

Christmas Letter 2010

Every year, I try to pick out a theme for the notorious Christmas letter. While they all seem to border on the ridiculous, I find it much more fun than the “normal” “everyone is fine chronicle. What a boring life that would be if it were all true. I think I will have to call 2010 the year of the roller coaster. It certainly has been up and down all year.

The year started the same as most years, on January 1st just after the stroke of midnight. Fireworks filled the cold night air. We knew because we were watching it on TV. As the sound of exploding firecrackers began to diminish, I kissed Pat and told her to wake up. It was way past these old folks’ bedtime.

January signals the time for eagle watching and this year was no different. Armed with a new lens, I was certain to get that once in a lifetime picture. I took a lot of pictures but I can’t say I got any really extraordinary shots. Now, as I look out the window at the accumulating snow, I know I will have another chance in the near future. Photography has always been a passion and I don’t see that changing any time soon.

February caught us on the low dip of the coaster. We got word that my Mom, in a nursing home in Decatur, had been taken to the hospital with an infection on her face. We were with her in the afternoon. She was unconscious when we got there and the nurse indicated it was serious but she was holding her own. After some time, we decided to go home to take care of Kira and make calls to family and plan for the next day. About 7:30, I got a call from the nurse that Mom had taken a turn for the worse. She died before the conversation ended. We had a celebration of her life in April. She had a full life until her mind turned on her during the last few years. Her transition was a blessing. We will miss her always.

The middle of March, we packed up the dog and a couple suitcases and headed south. No, we didn’t pack the dog into a suitcase but we did pack her into the back of the Jeep. Then we hitched up the camper and headed down Rt. 66 for some much deserved R & R. First stop was in Tulsa and a quick and expensive visit with our high school friend, Rosie. We didn’t know they were going to charge us over \$,2000.00 for the camping spot in front of their house. I plan to pay it off in small payments the 6th Monday of each month. Other than the cost, it was a great time. Had I known the fees were going to be so high, I would have asked them to warm some bricks in the oven for us to put under the bed in the camper. Our furnace was broken and it seemed to be way below zero when we awakened in the morning. I put my shoes in the microwave to thaw out the tongue. Snow was falling when we left. You see even the Gods were not happy with the charges. The incantation I learned from the Harry Potter movie helped too.

We pressed on South to the Dallas area and an overnight stay with Mary a fellow SHS 64 grad. She has to win the hospitality award. Not only did she arrange a visit from another old high school friend, Barb but she even slept on the floor so Kira could have her bed. We had every intention of staying in the camper but upon her insistence and the sight of those two 38’s, I couldn’t resist. I don’t know if they

were real or not but they certainly got my attention! I know what you are thinking but in Texas guns are a way of life! We were supposed to head out the next morning but Mary with her double 38's held us hostage in her car while she drove us around Flower Mound. Kira and I sat in back. Kira got down on the floor and just whimpered as I slid from side to side. It was the first time in 64 years that I got car sick!

Next stop was to visit Jackie and her husband Steve. She is Pat's best friend from grade school. Their home is on the lake. If we had more time I would have figured a way to park the camper down by the lake but they only had electrical hook-ups in the drive. Again, it was cold but our little electric heater kept it above freezing during the night. Steve offered to build a fire under the camper. That's probably the warm English hospitality coming out as he is from England. I explained that the smoke from the burning floor might bother Kira. After a couple nights camped out in the driveway, we decided a short stay in a campground would be good so we could empty the nearly overflowing waste tanks. I had told Steve I could empty the waste from the stool in his drive to control the fire he was planning to put under the camper and it was probably this thought that kept him from his intended warm welcome.

The campground was close to my cousin, David's house which made our visit there more convenient. We had a great time in Dallas visiting with friends and family. David is one of the few people I know that is Texan enough to be comfortable in a cowboy hat and boots all the time. He told me he didn't feel at all out of place wearing them along with his speedos at the beach. STOP. Get this picture in mind fully. We have a short but well-proportioned Texan with a hat as big as his head and tall boots reaching nearly to his knees. Add some American flag speedos for color and, frankly, I was glad it was too cool for the beach while we were there.

Fort Worth is right next to Dallas but they are worlds apart. For the main attraction, we watched an authentic cattle drive down the streets of the old Fort Worth cattle town. Their faces had more lines than a contour map of the Grand Canyon. But, I bet these guys would hang out with Dave at the beach. Seeing these Long Horns up close and personal was a bit intimidating. You could hang a load of laundry out to dry on one set of horns. Kira didn't know if she should round them up or run for cover especially with each stinging crack of the cowboy's whip.

One night while we were there, we had a wonderful dinner with my step-sister and her extended family. We had not been together since 1976. I hope this friendship can continue to grow. The stories she tells and the ones told about her make my experiences seem mild. My sides ached from so much laughing. One of her sons told about her first time using a motorized cart at the grocery store. It was like an episode of I Love Lucy. I think they were cousins. Everything that could be backed into was; including pyramid shaped can good displays and little old men who could not move out of the way fast enough. Then there was the time she was stopped by the police. She kept driving to get out of his way and he kept following her with lights and sirens going. When he finally did get her to stop, she greeted him with, "Does your mother know you are out without your coat?" He just shook his head and let her go with a warning.

The weather was nice throughout our visit in the Dallas/Fort Worth area but after we left, they had a major once-in-a-lifetime snowstorm! What can I say; we were just trying to show a little northern hospitality.

Our route then took us to [Aransas Wildlife Refuge](#) on the Gulf Shore, north of Corpus Christi. We had been there before and got a lot of good pictures. This time we did see the endangered whooping cranes but otherwise the wildlife was limited. They probably heard about the snow that seemed to follow us and they all went into hiding. The trip up the Texas coast and into Louisiana was beautiful. Our friend Patsy, another classmate, who lives in Baton Rouge, gave us a personal travel plan through the area. We saw the Gulf Coast that was later covered with oil. We spent two nights in New Orleans and went across the lake into town to see the French Quarter. The architecture was beautiful. The grave yards with bodies stacked above ground gave some indication of just how unusual this part of the country is. The campground was great and I want to go back there again. We never did get to link up with Patsy before heading out. Going east from Louisiana into Mississippi we headed to Jackson to stop over and visit another of the Miller clan. My nephew Bob and his wife put us up for the night in their drive. After enjoying their hospitality, we pressed north to see his Mom, Margie. After a nice visit with her, we headed home. It was a great trip that I would like to repeat again.

In July, we reopened our bed and breakfast for a visit from my almost brother. Wil and his wife, Elizabeth from Florida along with their three granddaughters spent three days with us. We did all the tourist things from [The Abe Lincoln Presidential Museum](#) and [Lincoln's Home](#) to [New Salem](#). It was a great time. WE LOVE TO SHARE OUR TOWN WITH FRIENDS!

The first part of August gave us that gypsy urge again and we headed north to escape the heat. We went along the eastern side of Lake Michigan into the Upper Peninsula. What beautiful countryside we saw there for the first time. We had made the trip around Lake Michigan once before but this time we spent time along the northern border with Lake Superior. I hiked a 6 + mile hike along the [Tahquamenon River](#) from the upper to lower falls. It was a great hike but I was totally exhausted when I got back to camp. We moved camp a little west and north and saw additional scenery along Lake Superior. Our trip ended with a stop in Door County, Wisconsin to visit our good friends Hans and Nancy.

When we returned, we met up with Jackie who was here to go to the State Fair and check out homes for possible retirement. She spent a couple nights here and some with her sister. Now we were into September and a visit from Patsy who we had missed in New Orleans. October also brought with it a visit from Mary and another visit from Jackie and Steve. Once October was over, could Thanksgiving and Christmas be far behind?

So, to sum up the year, we seemed to be either visiting friends at their home or they were visiting us. We spent a lot of time on the road but I would like to spend more. Last month, we traded in the '04 Jeep for an '07 Dodge truck. We love it! It pulls the camper much easier and a larger unit for retirement will also be an easy tow. Speaking of retirement, we went to a retirement workshop put on by the state last week. Apparently, we have two options. We can take out everything and have a great weekend at a nice

resort or get a monthly check to pay for a night out every week at McDonalds. These retirement decisions are hard! Think we will just keep working.

A Christmas letter would not be complete without an update on the family.

In order of appearance:

I am still working doing home repairs. My list of types of work shortens each month. I guess that just makes me a specialist. That's how it is with doctors; even House Doctors. I have spent the last couple years getting my computer, photography and related software up to date. My plans still include my House Doctor work but it will become more and more limited as I quit taking on new clients. I will continue servicing old friends because they have become just that - Old Friends! I expect to devote more and more time to web design and the photography to go with it.

Pat is still working for the state. I don't see her retiring any time soon but I do hope we can spend more time traveling. She enjoys her work and her friends there. She decided to try the gel injections for her knee one more time before opting for a knee replacement.

Krystal received her Master's Degree and is still teaching at Pleasant Plains HS. She enjoys teaching but sometimes the grading gets to her. She and Steve will be adding a new sub-domain to the Oh family website. That's computereze for we will be grandparents again next spring. Steve puts in way too much time at Springfield Clinic as Director of Research. Joshua is the cutest little grandchild that anyone could hope to have. He just turned 4 going on 10. He reminds me of Krystal in so many of his actions. With his quick mind, he will continue to be a handful! All I can say is he got a good set of genes!

Kimberly can certainly hold her own in the gene pool. She is still in Carbondale at SIU and expects to be completing her Master's Degree in the summer. She is currently undecided if she will continue on to get her PHD or take some time off from school for a while. Whatever she does, I am sure she will be successful. Much of her current life revolves around her neurotic dog, Sasha and her new cat Jäger. They are a riot to watch.

Kira still keeps me going. We take a nightly 2 mile walk with very few exceptions.

You have probably noticed that I have made it through 4 pages without any mention of government and politics. Governor Rod was easy to laugh at; but with the current state of the world, it is hard to laugh! Last year, I noted the ever shrinking toilet paper. Well, the rolls are getting even smaller and the messes in need of clean-up are increasing logarithmically. Did you notice how the gas prices fell after the oil spill? We wouldn't want to bring any more negative publicity to the oil companies while we were watching them rape our environment. Now with a pro-big-business Congress to take office next year, we can see the prices increasing. Wonder how that works. It's getting worse, folks; just watch and see!

They say if you try to put a frog in hot water, they will jump out but if you put them in cold water and put it on the burner; they are content to be boiled alive. Are we like the frogs? Each year, the weather gets more and more harsh; the politicians get more and more corrupt; big business gets more and more greedy and we become less and less FREE! The politicians have had their hands in our pockets

throughout time but now through the TSA, they can even grope us at the airports. What's next? Don't think about it; enjoy the warm soak! Anybody got some bubble bath?

You have finally come to the end of this chapter of the Sriner Family Annual Christmas Letter. I hope it finds you in good health and spiritual prosperity. May you be blessed with calm waters and a warming morning sun. We wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2011.

Love and Light,

Pat and Dulany

"& Kira"