

I am obviously getting old. I creak. My sense of style is clearly rooted in the latter half of the 20th century (can you say grungy?). And even though I've experienced decades of change and growth, I often just spend my days sitting quietly and doing nothing. I should be enjoying retirement sporting a fresh new tan (or at least an ecru). I should be rewarded for all my years of service and be allowed to finish my life on some sunny beach with a sporty umbrella. But that's not what's happening. I'm stuck here in Decatur, Georgia and I'm clearly not going anywhere. I probably weigh about 57 tons. Seriously, I'm a lot bigger than I used to be. I don't really have a choice so I just need to accept it. *I'm a house and I'm empty.* Except for that annoying dog and psychotic cat. And that cute older couple who seems to be happily coming and going and staying active. So much so, that they keep putting off their holiday correspondence. Oh it wasn't always like this. I used to be able to fill an entire trash bag every week. I've been so packed with people they spilled out of every doorway. I had ants one year for cryin' out loud! Yes, I've lived. But now, I'm just an empty nest. Fortunately, I have more time than my owners so I guess it's my year to crank out the

2014 Lefton-Steinbart Holiday Letter

Hannah is a senior at UGA, and she's on track to graduate in May with majors in Political Science and in International Affairs. She still loves travel, and last year she studied abroad in South Africa, working with kids and hanging out with wild animals (both African native and UGA imported). She also took a lovely trip to San Diego courtesy of Lew's sister Irene. Hannah has a touch of (well earned) senioritis so she's dropped to part time this spring, only enrolling in the few classes she really needs to finish. Did you know bowling satisfies the basic physical education requirement? Yep. She's still very involved as a team leader of the UGA Mock Trial program, and her team has scored some impressive wins in highly competitive national tournaments. Law School is an option (although probably not immediately) so she studied for and took the LSAT this fall and chalked up an excellent score which is good for 5 years. She applied to join the (apparently highly competitive) Peace Corps with a preference for southeast Asia, but she is still waiting to hear back. Hannah has also been working at Extra Special People (ESP) which is a very cool organization that strives to enhance the lives of children with developmental disabilities and their families by focusing on their abilities – not disabilities. Just because you're not verbal doesn't mean you can't go whitewater rafting on the Chattahoochee like all the other teens, AMIRITE?

Monica and Natalie are now both college freshman. Natalie is majoring in Chemistry at Georgia Tech, and Monica is still undecided but knocking out general requirements at Oxford College at Emory (a historical campus about 45 minutes away, which feeds into Emory University). They had a great finish to their senior year at Decatur High School including a relatively drama-free prom night and a slew of honors and recognition. Their Girls Scout troop took a trip to New Orleans. Lew's sisters Linda and Charna generously took the twins to Hawaii over the summer for a memorable graduation gift. They swam with dolphins, surfed, hiked volcanoes, ate mochi, and learned to pronounce the state fish (don't try that, it takes about a week of training). Since they're still close to home, they enjoyed attending Atlanta's Music Midtown to see some of their favorite artists including many acts that have trouble with spelling (Lord doesn't end in an "e", just sayin.) Linda also visited for the actual graduation.

Natalie was announced as class Salutatorian at the graduation ceremony, which made us all quite proud. She enjoyed another solo trip to Puerto Rico over the summer visiting her friend Lizbeth Herger and her gracious family. We think of this as a Spanglish immersion program which will help her if she ever needs to order food on Buford Highway. She had a great fall semester, and it turns out that having Mom and Dad on faculty at the university you attend isn't all bad. You can just text and ask for the pillow you forgot, and it shows up the next day! Last fall, on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3 PM. Lew's class was letting out at the same time that one of Enid's and one of Natalie's classes were starting, all in the same hallway, so they were able to make eye contact somewhat regularly (spoken words were frowned upon).

Monica's senior year at DHS included varsity Lacrosse and an editorship at the award winning Carpe Diem school magazine. She is also now writing for the Oxford Spokesman. Oxford College at Emory is located in a small, one-WalMart town and that took a little adjustment, but Monica has made some great friends and she's doing really well. She can take a shuttle back to Atlanta just about anytime she wants, but she's been staying on campus and

doing a lot of volunteer work in the local community. She's still taking lots of pictures and creating awesome handmade gifts for lucky friends and family. Follow her on Instagram to see some of them. I can't do that, since I'm a house, and I only have a land line.

The Lefton pets are all still making their presence known by digging out under the fence and running around the neighborhood (Madison), hissing menacingly at strangers and making little girls cry (Bo), and silently standing directly at your feet so you can practice balancing your dinner plate as you trip (Ralph). Bo has decided that empty nest means "my nest" so he has been discovering all kinds of new places to curl up and freak you out. He had a cone of shame earlier this year when he came in with a bad scratch near his eye, but you should have seen the other guy. Ralph and Madison spent many fun hours in the backyard over the holidays reducing the possum population.

I wasn't an empty house all the time of course. Lew's sister Irene made her traditional Thanksgiving pilgrimage, and we had several friends and family pass through including Charna over spring break, Cindy and Yuki Naka from New Orleans and niece Emily and friend Keel. In October and November, we hosted Wendy and Charlie Cromwell and their wonderful 3 year old daughter Mary Louise for several weeks while they were between houses in a real estate transaction. It was nice having a young child around again. Why? Because they are looking at the world with fresh eyes and curiosity. Why? Because that's developmentally appropriate. Why? Because I said so. Now pass the salsa.

Enid is still a fast runner (when compared to others in her age group in this small community), winning or placing in several 5K races this year. She's also stayed active with hiking and walking, and she challenged herself when the five of us did the slippery strenuous hike into and out of Tallulah gorge. Work for her continues on the Georgia Tech Mathematics faculty where she is a key part of the successful undergraduate program. She teaches everything from introductory calculus to upper level seminars. She sometimes has days when she really misses the girls, but with Bunko, two book clubs, Toastmasters, and keeping up with life in general, her nest doesn't appear too empty. Enid visited friends in Minnesota and has also spent time volunteering as a buddy to an international seminary student. She's tried binge watching (e.g., Downton Abbey) but never makes it more than a single episode. It was a good college football season here when Georgia Tech won the Orange bowl, and Emory football remained undefeated. Both Lew and Enid visited all three colleges for parent's weekends, and their first UGA game in Sanford Stadium (about time).

Lew continues to work at Georgia Tech in both the Dean of Sciences' office and the School of Math as an IT director. The use of computers on campus is so ubiquitous now, it seems like everything is IT. He's also still running the special topics course on the Humor Genome Project (an effort to better understand "open source" humor through use of data analytics) and he taught out of his textbook again, too. Lew still performs stand up and improv comedy, and he did a number of shows for the Atlanta Science Festival. In February, he reunited with some of the comedians and actors from his New Orleans improv group Brown! for a special bittersweet farewell show to one of the cast. He also traveled to Austin for an applied improvisation conference and did some geek comedy while he was there. Lew has spent a tremendous amount of volunteer effort this year supporting the Atlanta Maker movement. He was one of the organizers of the Atlanta Maker Faire, which was actually held in Decatur, and he's been leading a startup nonprofit organization called Decatur Makers which is establishing a community makerspace (see decaturmakers.org). How does he do all this? Many believe Lew is actually one of the Walking Dead, but that's only those who have seen him first thing in the morning when there is too much blood in his caffeine system.

We would love to see you in 2015! As an empty house, I would personally appreciate to have some more activity upstairs. It scares me sometimes when it's just that gray cat padding around. Atlanta is easy to get to, and you always have a place to stay, so make this the year to check "visit Lew and Enid" off your bucket list!

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May you and your loved ones have a new year full of happiness, health and peace.

Happy <belated> Hanukkah!

Merry <belated> Christmas!

Happy <belated> New Year!