

January 1, 2012

It's been a few years since our last New Year's newsletter. I've warned some relatives that the quiet man behind the keyboard has some pent-up words that must get out. So grab some coffee and Christmas leftovers and carry the Miller family over to a comfortable chair. Let's get started.

Our oldest, **Joe**, has added new meaning to the phrase "doing a 180." A vocational turn that leaves most amazed and curious: from plans for nursing school to a successful run at a cryptologic linguist position in the military. Joe's been in the Navy for two years now, studying Chinese at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) in Monterey, California (photo view is from Big Sur). This intense, single-focus training has transformed Joe into someone who dreams in Mandarin and whose fluency brings smiles and stunned stares of amazement from Chinese people wherever he goes: airports, Gustavus, restaurants (yes, ordering Chinese food with Joe is now quite a cultural adventure)... Last spring on leave, Joe rode his crotch-rocket motorcycle from Monterey to Richland, WA and got a royal welcome and returning-son hospitality from our old neighborhood... Graduation from DLI now puts Joe in Hawaii for even more training and four years of service. The latest round of Joe-on-the-beach photos from his Facebook friends are a bit tough to take right now. Are you thinking windsurfing in Maui? Me too... Notice the insignia on his sleeve in the photo: a crossed quill and lightning bolt, indicating language and technology. By the time you read this the three stripes will have been replaced by a chevron indicating his promotion to a third class petty officer. Way to go, Joe!

**Carl's** days are numbered in Saint Peter; it's off to college next year. But, as that day approaches he refuses to take lightly his long-standing and time-honored role of keeping his parents on their toes... Carl, another quiet man in the Miller line, continues to work his magic: he can still walk into a chess tournament and walk out with the goods; his passion for gaming events has taken him to Gustavus and to the U to mix it up with college students. It's fun to hear from some of my physics TAs (who game with Carl at Gustavus) on the competitive reputation of my young son (now taller than me). Somehow Carl manages to be a very good student on the side... Carl participated in the state tennis tournament with the high school team. And yes, he's been to a very long list of dances at the high school including prom and ones where the girls do the asking. (What? Wait a minute here. Carl? My Carl? I remember dances in high school very much like pre-painless dentistry. I was drawn to the board games spread out on tables on the other side of the sound divider in the gym.

Must be his mother's influence; Laurie still thinks there is hope for me on the dance floor.)

**David** has become very involved with the theater group at the high school, working with the crew on sets and running lights and sound. He's the deep, deep radio voice of reason at the beginning of the plays asking the reluctant masses to turn off their cell phones. David often puts in long days pepping the school teams (in band), entertaining the town with plays, and testing the waters on the speech team. Like his older brother, David manages to be a good student on top of it all. (How do they do that? I seem to remember constant studying to keep up with things in high school; again, must be their mother's gene pool.) He, too, is often dancing up a storm at the high school (another dancer in the family, oh man)... David continues to work through the stages of the linear scleroderma he's had since the age of two. He had knee surgery at Mayo a year ago. This tune-up has been successful, and he continues to do very well... Last summer, David and I did an open water swim in Mille Lacs lake from Malone Island to Dickie's resort. David is also often my lap-swimming buddy at Gustavus during the summer. We swam a mile every other day the whole summer; you can see those workouts in his shoulders.

David, Carl, and I made it up to the Boundary Waters (BWCA) this August. We went with a crew of six, including their two cousins, **Chelsea** and **Evan**, and their uncle **Dave**. Dave was the brave instigator, especially considering his recent hip replacements. We started at the end of the Gunflint Trail on Sea Gull Lake and paddled and portaged west to Ogishkemuncie — three nights out. We had very good weather, and it was the perfect time of the year for swimming. The bulk of this area has been burned by fire, so there are not many trees until you get to Ogish; stark, eerie beauty eventually transforming into a lush green. Strangely, there were no mosquitoes to speak of on the trip. The Dairy Queen we stopped at in Grand Marais on the way home was very, very good. Amazing what a little time in the woods can do for your appetite. The order is important: BWCA, then DQ.

**Dad** (George), my good father, passed away a year before last, shortly after his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday in April. Dad was thought of by many as a kind, Christian gentleman. Dad never spoke poorly of others, never used harsh language. Dad was always ready to laugh at my goofy (overstated) stories. My teasing Mom (as only the youngest is allowed to do; thanks, and sorry Mom) always was good entertainment for Dad; painting Mom into a wildly-out-of-control situation usually left Dad hysterical... One of my favorite memories is of chasing my very young son Carl in the living room, hands and knees on the floor, pretending to be a tiger. The intensity of this left my wife and

mother silent and slightly stunned, but Carl and my dad were absolutely cut open with laughter, digging deep for a breath. His dad (also a George) also really liked to laugh. Now I can still hear that “George” laugh very clearly in my niece and nephew; they both like to laugh (good thing in the Boundary Waters)... **Mom** worked tirelessly to provide Dad a meaningful and dignified last three years of life. Alzheimer’s, osteoporosis, and blood disease (MDS); it was a hard period for them. Before the final stages, Mom and Dad made a couple trips down to Dad’s home town, Madelia, including the Dodge family reunion... We often worried about Mom, but the tough farmer girl determinedly gave her very best to Dad.

**Laurie** continues to spread the good will, drawing the Sander and Miller families down to Saint Peter with her cooking and holiday entertaining. Her close buddy **Diane** (once again calling Richland, WA her home) has made two visits to Saint Peter; one trip to settle her daughter **Caroline** in Minneapolis for her work with Lutheran Volunteer Corps at Open Arms. Laurie, with no daughters, no sisters, no mother, no grandmother, no work-at-home neighbor friends in Saint Peter, definitely has words to share when Diane is in town. (When they get talking, I just stand back and nod my head at the appropriate times.) Fifteen hundred miles does little to keep Laurie and Diane from continuing to support and help each other... Recently, during an episode of Car Talk, I was gazing at the bottom of Laurie’s feet. I have to tell you they’re kind of wrinkly. You’d think after 20 years of marriage I’d pretty much know the lay of the land, but this was an interesting discovery (by the way I was wearing socks). I encourage you to take a look at your spouse’s feet ASAP... Laurie and I have been involved this last year in a church planting effort in Saint Peter. We’ve been attending Our Savior’s, an LCMS (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) church in Mankato, which will likely serve as the mother church if this effort gains some steam. For now, we’re looking forward to a Bible study in Saint Peter, led by Pastor Lauer from Our Savior.

I (**Jim**) have been a little too busy lately working part time for my former employer, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, on top of my duties at Gustavus... When time gets short you have to look for adventure in the nooks and crannies of the day. Last winter was intense: snow, cold, you get the idea, a real Minnesota winter. One Saturday, a particularly nasty blizzard-stricken day, I was working on a kitchen-refrigerator repair and was one part shy of finishing the job. And so, I go to my wife, look her in the eye and say, “I think I want to make a run to the hardware store.” And Laurie, more than completely aware of the situation outside, pauses, and silently thinks “Are you nuts? It is a crazy death-blow, storm-of-the-century, there’s-already-over-a-foot-of-snow-on-the-ground-and-the-

plows-have-been-pulled-off-the-roads, you-don’t-have-four-wheel-drive, I’ll-probably-never-see-you-again day out there. Why, oh why, do you have to do this? What are you thinking?” Without saying a word and continuing to hold her gaze, I think to myself, “But I could use a little excitement and besides, what’s the worst that could happen; I’ll wear my boots and put a shovel in the back. Come on; let a guy have a little fun.” Now at this point Laurie goes verbal and says “O...K” with a little pause after the *O* and slight rise in pitch in the *K*. Then I respond with a “See you later.” Oh the beauty of married life, communication in its purest form. Well, I got stuck three times: pulled out once by a teenager with a truck and tow strap and twice had to dig myself out. It was fun, a good workout, and I got the fridge back in service.

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.

---

(You have finished! 1737 words, that’s only 0.3% of *War and Peace*.)