

Christmas 2006

Get yourself a beverage of choice, gather round the family and find a comfortable seat to join us for our busy trip through 2006.

This Annual Christmas letter is dedicated to Joshua Seunglee Oh, the newest bud connecting the Sriner Tree of Life to the Tree of Oh. The budding Joshua is already loved by us all. Krystal and Steve's branches spread all the way to Plainfield where they are dropping their own roots. The other main branch, the Kimberly branch, as you may recall had made it all the way to Florida, but hurricane winds, local entanglements, and poor educational nourishment caused a break.



The now, shorter but stronger portion of the branch extends down to Carbondale where it is dropping roots and getting better nourishment from Southern Illinois University. The aging dual trunk of this tree records 60 age rings to date. Some of the bark is beginning to peel as its girth expands, and it isn't as limber as it was, but, it still stands tall and proud showing off its offspring.

I usually start my Christmas ~~Novel~~ Letter with some reference to a starting point in January. This year I am going to start with April because that was the month I turned 60. It seems cruel for nature to have me start my old age in the spring of the year. Everything around me is putting out new shoots and new growth and mine is wilting. (My life not my shoot) I needed something new and exciting. Pat got me a new camera; probably to chronicle my demise. You might ask, "Why did you need a new camera?" "Well, I'll tell you, it all started in January. Aren't you sorry you asked?"



January of his year brought with it a new desire to capture some of life's beauty in pictures. It was our first quest to find the mighty eagle. It only took one day out scouring the treetops for the majestic raptor, to hook us. Like a gambler looking for the winning hand, I wanted the best pictures. It is a little like "no-kill" hunting. It's obvious that I enjoy taking pictures, but now it is more than that. Now I am perfecting my skills and adding new tools to ply my new trade. Almost every weekend in January and February were filled wholly or partially with trips to Western Illinois' river valleys. I added new lenses and eventually a new camera to capture the eagles we saw and when there were no eagles, we captured the beauty of the rural landscape.

March brought a new chapter to my book of picture memories. They were pictures I didn't enjoy taking but felt compelled to capture. March 12th remains clear in my mind; the air raid sirens were sounding (that dates me, doesn't it? For those of you born after the Cold War, that's what we now call tornado sirens). Anyway, whatever they were, they were making a lot of noise; Kim was taking her laptop, MP3 player, and cell phone, down to the big closet in the basement. Pat had the portable radio, a flashlight, her notebook and pen for lists, and the emergency kit from the car. You know the one with the blanket, candle, protein snacks, and matches in a coffee can. I was standing on the porch with my camera trying to document the storm. It was dark and I could not make out much; but when the next door neighbor blew by followed closely by her roof, I knew this was not your average storm. I was barely able to get a

shot before I felt myself being lifted off the porch floor to join the flying neighbor and ride Aladdin's flying roof across the street. I grabbed up my equipment and headed for the basement. This is the first time in my life that I have been chased to the basement by a storm. To make a long story short, (I know what you are thinking, "Sure, like that will happen.") the funnel missed us by two blocks. We didn't have any structural damage but the recently filled freezer was going into an extended defrost mode. We had no power for several days. A borrowed generator followed by a generator purchase, saved the contents of the freezer and saved us from e-mail withdrawal. There was extensive damage all across town. Apparently there were several tornadoes. I am not exaggerating when I say, we are still cleaning up. Some businesses on Wabash Ave. were completely demolished and some decided not to reopen.



A couple places had grand reopenings just last weekend. A completely rebuilt Barrel Head Restaurant should open soon.

After all the excitement of early March, Pat and I headed south to get a head start on Spring and take some pictures. We began our trip with a visit to the Schreurs' in Hot Springs. They took us to see the most beautiful Garland Woodland Gardens. It was tulip time and the display was fantastic; there were thousands of them. Back at their lake front home, we had our own bungalow just off the main house. Our host Jerry, a recently retired Ford employee, had our bungalow decorated in all types of Ford memorabilia. While Ford is not my current car, of choice, this was definitely my kind of room. I convinced Pat it was her type of room also by pointing out the many windows facing Lake Hamilton. The sunset cast a romantic glow over the adjoining lake. I couldn't help but remember my first and only Ford with the Rambler-like custom reclining seats. If you can't see why a romantic glow across a still lake would invoke such a memory, you obviously never spent a night at the submarine races.



After Hot Springs, we headed south into Texas where we met up with my nephew, Harry and his family, living north of Dallas. We tasted our first fried pickles at his new restaurant. I can't wait to go back there for seconds. We were also joined by Jackie Hubbins, an old friend of Pat's. At this point, I would usually interject that the relationship was old not Jackie; but considering the fact that she was in our same school year, there is no need for such a disclaimer. We are all OLD! After a great time at the restaurant, and a short stay at Harry's house where we met up with more family including another nephew, Jeff, we went around to the south side of Dallas and visited with more relatives. This time it was my cousin, David, who definitely brings out my humor. (Good and BAD) I'm not certain Texas was ready for my "Hi, Big Boy" swish. We laughed until our sides ached. He took us to see their goat ranch. (Perhaps after the previous comment, mention of a goat ranch is not a good subject) Let's just move on to Crawford Texas where the President has a ranch previously unseen by my cousin and his wife Cheryl. We made quite a comedic scene trying to find out from the locals where it actually was located. I don't think David will be showing his face there again in the near future; but guess who has pictures of the ranch and security encampment? Yes, we found it!

At that point we had run out of relatives and free housing; but we headed further south to Padre Island where I would photograph the shore birds. We stayed on the island across from Corpus Christi. The pelican brigade was fantastic to watch as they flew over our balcony in perfect formation. In the morning we headed up to Aransas National Wildlife Preserve. It was photographer's heaven. I only wish that I had then, some of the equipment I have now to do justice to the photographs. It was awesome! I will go back there.

Our next stop was our hotel on the River Walk in San Antonio. That is another place I want to revisit. The night lights along the river were breathtaking. Needless to say, I have lots of pictures.



In June, we opened a new campground out behind our house. The Dershimers, our dear friends from Florida came for a visit. We have the new motto of "travel light" they don't; they carry everything including the kitchen sink in their new camper. Since we met them while camping the Rockies years ago, they felt comfortable camping out here. Not to be confused with a basic SRA with no amenities, I installed water, electric, and cable TV hook-ups, along with fast

Ethernet internet connections. All the good places have internet now and I didn't want to have them feel less than First Class. I made the standard camping signs so they would feel at home. You know things like "Campers, please do not wash dishes in the bathroom sink," "shower for registered guests only," and "office hours" posted on my office door. We had a wonderful visit, but I decided not to continue in the campground business. They were our first and only guests. With the end of August just around the corner, Pat and I were getting ready to hit the road again as we returned to empty nesting when Kim left for school in Carbondale. You will remember, we had a practice run in the fall of '05 when Kim was in Florida.

Earlier in the year, we were delighted to find that we were going to be grandparents. At last we could buy baby clothes and not have to worry about how they will clean up or how hard it is to change them, because that's not in our job specs. We can buy big, noisy toys, plan parties with lots of treats and not worry about the resulting sugar high because we can send them home with their parents. Wow, I think I will like this grandparenting thing. We can spoil not scold. Joshua was born October 23rd at 9:32 AM and weighed in at 6 lbs 10 oz spread over 21 inches. He is adorable. But how could he not be considering his lineage? I can't think of much that makes Pat happier than holding him! I'll probably get him a hammer and power drill for Christmas; because, he is obviously too young for a fishing pole. He also might eat the bait. Although, the minnows and worms would be good training for the future sushi bars. I obviously didn't eat enough minnows and worms as a kid! I preferred the cookies and look where that got me.

Shortly after Joshua was born, he decided he wanted a little party here in Springfield to meet his new relatives. I quote from his letter which he dictated to me telepathically so I could send it. He knew he could not get to the mailbox and his Mom would never let him lick the stamps:



In the original plans, it was decided that I should arrive around November 13th. I had no intention of waiting that long; so, I just sat down like my Aunt Kimmy and went on strike. The doctor told Mom I was breech. I think that meant stubborn. Then they decided they were going to come in and get me November 8th. Ha! Ha! I had other plans! One well placed Tae Kwon Do kick and I emptied the pool. I had everyone scurrying to get me out then. I guess, I showed them who was in charge. So, here I am; and I would like to meet all my family and new friends. Josh



The Sunday before Thanksgiving we had house guests, the Schreurs' from Hot Springs. They cashed in their Sriner-Hilton bonus points earned earlier and reciprocated a visit. While we couldn't provide a themed room like they did, we did have a fantastic city tour. Like many of our friends, we also met The Schreurs camping. We hope they will come again for an extended tour.

That was a full week. We had house guests on Sunday – Monday; then Thanksgiving with the kids here; followed by a coming out party for Joshua on Saturday; and, all on just one house cleaning. That's what I call good planning!

After such a busy week, I thought we could sit back and take a couple weeks to recuperate (we seem to have to do a lot more of that nowadays) Unfortunately, the Storm Gods had other ideas and dumped about an inch of ice on us and then covered it with 7 inches of snow. Everything was literally frozen in place; except the too heavy tree limbs and power lines. This time it wasn't the thawing freezer that worried us, but rather the freezing interior. Where is some good global warming when you need it? It is bad enough being cold, but cold and no e-mail, I had to act. The tornado-purchase generator was again pressed into service and I rebooted the computers; then I plugged in the refrigerators and furnaces. It was so good to hear that heart-warming sound "you've got mail."

In my spare time this year, I have added three new blogs to my web presence:

One is for classmates: <http://shsclassof64.blogspot.com/>

one is for photography tips: <http://dsdigitals.blogspot.com/> and

one for our many trips: <http://em-t-nest.blogspot.com/>

It is like our own reality show. Perhaps we can syndicate it! These are in addition to my other websites. www.DSDigitals.com is home to my photographs, which I will be expanding this winter as Housedoctor business slows down.

Obviously, I have more words than space. Pat tells me if my Christmas Letter gets any longer, I will have to include Cliff Notes and an index; but don't worry, you won't be tested on any of this.

From all of us in the Sriner family, may 2007 bring you peace, happiness. and good health to sustain you throughout the New Year and beyond.

Seasons Greetings, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year 2007!

God Bless you all,
Love and Light,
Pat and Dulany