

Christmas and New Year greetings from Doylestown, Pennsylvania!

The world saw the end of Osama bin Laden and Mohammar Quadaffi in 2011. The nation saw an unprecedented rash of natural disasters. Pennsylvania saw the end of World Series hopes for the Philadelphia Phillies after the St. Louis Cardinals, the eventual champs, prevented them from making it into the post-season. The Penn State child sex abuse scandal rocked Pennsylvania and the nation.

Here in Bucks County a February ice storm knocked out power for 10 hrs. In late August Hurricane Irene blew through our area and one week later Tropical Storm Lee dumped water on us for hours. Irene caused some minor exterior damage to our house but T.S. Lee left us with three inches of water in the carpeted basement that had never flooded before in the 15 years we have lived here. We tore out all the carpet and padding and replaced it with industrial grade carpeting. We also had to replace the sump pump that failed during the storm. A month later on Halloween weekend a freak nor'easter dumped nearly a foot of wet, heavy snow bringing down trees and large limbs that had not yet shed their leaves. Power lines went down and there were extensive power outages; we were without power for two days while others in our area had no power for over a week.

Paul, assigned to the 1st Infantry Division (The Big Red One) at Ft. Riley, KS, deployed to Afghanistan in February as an intelligence analyst with a famous “kick ass” mechanized cavalry unit know as the “Pale Riders” from battles fought in the 1800s. A few days before he deployed, Jean,



Jean, Paul, Gretchen, Ft. Riley, KS, Feb. 2011



Written by Michael P. Mueller

Gretchen, and I flew to Kansas City and then drove to Ft. Riley to celebrate his 26th birthday and see him before he deployed (he was restricted to 250 miles from the base). Halfway through his deployment he took his R&R in Spain, Gibraltar,

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and Morocco and FOB Wilson, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan wrote an interesting travelogue about his adventures. He is due to return to Ft. Riley in mid-January. He has been in the army for three years (his total obligation is eight years) and we are unsure of what his next plans are—he always likes to keep us guessing! We are very proud of him; he has now served in the longest war in U.S. history and is an elite member of the less than 1% of the U.S. population that has ever served in the military.

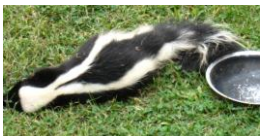
Gretchen continues to live with me at our house. In February she resigned her position as an accounting clerk at the crazy company where she had been working for over two years. She spent June and July at the YouTube Creator Institute at Columbia College in Chicago. She was one of 20 people chosen out of 1600 applicants for the all-expenses-paid opportunity. After her Chicago experience she flew to Los Angeles to attend the annual Vidcon convention. She maintains her YouTube video-blog, www.gemllama.com, and participates in a collaborative vblog, www.hipsterchicken.com, with some of the people she met at the YouTube Creator Institute. She is currently job searching and volunteering two days per week at the Travis Manion Foundation, a non-profit established by the Manion family after Travis was killed in Iraq a few years ago. The foundation supports military families.

Tyler, a 16 ½ year old sheltie, died in November. He joined us in March 2010 after his owner, Amy (Jean's work colleague), dropped dead while checking into a local emergency room. During the 20 months he was with us, his cheery disposition brightened our lives. On long walks with Otis and me, Tyler would try to herd anything that moved—squirrels, people, UPS trucks, school buses, blowing leaves, whatever, barking all the way.



Tyler, 16 ½, RIP, Nov. 2011

I now have my Medicare card. I teach one or two business and information system courses each quarter as an adjunct professor for Strayer University. I still sing baritone with the Bucks County Choral Society and serve as the choir's data systems consultant. I also spend a few hours per week on several other database and business consulting assignments. In August I made a five-day trip to Minnesota-South Dakota to visit relatives and my parents (mother-86, stepfather-91) who still live and thrive on the old farm. I was privileged to spend uninterrupted time with them and while there I documented the destruction of skunk #23



that had been rooting around in the apple orchard.

Jean and I remain married but separated after 36 years. She lives in a rural apartment three miles away. We see each other and talk at least twice per week. We hoped to sell our house before finalizing the divorce. The house has been on the market for over a year and despite more than 80 showings, nobody has bought it. It is a terrible real estate market with too many houses for sale, potential buyers worried about their jobs, and stingy banks. Our house is now off the market until January when we will try a different realtor. When you're not getting results, fire the manager, right? On to 2012!

God's blessings to you in this holiday season and peace and joy in 2012.

Mike