



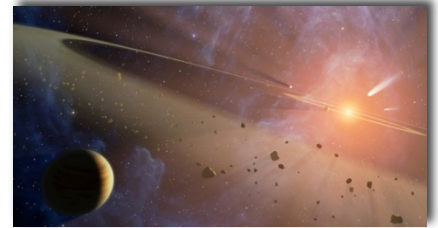
December, 2014

**Dear Family, Friend, or Current Occupant,**

We hope this letter finds you happy, healthy, and enjoying a restful and restorative holiday season with loved ones. Because our most significant news item requires some context, this letter provides more than just a year in review—it's a *family* in review. Nobody has ever asked for this, but we strive to exceed your expectations, your reasonable demands, maybe even your patience!



*Origins.* Our story begins 14 billion Julian years ago, where a Julian year refers to 365.25 days of 86,400 SI seconds each (but that probably goes without saying). Stars form, dust clouds coalesce into solar systems, life emerges and evolves, humans discover fire and invent polyester athletic clothing. But as recently as 1993, there was no iPhone. Finding it hard to remember life before the iPhone? No worries, Siri can help! If you don't know who she is, you should find out—try asking Siri!



*The Laboratory.* In 1993, Ayelet and I met in a psychology lab at Brandeis University. The stage was set for a relationship every bit as wild and crazy as you'd expect a research lab to produce!



*The Pressure Cooker.* When the school year ended, we crammed our relationship into 450 square feet of studio apartment for a full summer to see what would survive. If you have trouble imagining 450 square feet, think of it this way: That's some small number of feet by another small number of feet. It's not very big.

*Breathing Room.* From 1994 to 1998, we lived in an apartment featuring three rooms! It also featured New England charm, meaning Nor'easters could blow right inside via gaping holes much larger than the doors and windows that served mostly as decoration. A typical example of New England housing is shown at left.

*Convenience, Rural Style.* When Ayelet began grad school at Penn State and I became a professor at Elizabethtown College, we moved to Thompsettown, PA. From 1998 to 2003, we learned that convenience comes in many forms. Not one but *two* grocery stores were open 24 hours, and we only had to travel a couple of



towns away to reach one! Right in town was a carpet and video store (yes, you read that correctly) with some marvelous taxidermy (ditto). I once asked about the pair of moose heads towering majestically over the new-release DVD rack and was told they "came with the town." What a perfect answer, no clarification needed! Perhaps most memorable is the main road running through Juniata County, which was given a special name to reflect the vital role it played in all of our lives: State Route 322.

*Capital City.* A friend described Pennsylvania to us as Philadelphia + Pittsburgh, with Alabama in between. After spending 5 years in the heart of this would-be Alabama, we moved to its capital, Harrisburg. Ayelet departed (fled?) almost immediately for a one-year clinical internship in Roanoke, VA (not the lost colony, I checked) and then began a two-year postdoc at Harvard Medical School. I stayed behind in Capital City, where I shared my space with some excellent fish while waiting for Ayelet to return for a year of telecommuting. The clown triggerfish (upper left), the red-tailed catfish (lower left), and the silver arowana (upper right) were later sold to pet shops. The pair of clownfish (lower right), now 12 years old, is still with us and lays eggs every two weeks! (Do you need any?)



☐ Check here for a free sample of clownfish eggs! Fertility guaranteed!  
(Note: This offer is strictly limited to anyone who responds.)

*Putting Down Roots.* In 2006, Ayelet became a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and I took a new job as professor at The College of New Jersey. After 8 years of hard work and uncertainty, we were ecstatic this year when *Ayelet was granted tenure!* During our 21 years together, as we've completed our schooling and embarked on our careers, we've lived in 9 dorm rooms/apartments/homes. Now, for the first time in our adult lives, we do not have to keep moving—we can *choose* to stay someplace where we're very happy!

*Raising Young Pirates.* We're very happy here in Yardley, PA in no small part because it's a great community for raising a couple of pirates. Max, who's about 5.87 Julian years old, enjoyed a pirate-themed birthday party in January (A), spent Halloween as Captain Hook (B), and recently attended Pirate School (C). Zach, who's about 2.67 Julian years old, follows in these footsteps and spent Halloween as an adorable pirate with a parrot (D).



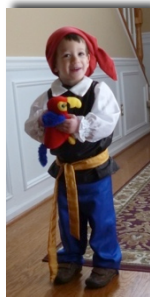
A



B



C



D



E

Maybe Max didn't learn much at Pirate School, but at least the lessons weren't the dangerous lies of Disney's *Jake and the Never Land Pirates* (E). During one episode, we learn that "a good pirate never takes what doesn't belong to him." I'm pretty sure that's mistaken, and I will continue to insist that all my freight be shipped as far around Somalia as possible. It's even more disturbing to see Jake and his pals gallivanting about, carefree, on an island shared by Captain Hook and his crew of nasty villains. Where's the responsible adult supervision? And let's not forget that Tick-Tock-Croc is always lurking nearby. Sure, he has a cute name, and maybe you can hear him coming, but he's a voracious reptilian predator. Would you drop your child off for a play-date in Never Land?

Thankfully, the boys are getting better training and developing non-pirate skills elsewhere. We won a charter school lottery, and Max hops a bus (A) to kindergarten at a Montessori elementary school where he's thriving. He's also a Little Dragon (B), capable of yelling "Sensei!" with a startling level of respect. Zach watches karate classes intensely and practices his own moves at home. While he waits to become a Tiger, the larval stage of the Little Dragon, he's doing a fine job of learning to swing (C), slide (D), hang (E), throw (F), and climb (G).



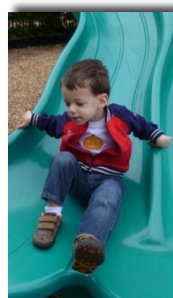
A



B



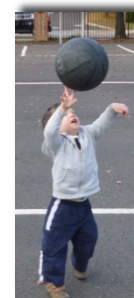
C



D



E



F



G

So there you have it, our family in review. We hope that you and your loved ones have a joyful holiday season and a wonderful new year! Please keep in touch, even if only via the anonymous (but live!) links below.

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**Holiday Letter Archives:**

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~ruscio/holidays.html>

**Pictures and Videos of the Boys:**

<https://picasaweb.google.com/113323955775289784206?noredirect=1>

□ Last chance! Check here for your free sample of clownfish eggs!