

Christmas 2017 at the BOGTs' House

My Grown-Up Christmas List

by David Foster (music) and Linda Thompson-Jenner (lyrics)

Do you remember me? I sat upon your knee. I wrote to you with childhood fantasies.
Well, I'm all grown-up now. Can you still help somehow? I'm not a child but my heart still can dream.
So here's my lifelong wish, my grown-up Christmas list. Not for myself, but for a world in need.
No more lives torn apart. That wars would never start. And time would heal all hearts.
Every man would have a friend. That right would always win, and love would never end.
This is my grown-up Christmas list.
What is this illusion called the innocence of youth? Maybe only in our blind belief can we ever find the truth.
No more lives torn apart. That wars would never start. And time would heal all hearts.
Every man would have a friend. That right would always win, and love would never end.
This is my grown-up Christmas list.
This is my only lifelong wish. This is my grown-up Christmas list.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54TFSY3WA5c>

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, from our house to yours! Once again, we'll skip the usual light-hearted tantrum about years going by faster and calendar pages turning too quickly. All true, but still inevitable. Oh well!

Our top news of the year is that we are going to be grand-parents! Megan and Dan announced the news by presenting us with a small decorative box with pairs of "Hello, My Name Is..." nametags, with "Grandmother" or "Grandfather" written in various languages on the tags. We chose "Opa" and "Oma" (German). We now know the gender (male) and the due date (mid-February) but no hints on names yet, as it should be. Life is about to change... for some of us more than others!

Lynn decided to have the hardware in her ankle (from the 2014 auto crash) removed this year. There had been some residual discomfort that was likely due to the presence of the hardware, so she made the decision to have it removed in May. Recovery from the second surgery was infinitely quicker than from the first; she was back walking unassisted within a week. The residual discomfort has been reduced but not eliminated, probably due to the reopened incisions and rehealed scars. Time will tell.

She also had a dream come true this year – she is now the proud owner of a Handi-Quilter™ Avante® long-arm quilter on a ten-foot quilting frame [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbCLefKZ8oY>]. She can mount an unquilted quilt on the quilting frame and free-hand quilt a two-foot-by-ten-foot swath of the quilt¹ with ease. It lives in the in-law apartment at the southern house, but will move with us to Maine when we retire.

Gene is still at MITRE; he hit the 30-year milestone in August and was presented with a MITRE-embossed Captain's Chair to commemorate the occasion. I guess they hand out chairs at 30th anniversaries because we must be tired by now and need to sit down more often. Gene also changed projects this year, and is now working on the local Air Force base, focusing on Foreign Military Sales, a.k.a. FMS (the military loves acronyms). He made two trips to Bulgaria and one to Santo Domingo for FMS projects this past year. Almost had another one to Iraq... that may pop up again later. His genealogy hobby has gotten short shrift time-wise lately, but he still pokes at it and fills in data gaps as they become available at the various online data repositories. He was cold-contacted by an Australian descendant of Lynn's Scottish great-great-grandfather (Thomas Leckie), which livened up the Munroe side of the family a bit, and he was able to escape to Springfield MA in late April to attend three days of the five-day New England Regional Genealogical Consortium (NERGC) conference.

¹ Using the word "quilt" as both a noun and a verb in the same sentence is awkward and confusing, but there was no other way to express it!

We managed to squeeze in 80 overnights at the Ballot Box so far in 2017, mostly long weekends but a few week-long visits as well. Our plans call for 6 more days in 2017, as we hope to do our usual northward trek the day after Christmas and stay until a few days after New Year's. But "squeezing in" nights will come to an end soon, as momentum is building for our retirement (which is planned for January 2019) and an eventual permanent relocation to mid-coast Maine. In preparation, we've started the cleanout of the Woburn house to get it ready to put it on the market. It's going to be a LOT of work – we've got thirty years of living and collecting/hoarding to dig through! We started in the downstairs in-law apartment to make room for the Handi-Quilter™ Avante® long-arm quilter. After the apartment is cleaned out and painted I'll clean out my downstairs office, which has played the dual role of my office and our "cellar storage space" for our time here. Remember... split-level... no basement. Next up the Family room will get the attention. By then it will be warmer weather and we'll attack the attic and the garage/loft. Makes us tired just thinking about it!

As we gear up for this big change, we're also weighing options and possibilities for our eventual living space and conditions. We've been using the Ballot Box as a permanent vacation/escape home for eight years now, and it's been a delightful 2nd home, but... we've concluded that 960 square feet of living space is a little too small for a permanent residence for us. We both have too many "toys," and Lynn's new toy is a whopper, space-wise.

One option is to expand the Ballot Box, and we're exploring that in two ways. The first is via construction, and we've enlisted the aid of a local contractor-friend and his favorite architectural designer to give us some ideas about what's possible within reasonable budget constraints. We're toying with adding a first-floor master bedroom suite with bath, pushing out the front to enlarge the kitchen and dining area, finishing the basement as a guest suite, and adding a 2-car garage with a workshop out the back. Our current master bedroom would become the quilt studio where the long-arm quilter lives, and the current little quilt room / guest room would become my office. The second way to expand is via acquisition, and we've reached out to the owner of the 12½ acres of land behind our 2½ acres to try to recombine the two lots, as they once were one lot. The land behind ours also has a right-of-way across our land to the road for access, and we'd like to not have any construction on that lot behind us, with traffic across our land, if we can help it.

A third option which might be viable is to sell the Ballot Box and buy a more appropriately-sized house in the Newcastle area. This option is less desirable for us as we have become quite attached to our little carriage house, but we cannot ignore it as an option, so we've started viewing houses with our good friend who's also a real estate agent (she sold us the Ballot Box!) to make sure we're not ignoring a viable option.

Megan and Dan are still living in Lowell, doing well and having fun. Things are about to change dramatically for them, though. NEXT year's Christmas letter should be interesting... 😊

Audrey is still working at PetEdge and keeping her hands in the dog-grooming trade. She's moved from her apartment in Haverhill to a place in Amesbury (which we haven't seen yet!). She has dog, named Loki, as her constant companion and she's using Service Dog training techniques in her regimen for him.

We don't see the kids as much as we used to, but I guess that's the natural order of things; they get busier and we get older and more boring. They may be relieved when we finally relocate to Maine! 😊

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 & Gary