

Dear loved ones,

Another year has come and gone, which makes most of us a bit philosophical. My good intentions of writing a New Year's letter have even further than last year, as it is now mid-March, but that's how some years are. It has been an eventful year in many respects, though quieter than before, since neither of our boys lived at home for most of the year. For that reason, it seems simplest to summarize the year individually, rather than as a group.



Alex

Alex is working for *It is Written*, in Simi Valley, CA, as a system administrator. He is working on finishing his college degree online, in the field of IT security. He has been diving in California, and recently finished his rescue diver certification and got his own dive gear. He and JJ are planning to get married sometime, but J needs to finish school and move to CA if they want to live in the same place. She is hoping to graduate from dentistry in March of next year, and to write her board exams shortly after that, at which point she will be ready to talk about specific wedding plans. Some of us are placing bets on June of 2010, but there is no announcement as of yet. Alex was home for nearly 2 weeks over Christmas this year, which was delightful for us, and J seemed to rather enjoy it, too.



Erik

Erik is in grade 10 at Maxwell Adventist Academy in Kenya. He has grown a lot, both outside and inside, and we have really enjoyed having him home for this Christmas break. When he came home last summer, we met in Thailand for a short vacation in Chiang Mai (the highlands of northern Thailand). We've been trying to get there for years, so it was a really special trip. Then we went on annual leave at the end of the summer, from which point Erik went back to Maxwell. Erik says he knows

what he wants to study in college—computer systems administration, with minors in math and physics. That sounds about right to those of us who know him. Erik says we have permission to move from the Philippines if we are called elsewhere, as long as he is allowed to stay at Maxwell. Anyway, at this point, there seems to be nothing to worry about. Every family needs a sanguine/phlegmatic to keep people relaxed and smiling—we're glad for Erik, and he is getting to be really good help, too. Over Christmas he rescued a whole set of deleted files for Mom, fixed quite a few things for Dad, and spent countless hours picking Dad's brain about topics too wonderful for Mom to comprehend, each with its own acronym. We really miss him when he is away at school.



Pets

Tucker was overjoyed to have the boys home, especially Alex, as they have always been special friends, and he worries when Alex is gone so much. He is getting older—nearly 13 now—and a bit slower. We lost our big yellow Simon kitty this year, but Abby realizes that her job just got bigger, so she is trying to be more of a lap cat in order to compensate.



Ron and Shawna

Christmas 2007 was special because of a trip we took with our friends the Gonzalez, but it was poor in terms of family. Three just doesn't make a crowd. But there was a visiting group of student missionaries, so that helped to fill the gap. This year was a veritable feast, by comparison. With Alex and JJ here, and Erik, plus Ron's parents, who have come to assist AIAS for a couple

of months, the house was literally overflowing with happiness. Shawna could not have been more pleased, unless they had all stayed longer. We stayed home over Christmas, then went to nearby Anilao (a 90-minute drive) with the whole family group and JJ, for a couple of days of sea and sunshine (ok, sea and clouds). We had never been diving here in our own back yard (we're never home when we're on vacation) and we discovered that the diving here was actually incredibly good. We had a wonderful time, and just enjoyed each others' company.



Nothing much exciting happened from Jan 2008 till May, since I wrote of my Mindoro mission trip in last year's newsletter. Shawna had to teach in Bangkok in June, so we took a few days to do some birding in the mountains near Chiang Mai. Erik flew in to join us, and we had a nice time going to all the non-tourist places we could find. We don't speak Thai, so it wasn't always simple, but we had a good time. After summer term, we went to the US on furlough. It would have been more enjoyable except for getting our luggage stolen out of our car in Sacramento, while



we were eating in a restaurant. Since we were moving from one place to another, everything was in the car, so we lost 3 laptops, and a lot of other valuable things, like passports...

Fortunately, they were in a hurry, or didn't have a good way to take the big suitcases, so we didn't lose all our clothes. Still, it takes a while to recover from this sort of a loss... we'll have to be more careful when traveling in such a dangerous country, apparently.



We visited family and friends, and spent a couple of days in the Smokies en route, and then it was time to go back to work. For Ron, this meant Qatar, where he had to teach an AIIAS extension class. Shawna went back to AIIAS for some work, then joined Ron in Qatar for a few days. We had managed to save a bit of vacation and had also agreed to do some mission work in the region, so we toured Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Oman over the next couple of weeks. It was a mix of work and play, but it was delightful, particularly Oman. We visited southern



Oman, the supposed land of Job, of Frankincense, camels, many birds, and many surprises. We arrived just after the Kharif, or summer rains, so everything was green. In northern Oman, we stayed in the capital city of Muscat, and did some excellent diving, went to see the sea turtles laying eggs at night, visited the souk (market), and met many delightful people. We fully enjoyed our time in the Gulf region, and learned so many things we didn't know before. I hope they offer the advanced course next year—I have this feeling we aren't done learning about this place yet. Given the AIIAS program there, we should have more chances to return, so that is good.



Ron and Shawna came home for graduation, then both presented papers at conferences in the US in October, and attended another conference together. Shortly after this, Ron went to Russia, and later to Tanzania, to do an installation of our Registrar software for the Adventist University there (we met up in Singapore to present a paper at a conference in between the two). By then, it was almost Christmas, and people started arriving to visit. So the year ended here at home, as it began. We pray that your year was also enjoyable and fulfilling. Please pray for



AIIAS. We have personnel needs and many other challenges, and the world financial situation is not any better for us here than it is for you there. We are thankful for health and strength, and pray that God will give you the same. Stay in touch. If you'd like to see more pictures from 2008, we put the best ones up at

www.andrews.edu/~vyhmeisr/pictures/2008. Enjoy! Love, Ron, Shawna, Alex, and Erik