

2009 Christmas Greetings from Doylestown, Pennsylvania!

Some things have not been much different here this year than last year. The kitchen remodeling project remains half-finished after four years, Jean still catalogues books for the Bucks County Free Library, Mike's work portfolio is the same (business manager for Neshaminy-Warwick Presbyterian Church, adjunct professor for Strayer University, systems consultant for the Bucks County Choral Society), Gretchen continues to live at home and work at Corporate Claims Management, the Phillies made it to the World Series again (but lost to the damn Yankees!), and Otis is a good dog.

This year we brushed up against the economic and social impact of the new political regime but remain unscathed so far. Ownership of our bank and mortgage company changed after the financial bailout. We are thankful that we still have jobs and incomes. The library eliminated 20 jobs due to cuts in state funding due to shortfall in tax revenue. We breathed a big sigh of relief that Jean's job was not cut because her job provides for our health insurance. Mike filed for early non-retirement Social Security benefits "just in case" there's no money left in the system when he actually retires; however, he won't see any checks until next year. Gretchen was "almost able" to take advantage of the "cash for clunkers" program. Paul paid close attention to the Obama speech announcing his decision to send more troops to Afghanistan after four months of dithering.

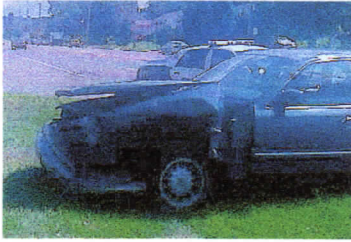
Although Gretchen labors in the accounting department of a family business ("paychecks are good"), she continues to hone her artistic side. For one month she produced quirky daily short videos on her Mac and then shared them online with friends and fans. She is currently producing one artistic digital photo per day so that in one year she will have a portfolio of 365 images of almost anything you might imagine. This is the year that she rediscovered how amusing the combined cleverness and tastelessness of Monty Python could be. Her not-to-be-missed weekly television program is "So You Think You Can Dance". She loves her new ice-blue Ford Focus with its electronic gadgetry. She decided to resume the orthodontia that she abandoned as a senior in high school, but now it's her turn to pay for it! Almost every day this year she complained that Rupert and Otis ignored her but she was a good nurse to Rupert this fall, especially in helping to boost his big butt into the easy chair of his choice. It's fun having her around (most of the time that is.)

After living at home following his graduation from college in August 2008 and doing some temporary work at a bank, Paul concluded that the job market sucked and decided to enlist in the U.S. Army for three years. The Army promised a \$15,000 signing bonus, a starting rank of specialist E-4, and payment of all college loans. His exceptional test scores at Ft. Dix, NJ qualified him for a wide variety of specialties—he chose to be trained as an intelligence analyst. Maybe all those hours of playing video games such as "World of Warcraft" will actually pay off. Because that job requires a top secret clearance, we were interviewed by the FBI along with our neighbors, Gretchen's friends, college teachers, classmates, etc. Much to our amazement, he successfully completed basic April. We were blown away by graduation ceremony. After he training at Ft. Huachuca, AZ in used three days of leave time to Jane, and two half-siblings now Carrell generously provided a GPS unit to navigate while driven in Dallas—or anywhere else, for that matter). After Dallas he flew to Los Angeles and visited Disneyland in Anaheim before flying to Philadelphia for a three-day home visit. Then he flew to Kansas City on



training at Ft. Leonard Wood, MO in the exuberance and emotion of the completed four months of intelligence mid-September he flew to Dallas and visit old friends and his birthmother, in their early teens. Rick and Cindy place for him to stay and let him use their driving the rental car (he had never

the way to his new duty assignment with the 1st Infantry Division, Ft. Riley, KS (The Big Red One, a real “kick-ass” outfit). He will be home for Christmas and plans to buy a car. Last month he had to write a 500-word essay after listening to the Obama speech about sending more troops to Afghanistan. When we asked to see what he wrote he told us it was “classified”.



While Paul was completing his final week of AIT (advanced individual training) at Ft. Huachuca in September, Mike’s car was totaled when it was hit by a 10-ton dump truck. The airbags exploded and Mike escaped with a bruised finger. It was the car that Mike drove from Texas in 2003 when Jean’s mother, Margaret, relocated from Texas to Pennsylvania. We had planned to submit it to the “cash for clunkers” program to help Gretchen purchase her new ice blue Ford Focus. However, we could not locate the car’s title before the government abruptly ended the clunkers program, so we traded in our 1994 Toyota Camry even though it did not qualify for a clunkers rebate. Two days after Gretchen took delivery of her new car a duplicate title for the Crowne Victoria arrived from Harrisburg. The delayed delivery of the title was probably due to state employees not getting paid because the Pennsylvania state legislature had

failed to pass a new budget in July. So when the accident happened Mike was stuck driving a big, heavy boat of a car. The Lord works in mysterious ways!

On early Saturday morning, September 19th in the same week as Paul’s graduation from AIT and Mike’s accident with the Crowne Vic, Jean’s mother, Margaret, died at age 87 while under the merciful care of hospice specialists at Lakeview Assisted Living. Back in 2003 Jean’s sister, Layne, chartered a corporate jet to rescue their mother, Margaret, from a distressing nursing home situation in Harlingen, TX and relocate her to Doylestown. We were blessed by having Margaret close to us for six years. Jean spent time with her every day and Layne flew to Philadelphia each quarter to spend one-week visits with her mother. Layne had arrived a few days before Margaret’s imminent death and stayed for two days afterward to work with Jean on final arrangements. Her ashes are in our guest bedroom; some day they will be scattered over the inter-coastal waters of south Texas where she spent some of her best years fishing with her late husband, Don Anderson. The day after Layne returned to St. Louis Paul arrived from his trip to Disneyland.



On December 4th Rupert died at age 13, probably from liver failure. Rupert joined us in 2003 when the breeder gave him to us after his littermate, Happy, died from lymphoma. He was the dog that nobody had chosen—just a house dog watching lots of puppies being born, selected, and leaving. He was a very friendly, well-socialized, polite dog with a face and bark more like a hound than a spaniel. Not the brightest dog in the world, but a good eater with a sweet disposition. Then Otis came along and immediately established himself as



the alpha dog despite being six years younger than his half-brother, but Rupert didn’t mind. Eventually Mike trained Rupert to tolerate long walks (which Otis loves) in exchange for food. Politeness faded as he became more insistent on having carrots and other vegetables miraculously fall off the cutting board onto the kitchen floor. Mike and Jean had already made arrangements with the vet to put him to sleep but true to his polite self, he didn’t want to be a bother and died unassisted.

Thus we close three chapters that began in 2003 when Margaret, Rupert, and the Crown Vic arrived here. Despite all that has happened this year, we feel blessed. We wish you God’s blessings in 2010.