

# From Family to Fishes October 26, 2014



The view from Gard's hospital room at Morristown Memorial. Everyone very nice there. You can see cliffs way in background.

Family problems—we just found out that the strong experimental test (MRI Tesla 7) used with Shawn showed some cancer cells still there in his brain. We are saddened and shocked to hear this. Currently the doctors feel they should wait and watch, something about how you save your big chemo hit for when there is more to see? I'm not fully understanding this, but am worried. I actually thought we'd be getting good news. However, this is a slow-growing cancer and I hope and pray for long life for Shawn, and for knocking the cancer cells out whenever possible. Please continue to pray for him. Also, my brother Ron is having more heart problems; I think some of my high school friends remember Ron. And...Mike and Cveta are sick on Maui. Gard just had his hip replaced. He's rehabbing well. Now this is happy; I hope to have him back as my dance partner square dancing and round dancing in a month or so. Yay!

There are funny parts to Gard's rehab. Our bathroom sink is totally clogged. I'm learning how to use a pipe wrench. But to even attempt to use that big thing I had to remove tons of stuff from under the sink. Will continue to try to resolve this problem later. Also, Gard usually does the serious grocery shopping. But I am so slow; the high caloric products or the just-cooked, ready-to-eat market items constantly tempt. Bring home crab stuffed tilapia (why not?) Look at those round breads and cakes with giant frosting roses....stop, Diana ,Stop!



A scarlet begonia I just had to “rescue” from a possible frost. It’s hanging at my studio window and it’s so cheerful.

Also...last Saturday I was privileged to be part of the Rutgers University Council on Children’s Literature One-on-One Program. Wow! What a great Saturday! I met other writers, illustrators, editors, an art director, and more. Learned a lot. Inspired by talks and panels. Had a great One-on-One with my creative mentor Marcie Aboff (who has written 50 children’s books. We got along well and it was such a pleasure learning from her.

At the breakfast table I met other mentees from NJ, Georgia, N. Carolina, Ohio, and Oklahoma. Obviously the fame of this Rutgers program has expanded. I was so glad to have been accepted into it this year. So when I went home I just had to go right to my newest endeavor...*not a picture book, but a middle grade novel with an 11 ½ year old boy protagonist*. Now this is amazing. I keep hearing his boy’s “voice” as well as his friend Amy, who is a character in the book. I am so enjoying writing their tale.



A cabbage couple in autumn oak leaf finery

No frost yet. Garden still lovely, at least to me. The deer are really coming by to investigate what’s left on the menu. Two moms each have twins, very cute. Both sets of twins have grown so, no fawn spots left. One of them is much tinier than the others. My fave.



Adult Mata-Mata turtle Strange-looking turtles, they are camouflaged at the bottom of rivers or lakes among the debris. Hard to tell you're looking at his head here. I also saw two juvies.

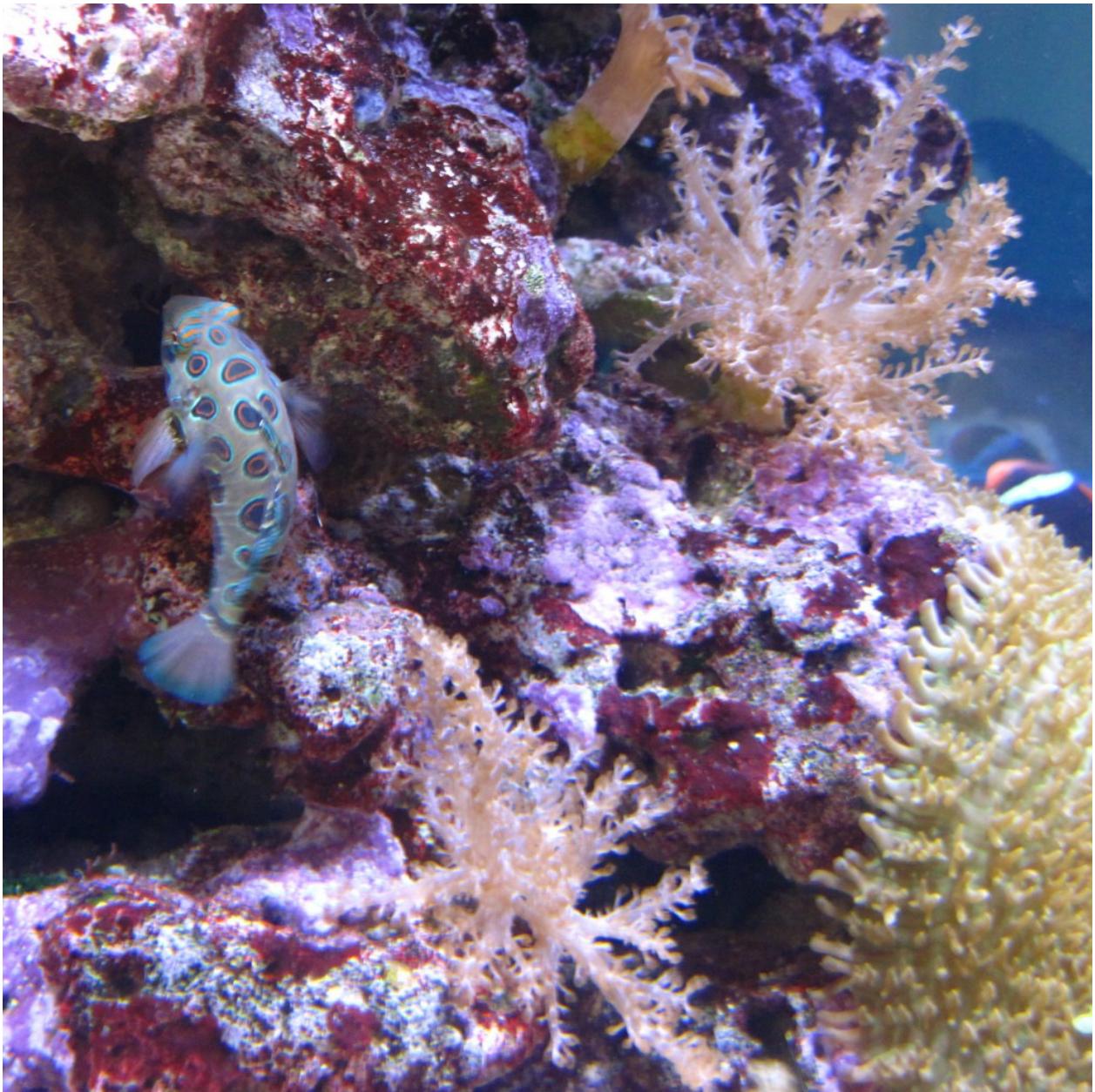
On October 16 Gard and I went to Camden's Adventure Aquarium. Needless to say, I loved it. I could easily stay overnight in any aquarium, but all the aquariums have sleep-over for children and scout leaders or parents. Maybe when Jillian is older I could take her on an aquarium overnigher! I'll let my photos do the talking here. I have maybe a hundred more just from that day, if you're interested (teehee).



Percula Clown fishes and Pink Skunk Clown fishes swimming amidst anemone



The beginning of a watercolor with the beguiling Percula and Pink Skunk clown fishes



the ornately decorated Mandarin fish, such a cute face!



Darling South American climbing porcupine “Gonzo”(because of his nose) reaching for food at Camden’s Adventure Aquarium



One of my all time fave fishes, the shy Mandarin Fish, or Mandarin Dragonet. About 3-4 inches long, they swim sweetly and shyly around a tropical tank, nipping quietly at coral. Gorgeous!

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# Pittsburgh–Festive in December

January 11, 2015



Could I be any happier?

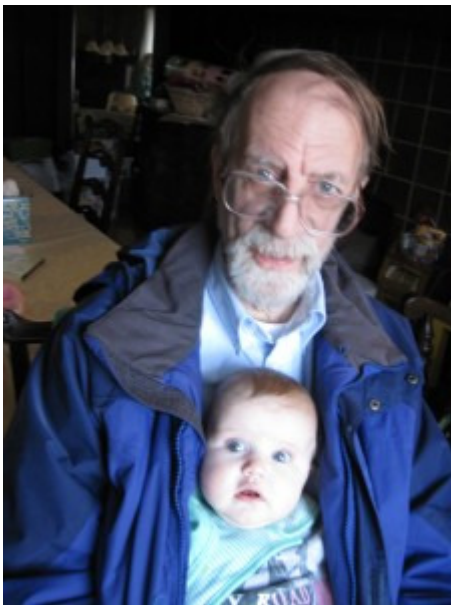
Early December we visited Shawn, April, and Jillian in Pittsburgh. What a great time we had!

Having not seen Jillian since early October, she had naturally changed a lot. Babies seem to grow and change each week...seriously. She is so responsive to us and to her various toys as well as to fingering material, picking up her binker, and surprisingly, paying attention to a board book. I so love being a grandmother; we were fortunate to Jillian-sit several times while the “kids” worked or did errands. What a pleasure!





Hard at work



Peek-a-boo! Grandpa Gard and Jillian

“Agoo” and “avoo” are key phrases that babies say at 5 months. Jillian has those “words” and others as well. It’s fun to carry on “conversations” with her, or try to make her laugh with silly words and sounds. After watching her on Thursday afternoon, in the evening while April enjoyed “quality time” with her daughter, Gard, Tal, and I went with Shawn to Greenfield Presbyterian Church, where, with church member Melanie, we decorated the hall for the cocoa and cookies party the next night (Friday) after Greenfield’s big Christmas Parade.



Enjoying a good joke with Tal

Friday I got to go with April and Jillian to Pittsburgh Children's hospital for Jillian's appointment. What a great hospital; you have the Bear section, the Zebra corridor, amazing fish tanks connected by clear acrylic tunnels, and a large model RR set up, complete with a miniature circus.



The banner under rain siege

Friday night, April, Jillian, and Gard went to set up cookie trays, coffee, hot cider, and cocoa, while Tal and Shawn and I were in the big Greenfield Christmas parade. Lori and Greg carried Greenfield Pres' church banner, while Minister Jenn Frayer-Griggs, and also Melanie passed out candy to the kids in the crowd. Shawn and Michal drove the disco car. This of course is Shawn's car with open trunk outfitted with a disco ball and lights, playing Christmas music. Tal and I marched with the group; I had my puppet Buckminster Bear wave to the children. It would have been absolutely perfect if it hadn't poured rain the entire time and been cold. Nevertheless, in the fun of a parade the cold and wet didn't seem to matter. And...in the middle of the parade Greenfield set off a magnificent fireworks display. I hadn't seen such a huge fireworks display in years...even in the pouring rain. What fun! Despite the rain, crowds lined Greenfield Avenue and there were still plenty of children. Afterward there were refreshments at the church and Santa and Elsa from "Frozen" even made appearances.



Christmas Parade Fireworks



Disco trunk with umbrella protection

Saturday included “chillin with Jillian”, April going to work for a while, and Gard and Shawn finishing applying molding to the new computer room for the church, while Tal and I Jillian-sat. It also included a late afternoon/early eve trip to the Phipps Conservatory (*see next blog*).



Studying piano playing with Tal

Sunday included church and also a trip to see the new things at Shawn's place of work, Schell Games, where we got to play some games.



Outside Schell Games at Station Square

We three, Gard, Tal, and I headed back to NJ late Sunday afternoon, after a thoroughly delightful visit.

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# Christmas at the Phipps Conservatory

January 11, 2015



Outside garden lights at Phipps Conservatory

We visited the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens while out in Pittsburgh and I was delighted to catch the Winter Light Flower and Garden Show. (<http://phipps.conservatory.org/>) The Phipps is fun to visit any time, but their special show entitled “Winter Wonderland” brought to life the carol with eight gardens decorated with glass sculptures, Christmas trees, plenty of lights, and more. Each garden was quite different from the others. Meanwhile, the outside gardens sparkled with moving fountains of light, gorgeous glowing light orbs, some of them 6-8 feet tall, and more. Jillian was particularly interested, I feel, in some of the running water exhibits. I loved the light orbs, the glass sculpture as part of gardens, and the wonderful, detailed model railroad setup.



Sculpture at the Phipps



Glass sculpture at the Phipps

You can go any time of year as they have special exhibits and regular exhibits, both indoor and out. As for their Gift Shop...it too is magical. I couldn't resist a sparkling snow white and silver glitter Christmas ornament and several children's books. Their book section is so great. There is even a café if you want a bite to eat.



Outside garden Phipps



Shawn and April with Jillian at the Phipps Conservatory

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# Christmas and New Year's Holidays 2014

January 11, 2015

What a wonderful Christmas and New Year's celebration we were blessed with this year!

Since a picture is worth a thousand words, I'm letting my photos tell most of the story here.



I love her little hands!



Jillian blows raspberries when she's happy

All my grandma friends tell me what a difference a grandchild makes, and they are so right. April and Shawn were good enough to visit for two weeks and share their time, and Jillian-time between Pat and George and us. How very special it was to have Jillian come to our Christmas Eve service! She was good as gold, better even, for what care I for gold? What fun to continue the tradition of reading "The Night before Christmas" to Jillian, a tradition which started with my Mom reading to



Ron and me, continued with me reading to Mike, Tal, and Shawn. And now to Jillian. As you can tell from the photo, she enjoyed the story, or....maybe sitting with three clearly adoring “big folks.”



On New Year’s Day, Jillian and Grandpa Gard confer about the possibilities and opportunities for 2015



Jillian at church Christmas Eve, sitting by herself in the Tripod Position



Reading “The Night before Christmas” to Jillian

When she’s happy, or wants to participate in whatever is going on, Jillian blows happy raspberries....blowing a raspberry, or as it is sometimes called, “Bronx cheer” is also defined thusly: ” It may also be used in childhood phonemic play either solely by the child or by adults towards a child to encourage imitation to the delight of both parties.”

So when Jillian blew raspberries during play time, or during the New Year’s Eve impromptu party (as she did, for 10 minutes straight in the middle of our improv game), or at church January 4<sup>th</sup>, we knew she was just happily part of what we were celebrating, our lives together.



Shawn, Jillian, and me at Van Holten School....Could I be any happier pushing her stroller?!



Shawn, Jillian, and Tal—getting out in the cold for our big stroll



Jillian is with us while we play  
A Day at the Museum Game



Tal and Jillian hold hands

There were so many highlights...the whole time was precious. When April brought Jillian down in her Christmas dress...oh, my! How cute! And when we skyped with Mike and Cveta out on Maui, she was quite attentive. Shawn and Tal and I strolled her down to Van Holten Elementary so, as Shawn said, "Jillian can see my alma mater." (and Tal's and Mike's). New Year's Eve saw an impromptu party with Tim and Erin, Eileen, and Chris visiting. Always a trooper, Jillian fit right in with the festivities. New Year's Day we went up to Rutherford for a great party with Pat and George and all, and Jillian met a cute 10 month old relative. And to top it all off, she ate her first solid food on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, she actually swallowed the rice cereal (previous attempts were more on the swish and spit style of non-consumption).



Skyping with Mike and Cveta



April, Shawn, and Jillian in her Christmas dress

Well, more could be said, but after a year of ups and downs, I am blessed to have had this very joyous and special time with loved ones. I wish you all (and us, too!), a Happy, Healthy 2015.



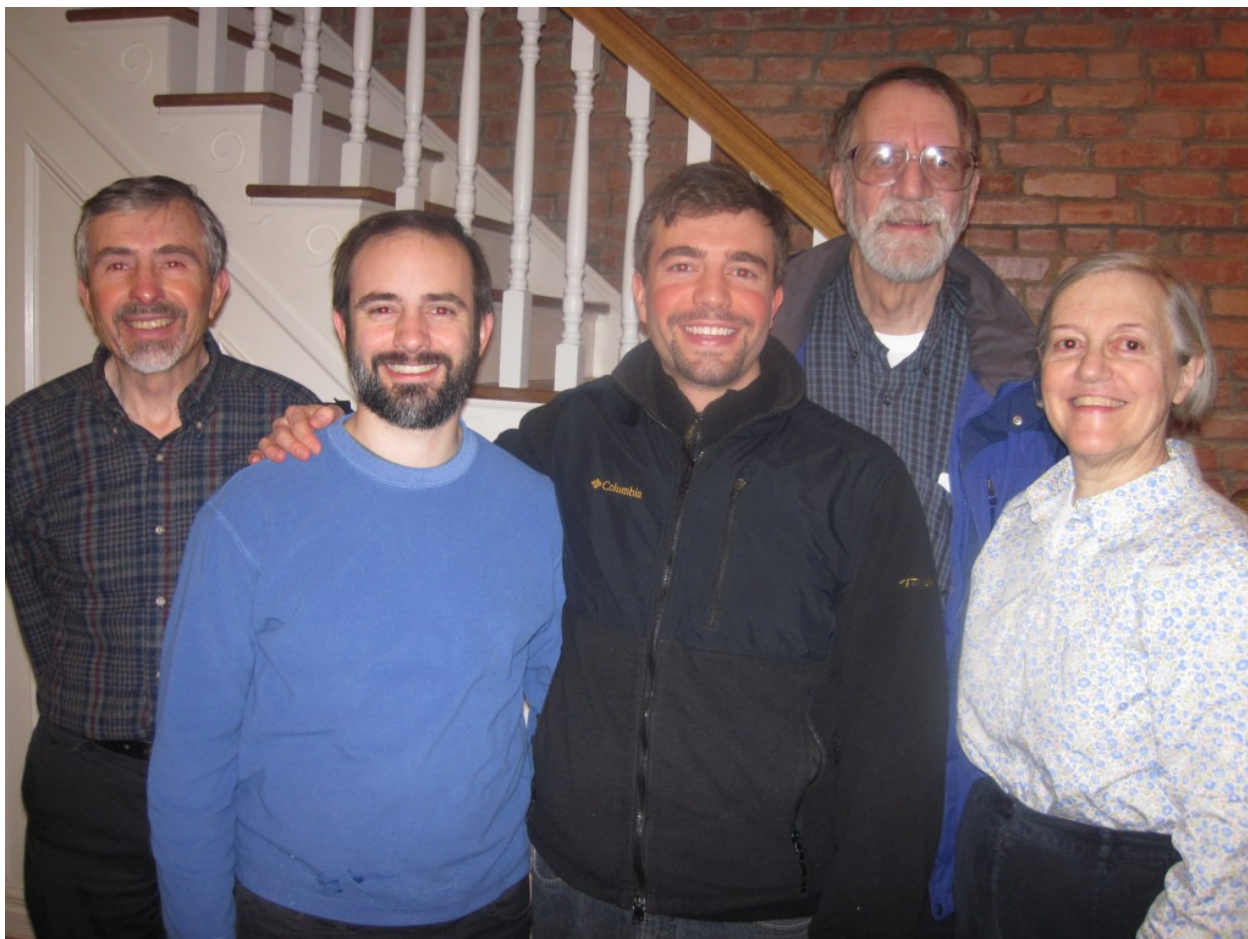
Me with Jillian...Little girls always lift up their overskirts!

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# Washington, DC and a family reunion

Visit to Washington, D.C.

February 4, 2015



The Schaefers and Gard



Gabriel and I paint...I'm painting the frog on his high chair

Recently Gard and I went to Washington D.C. where we met Gard's sister Karen, and husband Bob who'd come from Idaho, and our nephew Warren from Colorado, who were all visiting our nephew Merrick and his son Gabriel (I have a grand-nephew! In every way!). Gard and I stayed just outside Washington, in College Park, and saw the others for a couple of days, a fun reunion.

I got to play all sorts of funny made-up games with 2 ½ year old Gabriel, including making a two room tent in their dining room. I even got to paint with him. I'd bought him some Crayola watercolor brush pens. Gabriel and I both like them; they work well and are washable! Karen and Gard got to talk a lot in person which is a nice change from the phone or emails. We had incredible dinners cooked by Bob and Warren.



This empty house really intrigued me, would love to know the story behind it



Washington, DC LeDroit Park small super market. Bob says its opening hours vary widely.



Bob and I had a couple of walks in Merrick's really picturesque neighborhood. The architecture is varied and what I particularly liked was that the brownstone type homes were not just boring brown, but warm ivory, mellow yellow, pale blue, tawny orange, apricot, and brick red. The tiny gardens were just as individualistic as the homes. You could tell this even in the dead of winter!



LeDroit Park, LeDroit means the right, and this was to be the right of all, good housing and safe parks



LeDroit Park in a wall mural

Between College Park and Washington and also in the streets of Merrick's neighborhood, are incredible examples of mural art. I photographed quite a few and include some of them here. You can say a lot in a mural, and some of these artists are excellent. I enjoyed seeing them and it would be fun to design some, but I flinch when I think of the arm and back muscle pains it must take to actually get them on those walls. Are most muralists young, I wonder? Or at least, incredibly fit?



One of my faves—sort of surrealistic, on Rt. 1 between College Park and Washington D.C.



Unusual Mural with subjects from India



Bird/horse creature—mural in Washington,DC



Of course there's a puppy mural on the side of the Animal Hospital!