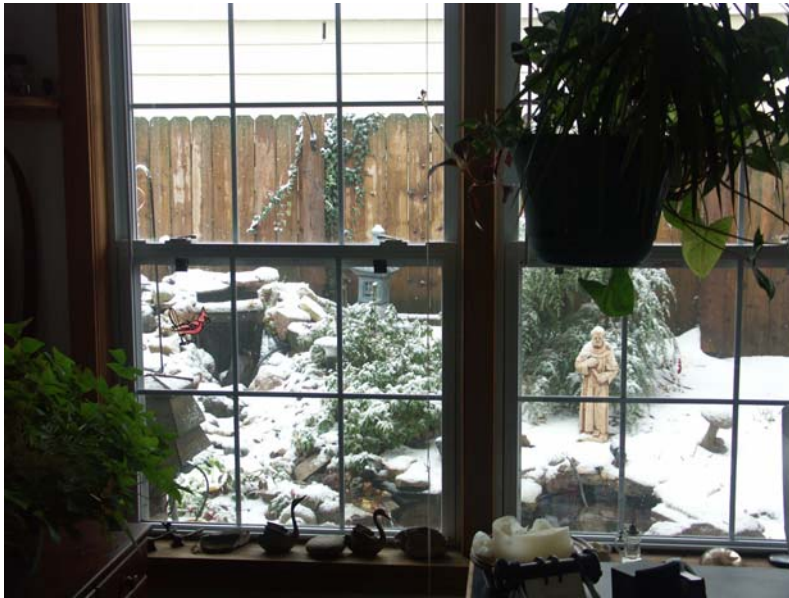


Sriner's Annual Christmas Letter '05



As I sit at my office desk peering out into the garden, I can see two turtle doves spooning in the pear tree. Could it be the second day of Christmas already? Sorry, they are not doves; they are pigeons and one of them just left a mess on the head of St Francis. OK, it was an apple tree; but if you have been privy to my Christmas letters in the past, you know I am given to slight exaggeration and that is

an understatement. I believe in laughing, loving and living life to its fullest. If you don't build up speed on the downhill, how will you ever make it up the next incline? This year has had more than it's share of hills -- both up and down!

January started on the first this year. There was some discussion of starting it on the 31st and working backwards; but then some months didn't have the 31 days, and the whole 28 days in February and the leap year thing made scheduling from the last to first thing a complete nightmare. So, it looks like the committee to restructure attitudes politically, acronym = CRAP, will have to give this change a little more thought. So I say, "Merry Christmas to you all". For those of you who don't share the belief of Christmas, I welcome you to share the spirit of peace and goodwill that it represents, as we all will face the same maker at judgment day, only the doormen are different.

If I had to think of a keyword for 2005, it would have to be stress. I did a Google search; (For those unconnected with life on the internet, a Google search is to the internet as Webster's Dictionary is to books.) I typed in stress and hit OK. The first link was *www.Krystal's wedding*, the second was *www. Kim's college choice* and similar pages, *www.college visits part 2*, and *www.let's drive to Florida again*. *Www.dementia and how it affects family* was also on the list. The list seemed to go on and on.

Kim had applied and been accepted to University of West Florida in Pensacola and Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. After an on-campus overnight stay at Augustana College and a second visit to UWF in March, Kim decided warm breezes and palm trees were better than icy walks and long johns. This culminated a two-year search and visits to

over 60 college campuses. (see last year's letter) She was accepted into the Honors Program, which is respected as one of the best in the nation.

While Kim was shopping for a college, Krystal was planning the world's most beautiful wedding. Tapping into her Mom's organization gene, she had lists of lists all packed into a small, 60-pound notebook. There were idea books, picture books, sample books and even a scratch-and-sniff wedding cake and flower book. She became Miss Wedding Planner extraordinaire.



Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Pat and I were trying to maintain some semblance of sanity. It was with cloudy judgment that we decided we would bring my Mom home from Sunny Acres to live with us. I spent the winter remodeling the gameroom in the back of the house into an apartment for her. I added a handicapped-accessible bathroom with a large shower and appropriate grab bars. In April, we brought her home. The first few months were delightful. She was

able to watch spring bloom in the garden outside her window and sit on her own deck and take in the sun and fresh air. She delighted in sweeping up the deluge of maple seeds that covered the walks. She was at peace, as was I, knowing she was no longer in a nursing home.

May started with a bridal shower for Krystal and ended with Kim's recognition assembly and preparations for Kim's graduation party. Kim was awarded the D.A.R. Citizenship Award and the Ray Kroc (MacDonald's) Youth Achievement Awards. She was a Spartan Scholar, a Student of the Year finalist and received the Golden Laurel Award. She was awarded the Southeast High School English and Cisco II Award. Nothing in a parent's life brings more joy than seeing their kids excel. We were ecstatic!



Above: "This is your life. Are you who you want to be?" asks Salutatorian Kim Sriner.

June brought Kim's high school graduation. Her salutatorian speech at graduation was awesome. We were so proud.

We had an open house/graduation party for her, but there was little time to celebrate



as we had to take another trip to UWF for orientation and registration. I took Mom up to stay with my sister in Chicago for a week, and then we left the next morning for Florida. After the two-day event, we were hurriedly urged to head out as a hurricane was approaching. We drove back to Springfield, and the next day we headed up to Chicago for another bridal shower at Krystal's new house in Plainfield, where she is still teaching high school English. I went to pick up Mom (Grams) who was at my sister's. The week culminated with the drive back that night. Another keyword for 2005 could have been *driving*. I logged more miles than a politician during an election year.

As the wedding neared, we noticed Mom was becoming more and more detached from reality. Mood swings took her from a peaceful lunch in the garden to angry confrontations by mid-afternoon. I had become the "bad guy". July was a real uphill struggle. I became less and less able to work away from home, because I never knew how Mom would be when I left or came home. On one return, I found her searching through the garage. When I asked what the object of her search was, she responded, "I'm looking for the hatchet." And her response to "why" was "because you told me to get it." This was a bit unsettling. Would we be the inspiration for a new *CSI in the Land of Lincoln*? I can see the promo: "Family found slain while grandmother sleeps peacefully in adjoining room." I didn't tell the rest of the family, but I did hide the hatchet and other sharp objects. Interconnecting doorways were also found locked at night.

August 6th was the wedding. Two of our friends Barb and Barb (reminiscent of "my brother Daryl and my other brother Daryl" from the Bob Newhart show) stayed with Mom, so Pat and I could enjoy the wedding. Let me go on record here to say, "thanks again to the Barbs". Without their help, I don't know what we would have done. The wedding was fantastic. Krystal and Steve's planning had paid off and everyone in attendance was impressed. The wedding, held at Westminster Presbyterian Church, was beautiful. The ceremony included two ministers and much of the ceremony was in dual language, Korean and English. Again, we were proud and happy parents. The reception was elegantly





beautiful and the food was outstanding. After a day of recuperation, Steve and Krystal left for their honeymoon in Hawaii.

We on the other hand, had no time to regroup. Mom was getting more belligerent, and we were due to take Kim to College in Florida. Mom didn't want to go to Chicago and even medication was not calming her. I made the decision that she was going to have to go back into the nursing home. Pat and I just could

not cope. After making the necessary arrangements for Mom, we were off to Florida following Kim in a parade of Jeeps. She drove one fully packed SUV, and we had the overflow in ours.



After getting Kim all settled into her dorm room, it was time to leave her there and head back. The drive was lonely, as was the empty nest we call home. But it wasn't empty for long. After shortly more than a week at school, Kim's college life was imposed upon by a category 5 hurricane! I was awakened at 5 am on Sunday morning with a call. "Are you watching TV? The hurricane grew to a category five overnight." "No, I responded groggily, I just awakened to answer the phone." Kim asked, "What should I do?" "You have to follow your own instincts here," I responded. After about an hour loading up her fishy and her plants and dirty laundry, she was on the road. This was followed several days later with a return drive into uncertain conditions and limited gas supplies.

Now I walk her to class on her cell phone as she tells me about this boy she met. He is a senior at UWF studying art. His family lives down there, and she was able to spend Thanksgiving with them after deciding it really wasn't smart to drive 13 hours by herself, mostly at night to be home for Thanksgiving. Although, it was the first time she wasn't with us to share the traditional turkey, we were relieved she wasn't on the road.

That brings us to the present. Pat and I have been recently enjoying the freedom of empty nesting. We go someplace almost every weekend. I have found a new passion taking pictures. My pictures of the pumpkin festival at the



Washington Park Carillon are on their website; http://www.carillon-rees.org/html/jack_o_lantern_spectacular.html and I was asked to be the official photographer for the Elijah Iles House after taking and sharing pictures of their candle light tour. <http://iles-house.blogspot.com/> I am hoping to develop this love into a commercial pursuit and will be unveiling a new website in the near future.



As you can see, this year Pat and I were only minor characters in this play of life. The stars were Krystal and Kim. Pat is still with the Secretary of State. In February, Seniors Department closed and she was transferred to Archives' Records

Management. I am still doing my house doctoring. We are both feeling the effects of distancing youth and dwindling mobility, but we are making the most of it. The other day as I hobbled across the room, I said, "I walk like an old man." Pat's reply, "You are an old man!"

So with that I will end this novelette Christmas letter 2005.



*May the breezes of time blow gently across your soul
and erode away the wrinkles of time and bring peace
and love to you and your family in the New Year .*

