

January 17, 2009

Hello from Saint Peter and happy New Year everyone. Hope you are keeping warm and yet finding a way to get out (and maybe even outside) and enjoy the season. Last Saturday evening, had a fire, a beer, and tuned in Garrison Keillor's radio show — and the next day a nice long walk with Laurie in the woods along the Minnesota River. Winter is good: no bugs, bright sunny days, and the shapes and distant views behind those leaves are unveiled. As a kid these were my favorite times; the indoors was strictly a pit stop to sleep and eat.

Everyone's healthy and doing well. I think we're getting the hang of life in Saint Peter. We always let out a sigh of relief whenever we leave the loop around the Twin Cities and head south on 169. Then there's another sigh of relief as we turn off 169 into our town. They say (ok, I say) people refuse to die in Nicollet county. I've heard the longevity statistics lead the state and country. And we hardly ever get colds anymore, less stress, better sleep. It's all starting to make sense.

Laurie's getting back into the center of things as she should be. There was something wrong about the one daughter in the Sander clan living 1500 miles out of town. I've felt pangs of guilt in the past for dragging her out west (she'll correct me on this, "you didn't drag me"). It's great to see her hosting holiday get-togethers and helping with family emergencies. Laurie's been a fountain of TLC as only a daughter and granddaughter can be. Laurie's grandma Helen died on December 31st and Laurie was able to spend time with her during those last weeks. Laurie misses her grandma. Those two would talk to each other more like mother and daughter (Laurie's mom died 20 years ago in a car accident). I can hear those frequent phone calls back and forth... The funeral was at West Akers Lutheran Church near Prairie Farm, Wisconsin, the country church where Grandma Helen had been a member since age seven.

The day Grandma Helen died, Laurie's dad Jack had surgery in Saint Cloud for a skull and brain tumor. Symptoms came on suddenly after a Christmas visit to Saint Peter. So, Laurie was burning the candle at both ends and driving all over the two-state area and dealing with Christmas. Jack is doing better now. Before the storm, we had a very nice Thanksgiving at Grandma Helen's farm, and two Christmas get-

togethers: in Saint Peter with the Sander crew and in Mendota Heights at brother Dave's with the Millers.

Laurie and I got down to Trimont to visit with my aunt Eunice in the nursing home, and I headed down again later in the spring with my folks. We stopped in Madelia (Dad's hometown). Nice to see some of these places through my parents' eyes (precious memories that were out of reach to us in Washington): Dad's old house and church, the town cemetery and even the dam where Dad skated as a kid. Eunice was excited to see Mom and Dad. It was fun to see them all laughing together, as good and loud as I remember from family get-togethers on Eunice's farm. Eunice died in July. The funeral was at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Galena Township near Ormsby, MN, the church where my folks were married. We stopped and went swimming at Long Lake and visited with Doris Krenz at her lakeside home.

One of the blessings of going to funerals in these small country churches is that you get a chance to hear some excellent preaching from the pulpit: the gospel belted out with authority and confidence. There's extra zip on the delivery. It's a strike sent right over the plate, no curves, no knuckle balls, the gospel clear as day. You're left reassured and ready to continue. We have such a pastor at our church. I've seen him silence a sanctuary full of squirming teen-agers with his gift for storytelling. My boys actually listen to his sermons. Wednesday nights, Joe and I have been helping in the confirmation program as small group leaders. It's a battle out there; we need warriors; we need men.

Our boys have been reunited and are serving another term as the three musketeers. **Joe** is back in Saint Peter taking a one-year leave from Viterbo (La Crosse, WI). A scheduling jam brought him here to Gustavus to get a year of Anatomy and Physiology. He's hoping to get into the nursing program when he returns to Viterbo in the fall. Joe made it up to the Boundary Waters again as a counselor with our church group and traveled to Colombia this summer visiting with family there. **Carl's** been diving headfirst into high school and keeping busy with marching and pep band and soccer refereeing. **David** had a pre-confirmation retreat in June at Lake George near Lake Superior's north shore and has now plunged into the wild world of middle school. Both Carl and David are back together now at the same facility, barely inches from our house. This really cuts

down on the shuttle service that runs between home and school. All three boys were certified as grade-8 soccer refs last spring. A couple times they all worked the same game together, Joe at center, Carl and David on the lines. Fun to watch them in their spiffy uniforms. Joe once threatened to red-card me if I used my camera too much. No complaints about excessive Miller influence in the games. The boys and I had many swimming adventures including one of our favorite spots in the world, the enormous shallow-water sand shelf at Malmo park on Mille Lacs.

We got all five of us out to the Black Hills in August. We stayed in Custer and saw the wonders of the area. One of our favorite stops was the Reptile Gardens. As we entered, we were greeted by one of their seasonal staff members (a Gustavus student, of course). I liked the snake and crocodile handler; he made me laugh harder than I have in a long time — those public Miller belly laughs that leave everyone else craving a little space... I hadn't been to the Badlands since the age of three and a roadside picnic table lunch stop brought back a very cool memory of our family tent blowing down in a windstorm. Not sure my mother thought it was cool at the time.

I tested positive for West Nile virus this summer. Some people blame stuff on senior moments; I just claim it's the tentacles of the disease still lurking in my brain. I had a home improvement project that went very south (sparks flying, drywall dust everywhere, etc). The TV wall mount had the words SIMPLICITY all over the box... It must be those tentacles.

Thanks for your Christmas cards, your e-mail and your visits to Saint Peter; we really enjoy them! Take good care, and may you be blessed this new year. Come and see us!

"They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Mark 4:41.