

## Christmas 2008

**Merry Christmas.** Perhaps it's a feature of middle age, but this year seems to have spanned a couple of decades. I can hardly remember back to its beginning...

Last Christmas we were entering the second year of our kitchen remodel, wondering if it would ever be complete. We finally finished in June, and just in time to host a high school graduation party for Elise that month. Actually, we had two graduations this year; Judy completed her Master of Nursing Education. Her research projected was accepted for publication, for which she is lead author. Woo-hoo!

**ELISE** entered the University of Minnesota this fall, planning to major in music education. Although disappointed in the caliber of the music program, she is working the system well and making the most of her time. She loves her roommate, and when she has a bad week, Elise plays her piano or guitar and sings her to sleep. She carried nineteen credits, and taught a songwriting class, for credit, so she is classified a junior (based on accumulated credits) at the end of her first semester. Elise is also working for an online search service called Cha-Cha. They search and forward answers to inquiries submitted by cell phone users who don't have access to the Internet. She gets paid per inquiry, and gets bonuses based on volume, etc., and used her earnings to buy an electric guitar.

Her proximity to home made Elise available to her high school to play piano for the fall musical. She was paid well for her services. She also did some arranging and accompanied the choirs for their fall concert. In her spare time, she is reportedly working on an album at the U. In a surprise to us all, she tried out for the U of M rowing team and made it. She is apparently a natural, and is ranked number one on the port side for novices. She's physically very strong as a result of all the workouts, and thrives on the physical activity.

Over winter break she is spending a month in Argentina for a research project on the tango. She and six others will study and enjoy the tango culture and festival in Buenos Aires. We hope she comes back (early reports are we'll have to go fetch her); she loves the city, the music, the people she has met, and her Spanish is blossoming there. She's even investigating music schools down there.

With all of that, we seem to be busier with only one daughter at home than we were with two. **ANNA** just turned sixteen and is eager to begin driving, but won't truly be on her own until sometime next year. As such, we still accompany her on many of her outings. (The jury is out on how she likes winter driving.) She has done well with her permit, and is taking behind the wheel lessons. She LOVES youth group at church, and lives from Sunday to Wednesday and yearns for in-between times when she can see church friends. Anna also got braces this year, and recently had surgery to expose two "shy" teeth which had grown into the roof of her mouth. The surgeon attached chains to the teeth, by which they will be pulled down (gradually!) into line with her other teeth.

She went on a mission project (shortly after getting braces—ouch!) to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota this summer, and is eager to continue reaching out with service to others. (She dreams of being a healthcare worker in Africa some day, and has begged to go either to Nepal or Ghana for another short term project.) Anna also has lots of fun in the top band at school. They added a marching band program this year, which was a new experience. It was fun to see her strut and play in the fancy uniform. The miracle of her oral surgery was that we were able to fit it in after football season and before the winter band concert. She is also doing well academically, and loves math. Anna made the JV volleyball team this year, and is constantly looking for someone to "pepper" with her. Her goal is to make varsity next year. She will continue playing on a club team during the winter and spring to hone her skills. The sport has already blessed her with a sprained ankle and stretched ligaments, a sore shoulder and jammed fingers.

Things are more routine for us as parents. **JUDY** has a new job and likes being a teacher of second year nursing students at Normandale Community College—except, that is, for grading. That is still a grind for her. After her first rotation (of five) through the course material, the prep is less, and she knows what to expect. There have been a lot of layoffs at the hospital where she conducts clinical training, so that has been a stress point. So far there haven't been too many "academic politics" issues, which is a good thing, as that is another area she dreads. She is still playing congas in the worship band at church, does a prayer walk with a neighbor friend which also doubles as exercise, and occasionally fills in as a nurse at the OB clinic.

**JUDY** and **RICK** continue to enjoy participation together in the book club founded by her father over thirty years ago—especially now that Judy is done with her course of academic study. The discipline of reading the required text expands our experience, and the diverse points of view are always enlightening and stimulating.

**Rick** still enjoys his ministry job, though it is definitely tenuous right now. As with many ministries, **FaithSearch** doesn't have any monetary reserves, and laid off almost half of the staff in October. Now there is an increasing amount of work, no money nor people to do it with, and the economy doesn't look to be improving any time soon. We're waiting on God to meet the need, as well as working hard to find His provision (grants, appeals, etc.). In the mean time, **FaithSearch** has been invited by the Russian public school agency to train teachers to use a presentation of evidence for the Christian faith as an elective in their curriculum. Amazing! Rick recently taught the material to junior and senior high school students at the church, where he is still on the youth team.

We are all blessed to be healthy and whole in our family and our love for one another. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus, who came that we might have life—abundantly and with peace.