

December 2008

Dear Friends and Family,

Current economics notwithstanding, we seem to be more relaxed these days. It's not so much that we have throttled back, but we are more discerning in how we spend our time. We are enjoying life, and we even seem to be laughing more.



After an election season that seemed to go on forever, we are thrilled that Barack Obama will be our next president. This was Eric's first time to vote, and he is responsible for our early interest in Obama. Not content to leave the result to chance, John spent five weeks up through election day in Fort Collins, CO, working for the Obama campaign. A bonus was staying with an old high school buddy and his family, who helped John celebrate his 60th.

John continues to explore his niche in the alternative energy field. Taking advantage of classes and meetings, he has extended his expertise in solar energy harvesting and the efficient use of energy in buildings. His first client was a local business that is focused on commercial air conditioning. As the Allen family "site manager," John tunes and tweaks the solar hot water system he built for us, and he also gets to use it for testing.

Susie is still hunkered down as a technical writer at F5 Networks, a company with cash in the bank and no debt. Frustrated at what she doesn't know about computer networking technology, she has been taking relevant classes offered by a local university. (Sometimes, she wishes she had stuck with sociology!) While John was in CO, Susie visited Eric at RPI, and confesses that the highlight of her trip was meeting Eric's girlfriend, Anna.

Eric's life is so full that it's difficult to summarize. After an awesome summer that included working for a start-up in San Francisco and backpacking in the High Sierra, he and RPI classmate Dan spent four days driving Dan's car back to Troy (NY).

Now back in the groove, Eric has discovered the benefits of undergraduate research, which he describes as getting academic credit or payment for working on fun and interesting projects with knowledgeable professors and peers. Even with two such projects currently, he manages time for a full class load, good friends, and Anna.

A major highlight of our year (now a distant memory) was our trip to Amsterdam during Eric's spring break in March (admittedly a little early for good European weather). We experienced firsthand Tiffany and Jason's urban European lifestyle—a cozy flat, efficient public transportation everywhere, time to hang out with friends in a local cafe, and a bike ride in the nearby park. We also took a three-day side trip to Copenhagen so that Eric could check out the DTU (Danish Technical University) campus, where he may study for a semester next fall.

Ava, who turned four in November, is thriving. In addition to her friends at the British School, her favorite things are horses, dolphins, and ballet lessons (the video clips are a hoot!). We don't know when Tiffany and Jason will decide to move back to California, but we eagerly look forward to their visit in January.



We would be remiss if we did not pay tribute to our big 20-year-old cat, Calvin, who passed away in October. He and his late sister, Vanessa, were Eric's childhood companions and an integral part of the family. From his secret hide-away under the avocado tree to his perch by the window, Calvin always looked after us. We miss him.

We hope that you and yours are finding warmth and love in this time of uncertainty, and we wish you good health and prosperity in 2009.

Love, Susie, John, and Eric