

Greetings from the Rockies: We're Back!

After our fun-filled museum-hopping east-coast-family-reuniting sabbatical year in Cambridge-“Mah” (à la Cahr Tahk), we were very happy to return home to Boulder in July.

Early on, we negotiated with Matthew and Sarah to go cold-turkey without strollers and kept fit by walking everywhere around the city. The mild and sunny (almost Boulder-like) Fall and early Winter permitted us enjoyable daily “hikes” to and from the kids’ Botanic Gardens preschool, that replaced our usual family biking commute in Boulder. Soon enough, however, the Boston Winter reminded us where we were and by January we became regular passengers on the Harvard shuttle. Still everything has its attractions if one chooses to recognize them, as we met and became good friends with Marc Cronin, “the silly bus driver”, who not only educated us about Irish traditions, Boston history, and the Civil War, but also treated Matthew and Sarah to daily stints behind the steering wheel, playing with the horn and opening and closing the pneumatic door, while waiting for Harvard students to board the bus, occasionally almost crushing a couple of them with the door and waking Cambridge residents with horn blasts. To compensate undergraduates for their patience, Marc treated them to weekly galleries of Matthew and Sarah’s art, that he would frame and plaster around the bus. Needless to say, riding the Harvard shuttle became the kids’ favorite activity and in the Spring we had a difficult time kicking the habit, despite the return of the warm and sunny weather.

While in Cambridge, we were Visiting Scholars at Cabot House, one of the thirteen Harvard undergraduate dormitories, which offered us numerous social and athletic activities with the undergraduates. Leo played soccer, hockey, and squash for Cabot House, and Lucy and the kids were their most loyal fans. Although there are no outstanding team performances to report (those undergrads seem to be getting a lot faster :-), Leo still managed to score the most goals for the Cabot hockey team, thanks to Lucy and the kids’ “Go Cabot” screaming cheers from the stands. Lucy, after regularly running the Harvard stadium stairs, weekly shaving seconds off of her time, finally settled for a ‘best’ time of a not too shabby 32 minutes in May, not able to improve any further once the hot and humid weather hit in June.

Unfortunately, Matthew seems to be following in his father’s footsteps in the mishap department, visiting the emergency room twice this year. (Leo still and hopefully will continue to hold the record of 4 times by the age of 5). During one of our many visits to the Boston Museum of Science, in the “At the Park” room, Matthew took a bad spill, landing on his face. Thankfully, aside from a very bad nose bleed and some bruising, we were assured by the ER doctor that nothing was broken. In the Winter, while we were skating on Frog Pond in the Boston Commons, Matthew slipped and also fell on his face, splitting his lower lip in 3 places, with gashes large enough to make a grown-up faint. In our attempts to calm him down, we were stunned to realize that Matthew was screaming to go back out on the ice after a Zamboni was done redoing the ice (which he did to the proud uneasiness of his parents). Then when we returned to Boulder, Matthew somehow managed to get a piece of metal filing lodged in his eye, that left a rust scar before falling off. Luckily, after a brief procedure and a month of eye-drop treatments, Matthew was back to normal.

Despite being a porker during his first couple years of life (surpassing Sarah’s weight at less than half her age), Matthew now loves sports, especially those that involve equipment. In Cambridge, he would get decked out in Leo’s hockey equipment and would attempt to parade around the apartment in Dad’s skates. Soon we would have to learn to share our bed in the morning not only with this hockey-player “wanna-be”, but also with various equipment, hockey sticks, and soccer balls, that he would sleep with and then drag to our bed in search of his parents’ company. Needless to say, our family outing to a Bruins game last year was a real treat. Since our return to Boulder, the kids have seriously taken up ice skating and have been regularly going to the CU rink and becoming quite good. Despite Sarah taking figure-skating lessons, Matthew already whizzes around so fast that neither she nor Mom can catch him now. Instead, Sarah is more cautious and is focusing on developing her figure-skating skills and is now practicing her crossovers, but she is able to lap Mom while skating backwards.

After a year off from biking, when we returned to Boulder in July, we restarted our family biking commute to school and work. Sarah quickly picked up riding a two-wheeler, although she is still not strong enough to do the four-mile uphill commute on her own bike to her new school, where she is really enjoying kindergarten. Instead, Sarah rides on a tag-along behind Dad, while Matthew relaxes in a bike seat with Mom. Riding a two-wheeler looked like so much fun, that Matthew insisted on trying it as well, and (with some encouragement from reading “Franklin Rides a Bike”) to our amazement, at three and a half shed his training wheels and since Fall has also been freely riding his two-wheeler around the neighborhood.

One of the highlights of the Spring was our trip to Disney World. The surprise was that Matthew and Sarah were not the only ones who had a blast. We were in the parks at the opening every day and stayed late into the evening. We enjoyed Sea World, Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, and Epcot, and went to a lot of shows and rides. Some of our favorites were the Cirque du Soleil show, the Kilimanjaro Safaris and white water rafting rides, petting the

dolphins and stingrays, seeing the parades, and meeting the Disney characters. After this fun-filled and memorable trip, however, the parents were really due for a vacation.

So in May, Leo joined Lucy in Alaska for a week after one of her conferences there, while Leo's parents and Lucy's sister graciously took care of the kids. Alaska was amazing! We took a day cruise out on Resurrection Bay and saw humpback whales, orcas, puffins, bald eagles, penguins, sea lions, sea otters, black bears, as well as impressively calving glaciers. We took a sled ride pulled by a genuine Iditorod team of dogs. Then we headed up toward Denali (the tallest peak in North America) and stayed in charming Talkeetna, a staging town for climbers of Denali. We explored Talkeetna and the neighboring rivers on horseback and enjoyed spectacular views of the mountains. So impressive was the sight that we could not resist to get better views on a two-hour flightseeing tour that took us around the Denali, Hunter, and Foraker peaks and treated us to a landing on Ruth Glacier, where we really took in the views. We enjoyed the long daylight hours, hiking into the evening, and then going out for great fresh seafood, followed by soaking in the hot tub with a view of Denali.

While the kids still speak Chinese and Russian quite fluently, more and more encouragement and incentives are needed to get them to respond in a language other than English. This is a bit easier with Sarah as she continues to attend Sunday Chinese school, even during our year in Cambridge, culminating that year with a recital of poems in front of a large 500+ audience. Our kids also continue to keep us laughing with funny expressions and questions as they try to figure out the world around them. Last Winter, Sarah challenged the theory of evolution with a rebuttal "...if people evolved from apes, how did they then get out of the cages in the zoo?" And after taking cold medicine a few weeks ago, Matthew had a confused look and pointed out "But Papa, the medicine is warm not cold." Leo was also reminded of the prematurity of his attempts to get a head start teaching Sarah physics, when she explained how water molecules freeze into ice when cooled, melt into water when warmed up, and "becomes tea" when heated beyond 100 C. On one of our hockey outings, Matthew, when explained that a team was taking a *time-out*, with a perplexed look asked "But what did they do wrong? Were they bad?"

Leo took advantage of the schedule-free sabbatical (and of Lucy) and traveled a lot, logging about 70K air miles, finally joining Lucy at Premier status on the now bankrupt United Airlines. While at a workshop in Aspen in August, Leo did a one-day 29-mile Four-Pass-Loop hike (later finding it described in the guide book as a "difficult 3-day hike") with a 50 pound backpack (of water) and almost died trying to keep up with his friends, Chetan Nayak and Matthew Fisher, who have been known to run a marathon or two. Leo is now looking forward to the annual Aspen Winter Conference in February to continue testing his parabolic-shaped skis.

One of our trips this year was of course our drive back from Boston to Boulder. On the way, we enjoyed visiting with Lucy's relatives in New Jersey, Lucy's parents, relatives, and friends in Maryland (taking in again some of the museums in Washington, DC (see enclosed photo)), Lucy's relatives in St. Louis, and friends in Kansas City. In late March, both of Lucy's grandmothers unfortunately passed away, and we really missed seeing Lucy's paternal grandmother in St. Louis on our drive back. We remember them fondly and are happy that the kids had met them both.

Fall semester was the busiest on record. We overcommitted ourselves a bit (especially Lucy), but it probably felt worse due to having just returned from our sabbatical. After the super-hectic semester, we had a wonderful winter break, caught up on sleep, and are only now getting around to this holiday letter. We just returned from Las Vegas where we had a Pao family reunion with over 40 relatives. Las Vegas is out of this world. It does, however, offer a few family attractions that we took advantage of, like Circus-Circus, hiking in the Red Rock Canyon, Lake Mead, and Hoover Dam. As we were checking out on our last day in Vegas, Lucy, who hadn't gambled the whole time there (nor when she was in Vegas for a conference a month ago), decided to use 2 quarters she had in her pocket in one of the slot machines and to her surprise won 60 quarters, our taxi fare to the airport. Whatever one's opinion of Vegas ... it does remind one of the power of money and preoccupation with exuberance in our society, enough to transform the desert into this modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah.

After Las Vegas, Leo's parents came to visit us for a couple of weeks, giving Lucy and Leo an opportunity to go skiing at Copper with our friends Penny Axelrad and Tim Perley. The kids have made out nicely this year with Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year (Russian time to exchange gifts), not to mention their upcoming birthdays in February. This is in large part because finally Sarah and Matthew's interests coincide with Dad's who uses them as excuses to purchase various paraphernalia, like soccer goals for the backyard, fozz-ball table, air-hockey table, and dartboard for the basement, as well as a set of hockey sticks for everyone.

We hope you had a joyous holiday season, and we wish you a very prosperous and wonderful 2003.

Lots of Love,
Matthew, Sarah, Lucy, & Leo