

We volunteered to host an Olympic-hopeful rower, as we have in the past, for two weeks in July. Next thing we knew, he was with us for the rest of the summer. That was too long, by about 5 weeks.



WEEKEND AT THE MITCHELLS' LAKE HOUSE, WHERE OUR LITTLE FAMILY UNIT CAUSED A SCENE THAT ONLY DEAR FRIENDS COULD FORGIVE.



LEFT, WITH MY HIGH-SCHOOL BUDDY TRISTAN, WHO VISITED US WITH HIS DAUGHTER IN AUGUST

Grace spent a second summer working in the lab of Dr. Denise Akob at the US Geological Survey. Denise has been a terrific mentor to Grace, which is a lucky thing because Grace's parents are useless at giving advice about a career in science. Right, Grace shows her appreciation by playing princess with Denise's 5-year old.



Denise and Grace. Nice to have a boss with whom you can go to a beer fest.

In late summer Grace began a Fellowship at the Environmental Protection Agency, which has been a very different experience. She quickly ran into conflict when told that she couldn't ride her bike to work; because she is a Fellow, not an employee, she is not allowed to use the bike rack or change in the locker room. This is the ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION Agency, folks! Let her ride a bike! Grace defies the rule, of course.

In late August Dave had his second surgery to repair last year's torn patella tendon. Hard to say which one of us was less thrilled about this development. In anticipation of the event, Dave set up dual screens to work at the kitchen table. Not to be outdone, I set up my own dual screens upstairs (mine were bigger), figuring I'd be working at home for weeks taking care of him. This arrangement lasted all of three days, after which I couldn't stand it any more, told him he was on his own, and headed into my real office.



Dave was in a heavy cast from his ankle to the top of his thigh for seven weeks. Even I felt sorry for him, and I'm not usually the sympathetic type. Not sorry enough to take care of him, of course, but sorry from a comfortable distance.



**MOMCAR
ON THE
WAY TO
THE
SCRAP
HEAP.**



It was one thing after another for Grace this fall: (1) serious roommate trouble, to the point of choosing to move out; (2) her car — fondly known as MomCar — was totaled (not her fault, and MomCar got the better of the other car, but when the airbags go off in a vehicle with 170,000 miles on it, you're done); and (3) her front tooth, fake from an ancient injury, fell out two days before she was scheduled to speak at a scientific conference (luckily one of my colleagues set her up with the Washington Capitals' dentist, who knows a thing or two about missing front teeth). She used a spreadsheet to decide carefully on a new used car — adult skills in action. But the 30+ texts a day during the crisis period made me forget that I'm an empty-nester.



More surprise visits: David shows up unannounced in DC on Grace's 22nd birthday.



The Jets were 4-12 last year. Nevertheless, my brother and I decided that, come what may, we would go to most of the games this year just to see each other. We got lucky: Not only did we have fun, but they had a pretty good season.

More football (it was one of the few activities available to Dave): Dartmouth at Penn above; Grace and Shelby at Penn State at right; huge Dartmouth crowd at Harvard; Dave and friends at Dartmouth Homecoming below.



We made sure the food was good in case the Jets weren't.





Fall term at Dartmouth: By now David had been on campus virtually non-stop for a solid year. This term was challenging because he served as Rush Chair (in charge of recruitment) for his fraternity. Oh, and he was taking classes, too. As one kid told me, Nature Dave is a “go big or go home” kind of guy. During the three weeks of rush, he spent 4 hours every night at the dining hall, having dinner with 4 sets of prospects, one after another. He had spreadsheets to track the 140 guys who rushed and to delegate tasks to his fraternity brothers. Adult skills, I kept telling myself. Ultimately they “sunk” 37 great guys (a huge group), so he was happy. The impact of this activity on his Chemistry 6 grade made all of us less happy.



Grace and Sorrel with Cameron, their friend from Scotland who was visiting DC (and whom they met in Honduras years ago). Love that Facebook keeps them connected internationally.

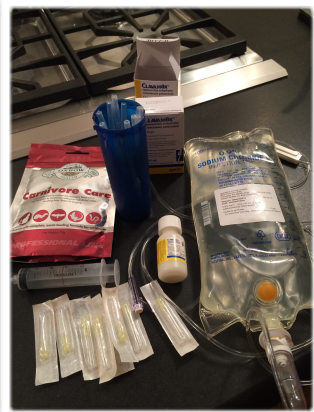
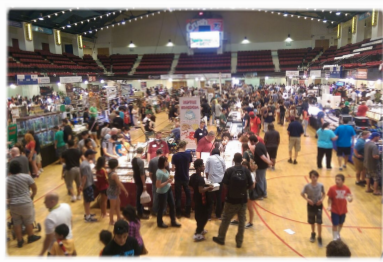
David enjoyed fall term’s “Fifty” as an observer, serving on a support stop crew, greeting the hikers and inspecting their feet for blisters. (The crew seems to be in costume above; if not, what is Dan Finch wearing?) You’re only allowed to hike The Fifty once, which is just as well because David might otherwise have been crazy enough to do it again.

David’s nickname at Dartmouth - “Nature Dave” - has stuck like glue, for obvious reasons. His friend Dan christened me “Mother Nature,” which amuses me immensely. With both kids headed toward careers in the natural sciences, it has become clear that we’ve produced a couple of tree-huggers.



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE
David’s room, complete with frogs and a skink. Compared to the hellhole he was living in off-campus for a year, the fraternity seemed almost clean.

It wouldn't be my annual letter without a pet report. I had calculated that this would be a dying-off year for at least some of the reptiles, and that was true, but my kids keep attending Reptile Expos (one pictured right) and acquiring new ones. After Buster the Ball Python died, Grace purchased Archer the Carpet Python. That made her somewhat less appealing on Craig's List as a potential roommate when she had to move on short notice. Her fallback plan was to dump Archer on Mother Nature, but luckily she found accommodating new roommates.



In one single day I made three trips to the vet - twice for the cat and once for the chameleon (sneaking the chameleon out past Dave, who was on a conference call in the kitchen, because I knew he would go nuts if he saw). Below left, the array of needles and fluids I came home with. I became a pro at subcutaneous fluid injections for the cat (once I figured out how not to stab myself every single stinking time, which upset both me and the cat) and force-feeding liquids to the chameleon. The chameleon died anyway, but it took months and we bonded in the interim. Honestly, I was sad. He was a very cool animal. I might have to get another.

Our kids continue their “two steps forward, one step back” progress toward responsible adulthood. Grace, who is normally quite competent, texts me in a panic from an Amtrak train: “MOM! We just passed Newark! Was it Newark, Delaware or Newark, New Jersey? Did I miss Philadelphia?” How about asking a conductor or another passenger, instead of your mother, who is NOT THERE? On a different trip, on the way back to Virginia after Thanksgiving, she discovers that her ticket was for the day before.

Meanwhile, Dave and I continue our march toward old age, with Dave in particular fighting it hard. Refusing to wear his reading glasses at the grocery store, he buys items like fennel-flavored toothpaste.



IN MEMORIAM



Took us a while to get a decent photo of Nature Dave for a PAWS wrestling recruitment poster



Grace shares an Amazon Prime account with her father, so she sees all his Amazon purchases. She was disappointed to find that he's really boring. He buys Rice-a-Roni and Pickapeppa Sauce in bulk, and a lot of seeds for his herb garden.

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WRESTLING

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