetitive chores (lawn mowing and snow plowing) so the chores we took care of involved the more interesting stuff.

Lynn was also able to spend a few weeks by herself at the Ballot Box, with Gene trekking up and back on the DownEaster Amtrak train weekends, which originates at Boston's North Station, makes its first stop in Woburn, and then winds its way up the coast to Brunswick ME, where Lynn would pick him up (Brunswick is a mere 35-minute drive south of the Ballot Box).

Lynn has resumed quilting, much to her delight. She's created a few charity quilts for donation, and a few art-quilts for wall display, but the triumph of the quilting year was her completion of Megan and Dan's Wedding Quilt; a personal adaptation of Kim Diehl's "Romance and Roses" quilt pattern done in earth tones and fall colors, with a self-designed and hand-appliquéd ivy border. It was eight years in the making! Black and white printing can't do it justice so here's a link to a page with a color photo:  
<http://www.familytreehouse.net/family/lynn/piecederesistance.html>

Gene is still at MITRE (sound familiar?), thirty years next August. He's hoping MITRE still awards a chair at thirty-year anniversaries. He's still settling in to his new department and new division, working architecture issues for an Air Force program and being a "group leader," helping a group of other employees with resource assignments and career choices. He's joined the University of Massachusetts at Lowell Physics Department Alumni Advisory Committee as the Recording Secretary, helping the department weather a recent accreditation/evaluation of their curriculum. His genealogy research hasn't had any breakthroughs of note, but he was able to present a lecture in April to the genealogy club in Brunswick ME about Self-Publishing for Genealogy, describing his experiences and lessons-learned while self-publishing two genealogical books. He was taken aback a bit while prepping this year's Christmas Card list to realize that three relatives on the list had passed away, two of which were recent friendship renewals. Father Time spares none.

Megan and Dan are still living in Lowell, doing well and having fun.

Audrey is hanging in there, still working at PetEdge and keeping her hands in the dog-grooming trade. She's expanded her Anime influence to Baltimore/DC, where she is now a voting committee member for the yearly convention, having worked on the Boston event for years and the Baltimore event for the past few years. In October she made the break from the homestead and moved to an apartment in Haverhill MA, about 35 miles northeast of Woburn. It's a small place but she's making it her own, exploring the area and finding all the amenities that Haverhill has to offer. Her recent stomach ailments have been diagnosed as Gastroparesis, which literally translates to "stomach paralysis." It's a digestive disorder in which the ability of the stomach to churn during digestion is either abnormal or absent, causing an inability to digest food in a reasonable amount of time. It means her food intake must be prepped for easier digestion and devoid of hard-to-digest stuff. Not fun.

As a family, we continued the birthday tradition of heading out to a local restaurant for the celebration rather than anyone being chained to a stove or grille for the evening. Gene chose Lester's Roadside BBQ in Burlington, Audrey chose Bamboo Sushi in Burlington, and Megan and Lynn combined to choose Fishbone Grille, also in Burlington.

So, the leaves have fallen and been raked up (mostly), the deck furniture (from both houses!) has been put away, the lawnmower has been moved to the back of the garage and the snowblower has moved to the front. Winter has arrived, the snow-stakes have been put out, and the shovels have been waxed (does anyone else do that anymore?). Some are making plans to head south, and we're dreaming of being able to head north that one last time. On Christmas Day the countdown to retirement will be 2 years, zero months, 30 days, but who's counting!

The holidays bring family and friends together, and help us appreciate the love in our lives we can often take for granted. May the true meaning of the holiday season fill your heart and home with many blessings. May all your wishes and dreams come true, and may you feel this happiness all year round. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

*Lynn & Gene*