

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Gretchen, Paul, Jean, Mike, and from the half-brother, half-dufus English cocker spaniels, Rupert and Otis!

Since last Christmas the whole world has endured extraordinary events such as the tsunami, Katrina, Rita, earthquakes, death of the Pope, war in Iraq, Eagles in the Super Bowl, etc. On a more personal level, our family endured the death of Mike's brother, Dave, Mike's hernia operation, Paul's quitting college, four power outages (two caused by lightening, two by brown bats), broken appliances (washer, dryer, water heater), cancellation of health insurance, dual colonoscopies, and 44 inches of snow.

Rupert



Otis



Brown Bat



But good things happened too. Mike and Jean celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary, Gretchen completed her freshman year at Wittenberg University, Paul completed his sophomore year at LaSalle University, Jean moved from a half-time to a full-time (with benefits) librarian job and Mike started working half-time as business manager for a church. Home improvements were made--driveway repaved, front door replaced, kitchen upgrade started, patio added to dog run, retaining wall planter build to surround tree stump in the front yard. Rainfall was plentiful this year, the seasons were pleasant, and the small garden produced amazing quantities of strawberries, cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes. Bluebirds, goldfinches, and hummingbirds hung around the dog run while Canada geese and deer claimed the lawn behind the house. Otis enjoyed the extraordinarily large acorns from the oaks.

Gretchen has a roommate for her sophomore year at Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH after surviving her freshman year without one. She is officially an English major. She likes coming home, but does not enjoy flying to Philadelphia from Dayton or Columbus. She is a finalist in a publisher-sponsored essay contest and may see her work published next year. This past summer she worked as a receptionist for an industrial lighting company. At Wittenberg she does administrative work at the alumni office. "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" made a big hit with her this summer.

Paul was a junior majoring in education and language at LaSalle University, Philadelphia, hoping to eventually teach Latin. However, around Thanksgiving his passion for online video gaming collided with paper-intensive courses in philosophy, religion, and sociology causing him to abandon his courses two weeks shy of semester finals. He is now trying to decide whether to work for awhile or change his major and transfer to another university—his preliminary choices are Kent State in Ohio, Florida State, Jacksonville State in Alabama, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa near Honolulu. At LaSalle he worked as an ice cream server at the snack bar.

In November Jean started her full-time position as a cataloguer for the Bucks County Free Library in Doylestown. She had been working a half-time schedule as a circulation clerk for the Northampton Library 30 minutes away. She is enjoying her new job because it is five minutes from home, she gets to handle all the new books, and she doesn't have to deal with the public. Her only trip this year was to St. Louis for a week to visit her sister, Layne (who was in Doylestown four times during 2005). She spends some time most days with her mother, Margaret (83) at Lakeview Assisted Living in Doylestown, and attends to her needs such as medical appointments, laundry, jigsaw puzzles, eating out, and keeping the bird feeders filled for the squirrels.

Mike made two trips via Minneapolis to the family farm in northeast South Dakota. On the first trip in March he arrived in time to accompany his mother, brother Steve, and sister-in-law Dusty, to a Sioux Falls hospital to see his brother, Dave (57) who had been in a pulmonary intensive care unit for three weeks. Dave was suffering from respiratory failure that began with a bout of flu in February. Like Pope John Paul II, he had been given a tracheotomy. He was unconscious and breathing with help from a respirator. His lungs were not taking up oxygen and the doctor said there was no hope. It was a bit like the Terry Schiavo situation. Family members were contacted by cell phone and the decision was made to let Dave die in peace. Mike sang a solo at his funeral. Dave, a 20-year army veteran, was buried with military honors on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter. His grave is next to his father's in the rural cemetery where St. John's Lutheran Church once stood; Dave had been baptized and confirmed there. On the second trip to SD in July, Mike took Paul along to make a surprise appearance at the 80-85-birthday dinner for his mother, Alice (80), and stepfather, Morrie (85).

Mike continued to search for suitable employment during the year. He rejected some straight commission sales "opportunities". He applied for one of five PhD fellowships in digital information systems being awarded by Drexel University, Philadelphia; fortunately, he was not

chosen! He sang in nine performances by the Bucks County Choral Society during the 2004-2005 season. He continued to manage data systems for the choir and was elected to the board of directors. In December he started a half-time job as the business manager for a Presbyterian church; the job entails looking after two cemeteries, four buildings, financial system, and three staff members. He has 800 bosses. His biggest project in the next 8-12 months will be orthodontia to straighten front teeth that are wearing out; he had five gum grafts to prepare his teeth for braces and restoration. Happy smiles ahead!

We hope that you and those you love have a blessed and peaceful holiday season and that 2006 will be a wonderful year!