

# Season's Greetings from the Muellers!

Christmas and New Year's Greetings to you from the Pennsylvania Muellers! We now have been in Pennsylvania for almost four years after moving from Texas. We are still in awe at the beauty of this area. New theaters, restaurants, and large stores have sprung up this year. The only thing we do not yet have is a decent Mexican food restaurant. We know our way around a lot better than before but still get lost occasionally. However, we can't get used to the number of dead deer lying by the side of the road. There are so many of them and no one seems to be responsible for picking them up. We much prefer to see them sauntering across our lawn as they occasionally do.

Both Paul (age 14, 9<sup>th</sup> grade) and Gretchen (age 13, 8<sup>th</sup> grade) are now officially teenagers and attend the same middle school. They have been going through their growth spurts and almost seem like rational people from time to time. In fact, they can be downright entertaining! Both have been turned loose at school dances and the school has survived! Paul is into karate, Pokemon, and video games big time. He is doing well in school and is considered a leader in some of his classes. Gretchen plays a mean flute despite her braces. This year she is on the tennis squad and yearbook committee. Armed with a Volvo, laptop computer, and cell phone, Jean looks after their welfare and gets them to/from their various appointments and activities. Jean continues to encourage and support others through women's bible study and prayer groups; she also supports other people through participation with Internet chat groups devoted to Asperger's syndrome, autism, and learning disorders.

Mike finally got a permanent job with Unisys Corp. in October. He is working in the Worldwide Telecommunications Technology Group at the East Coast Development Center on universal messaging systems (voicemail, fax, email) The commute is 40 miles each way from Doylestown to Malvern (west of Philadelphia). On a good day the commute time one way is 45 minutes; on a bad day two hours. While job hunting he did temporary work for ESPN Sports Poll (assembling the annual marketing report for NFL owners) and for Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (ISO 9000 certification process and responding to a federal

accounting audit report). He is participating in his fourth season as tenor section leader in the Bucks County Choral Society. In August during a physical exam he complained of having chest pains sometimes during strenuous exercise. That led to a heart catheterization and angioplasty after learning that one of the heart arteries was 80% blocked. In September he had all the old massive silver fillings from 30 years ago replaced with modern dental overlays. In October he spent two nights in a sleep clinic to see if he was experiencing sleep apnea. The moral of the story--you get to meet a lot of doctors and dentists when you're an old fart. Happy, the English cocker spaniel is the lowest ranking member of the family. She is now three years old. She barks everyone into shape so that she can ride to school in the morning. She is very protective of a stuffed hedgehog we call "Baby". The only new trick she has learned this year is getting on top of the kitchen table when she thinks nobody is paying attention.

The family left Pennsylvania a few times in 1999. There was the trip to Kingston, New York in the Catskills for an Asperger's support group weekend. Mike and Gretchen tried skiing for the first time. It was Paul's second time. Jean stayed at the hotel. Guess which two people didn't have a very good time! Mike and Paul went skiing again in the Catskills with the scout troop in February--no broken bones! Paul and Gretchen made class trips to New York City for the Museum of Natural History and Les Miserables respectively. In June we flew to St. Louis for nephew/cousin Andrew's wedding to Carrie in Festus, Missouri. Carrie and Andrew had just graduated from college. Jean flew to Harlingen, Texas to escort her mother to the wedding. In July we traveled to Germany for two weeks with singers and family members of the Bucks County Choral Society. We visited Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Prague (Czech Republic), Nuremberg, and Munich. There were side trips to Potsdam, Pilsen, Meisen, Rothenberg, and Dachau. The choir sang six concerts. It was the hottest summer in Germany in recent memory. Luggage got lost in transit through Frankfurt. All the nude statues and the wonderful ice cream impressed the kids. Luggage got lost on the trip home to Philadelphia. It had been so hot and dry at home while we were gone the landscape reminded us of south

Texas in mid-summer. When the remnants of Hurricane Floyd blew through here in August, water problems ceased and lawns turned green again. Mike and Paul made the last excursion of the summer by driving to St. Louis to load a U-Haul trailer with furniture at George and Layne's (Jean's sister) and tow it back to Pennsylvania. Layne had trucked furniture from Texas to St. Louis when Margaret sold her house and moved to an apartment.

The major home project of the year was getting the house painted. It all started when the annoying woodpeckers pecked inch-wide holes in the side of the house. A pest expert pointed out that we had carpenter bees burrowing into the soft, dry cedar siding. The woodpeckers came to dig out the larvae. Spraying the house with insecticide seemed to irritate the bees. It also dislodged some bats that had peacefully existed under the eaves. The pest expert also told us that we had a serious vole (politically correct term for "rat") problem with narrow burrows around the outside of the house and extending 10-15 ft. beneath the surface. So, we got professional painters to patch and caulk the holes and paint the house. Now instead of a rustic, cedar-sided house with rust-colored shutters, we have an off-white house with bright green shutters. The carpenter bees, voles, and bats seem to be gone but an occasional woodpecker with a long memory comes back to see if he can find any juicy larvae.

Now it's December and we're not quite ready for the impending Y2K disaster. In August Mike bought some metal shelving to store supplies but he still has not got it assembled. We have some wood for the fireplace although we haven't used the fireplace since it allows smoke to permeate the house instead of ascend up the chimney. We hope that you are better prepared than we are! Regardless of what happens, we feel very blessed. Please don't hesitate to call or visit if you are in the Philadelphia area—we love visitors! Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and Happy New Millennium!