

Merry Christmas from Doylestown, Pennsylvania!

2010 has been a year of surprises and transitions. Last Christmas Paul was home on leave from the 1st Infantry Division, Ft. Riley, KS. He is an intelligence analyst. The day before he flew back to KS to rejoin his unit he bought a used red Honda Civic. I dodged Kansas blizzards in January to drive the Civic 1800 miles to Ft. Riley (near Topeka) and then flew back from Kansas City. Paul will not be here for Christmas this year. He expects to be deployed soon to Iraq as part of the “non-combat” transition force.



I was the business manager at Neshaminy Warwick Presbyterian Church for four years. The day I returned to my job after delivering Paul’s car to him I was forced to resign due to a dispute with the new property committee chairwoman. Now I have only three jobs—adjunct professor at Strayer University, data systems consultant for an HVAC company, and Bucks County Choral Society systems administrator.

After old Rupert died at age 14 in late 2009, his half-brother, Otis (8), became more neurotic as we reverted to a one-dog household again. But in March we were back to supporting two dogs when Tyler, a 14-year old Sheltie, joined us. Police found him in an apartment belonging to Amy, Jean’s co-worker at the Doylestown library, after Amy dropped dead in the emergency room at Abington Hospital one evening. Amy’s family in Ohio didn’t want the dog so we decided to save him from being taken to the animal shelter. Now he accompanies Otis and me on three-mile daily walks barking and lunging at everything that moves. He likes to herd Gretchen when she comes home from work and he sleeps a lot all over the house.



During a Saturday evening choir and orchestra performance of the Brahms Requiem in April, Jean experienced extreme pain and left with Gretchen before the concert was over. When I arrived home from a post-concert reception I rushed her to the new Doylestown Hospital emergency wing. She was diagnosed with bile duct blockage and an inflamed gall bladder. A gallstone was removed the following Monday and her gallbladder was removed the next day, Tuesday. She spent four days in the hospital. No complications.

Gretchen has been working two years in the accounting department of a crazy Italian family business. She yearns to escape from the job and the soap opera sometime soon. She continues to hone her creative skills during her free time in hopes of eventually starting her dream career. She posts video blogs each week at her website www.gemllama.com which now has over 1000 subscribers. In April she took a week-long road trip to New England with her best friend, Laura. She was one of Laura’s bridesmaids in May. In early

July she flew to Los Angeles to attend the Vidcon video bloggers convention (think YouTube) and discovered that she had groupies! In November, for the second time, she wrote a 50,000-word novel during the annual NaNoWriMo challenge. When asked, "Are you going to get it published?" she responds "Who wants to publish crap!" In late December she and Laura will be groom's maids at the wedding of Chris, their close guy friend.

My mother turned 85 and my stepfather 90 in July. In late July I flew to Minneapolis, rented a car, and drove it to South Dakota to attend their birthday bash at the Big Stone City American Legion. I got to see my four living brothers, two sisters, four sisters-in-law, cousins, nieces and nephews, grand nieces and nephews, old neighbors, and family friends. There was lots of food, beer, natural and man-made fireworks, photos, and memories. Two weeks later I flew to Kansas City where Paul picked me up at the airport. He had just returned from a month of desert training with his unit at Ft. Irwin, CA in the Mojave Desert and had built up three weeks of leave. We drove north to the family farm and spent a few days visiting relatives in South Dakota and Minnesota. After I said goodbye to Paul at the Mall of America and flew back to PA to teach a class a Saturday morning class, he used the remaining two weeks of leave to take a road trip to WI, IL, KY, TN, VA, and PA before arriving home. Once he was home Jean and I told him about the divorce. I had been served with divorce papers in July while at the family reunion/birthday party. The decision to file for an amicable divorce was made before our 35th wedding anniversary in June but I did not want to tell anyone about it until Jean and I could speak to Paul in person. He was upset, of course, but seemed to have recovered by the time he started the 1800-mile drive back to Ft. Riley.



The five-year-old renovation of the kitchen, laundry room, and powder room was finally completed by Potter Contracting in January-February. Two days before Paul arrived home in August I brought down half the sheetrock ceiling and lots of insulation in the upstairs guest bathroom when I stepped in the wrong place in the attic above while examining an air conditioning system condensate leak. I was able to catch myself on the rafters but ended up with some significant bruises. After Paul left for Ft. Riley, Jean and I decided to get the house ready for sale. We met with our divorce lawyers in late August to work out separation provisions for finalizing a divorce settlement next summer (there are certain financial



and insurance considerations). We would like to have the house sold by then. We had the upstairs bathroom repaired and painted, upstairs and downstairs hardwood floors refinished, upstairs hallway and stair well painted, house exterior and front door painted, and large tree limbs and dying shrubs removed from the landscape to improve visibility from the street. A lot of clutter that had accumulated during the 14 years since we moved from TX had to be removed to get the house ready for sale by November 1st. Jean moved to her own apartment in September. This is not a good time of the year to sell a house, especially in this economy, but until it sells Gretchen, Otis, Tyler, and I will continue to live here. Where Gretchen, I, and the dogs will live after the house sells is unknown. Gretchen wants to stay in the area until her orthodontia is finished around April. She has talked about moving to Chicago at the urging of some friends. Jean wants to continue living and working in Doylestown. I may stay around here or move somewhere else. There are lots of other places in the U.S. and abroad where I would like to live and work. Stay tuned for more surprises!

I hope and pray that this holiday season and the New Year are full of blessings for you and those you love. Please stay healthy and remember to have some fun too.