Holidazed Letter 2006!

Happy Holidays from our home to yours.

Another year has come and gone, so it's time to review what has now become a part of *history!*

January 2006 found Dick & I in one of our favorite winter haunts, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. We spent a few days in the sun with our friend Brent from Denver, CO, who was celebrating his birthday, which one we won't say! While we were absent work continued in a major kitchen remodel which had started just a week or so before Christmas 2005. In a previous remodel by a former owner a drop ceiling had been put in. Well, we *ripped* it out! The ceiling in the kitchen has been restored to it's original 9'-4" height. A new row of custom made cabinets were added above the existing wall cabinets, a reproduction tin ceiling and authentic Armstrong Linoleum floor installed. Today the work is 95% complete, we have yet to choose new counter-tops and install the tile backsplash (waiting for the counter-tops you know.) Maybe by next Christmas, huh?!

Of course that wasn't the only thing happening this past January, I also worked diligently for a second year in putting on the single largest fund raiser, the Red Ribbon Dinner & Great Art Auction, for AIDS Project Quad Cities, a local non-profit. This past year we set a record $100K+ in that one night. Thanks in part to attendance by "travel buddies" Doug & Richard from Topeka, KS and David & Daryl from K.C., KS, who carpooled their way to Davenport to attend. Of course, no good deed goes unpunished, so I was asked to takeover as chairman of the event. Needless to say, it's been a busy year.

As winter drug on we found the time to get away for a long weekend to Phoenix, AZ. While there we visited with and had dinner with one of Dick's partner's from the firm, Jim, & his wife Mallory, who have a condo there. We also toured the Pima Air & Space Museum in nearby Tucson. At the museum I over heard an elderly lady state she was so happy to have her children visiting her from Iowa. You know me, I couldn't resist, I had to introduce myself and ask where in Iowa she was originally from and where her family still resides. She replied, "Clinton." Don't say, "WOW!" yet, I told her I was born and raised there and asked where in Clinton. Her daughter still lives in her old home... on Pershing Blvd, across from Horace Mann School, now you can say, "WOW!" (A lot of you know, but some don't, that is the street I grew up on AND my grade school, all just 3 blocks from the "old family place".) It's a small world after all!

Spring arrived on time this year, but landscaping took a backseat as we worked on restoring the yard up around the house. Late last year Dick decided it was time to put in geothermal heating and cooling in the house. For those in the know, geothermal requires putting tubing in the ground which is used to circulate a solution which absorbs heat from the ground in winter and dissipates heat in the summer. The tubing is at a minimum depth of about 6 feet and much, much deeper in some places. To put the tubing in the ground they use a machine which bores into the ground at one point (in the yard outside the backdoor!) and is steered from that one point. They went 300 feet into our backyard with 4 loops (6 tons of heating/cooling if anyone cares), all while sitting at that one spot. They did have to trench in the lines once they got close to the house, so the destruction of grass was confined to just around the backdoor.

To add to the lack of gardening, the north side of house was relieved of it's aluminum cocoon and the original 100+ year old cedar siding and shakes underneath were restored with our chosen color scheme. That entailed tromping through the flowerbed below the kitchen window, so nothing was planted this year. You can also note the removal of the 1980's bow window during the kitchen remodel. Aside from that we made a regular trip to Memphis, TN, to visit Dick's sister Dee Ann, brother-in-law Jim, and nephews Ryan & Kyle, one of which was celebrating his 10th birthday (Happy Birthday Kyle!) And then in May we had my niece, Melissa, come to town to visit us from Virginia for a long weekend.

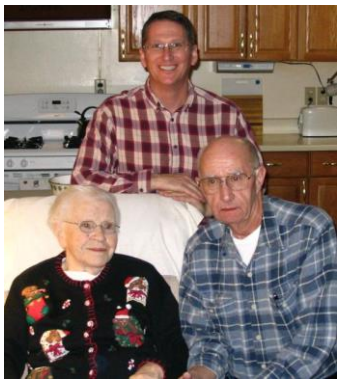
Dick remains extremely busy at the firm this year and I continue to do freelance computer work, everything from network maintenance to webpage design. But all work and no play makes Dick & Mark dull boys, so how about a summer vacation to... *China!* That's right, China. We flew out of Chicago on a non-stop flight to Beijing (formerly known as Peking), via the polar route.

Yes, *polar*, as in North Pole, as in Arctic Ocean, ice packs and all! Trust me, that is the shortest route. Of course that also meant we flew over Siberia, Russia. United Airlines has a feature which allows you to listen to the cockpit conversations with Air Traffic Control. That's a treat when you get to hear Russian ATC speaking "English"? Well, they claimed it was English anyway! In Beijing we joined our friends David & Daryl from KS. We did all the regular touristy things, seeing the Forbidden City (former palace compound of Chinese Emperors), Mao Zedong's tomb (he's encased in glass like Lenin), Tiannamin Square, the Great Wall (and yes, it really is great!) and the pandas at the Beijing Zoo. After seeing *everything* there is to see in Beijing, we took a two day trip to Xi'an, China. Xi'an is a much smaller city... only 4.5 MILLION people vs Beijing's 14 MILLION!!! Xi'an was HOT! Like 103°F hot! We visited the city wall, an art museum and the big attraction in Xi'an... the 2000 year old terra cotta warriors. These were built by peasants as dictated by the then emperor to protect him in the after-life. Little did he know the peasants hated him, and he was

going to NEED that protection! After his death the tombs containing the thousands upon thousands of terra cotta statutes (not of just warriors, with their real weapons, but also full-sized horses with actual chariots!) were destroyed and burned. After centuries, they were forgotten and their existence became *not even* a footnote in history. Then in 1972, during a drought, four local farmers were attempting to dig a well to get water for their crops in the surrounding fields. They found fragments of the terra cotta statutes! They diligently reported their find to local officials, who diligently reported to the central government who of course swooped down on the fields, removed the farmers and took control. Lest you think they weren't compensated, they received a handshake, an official government certificate and a token payment of approximately $400, boy-howdy! Our tour guide in Xi'an, Yuan Yuan, a.k.a. "Jack" (who loves watching bootleg DVDs of the TV show "Friends") had written a research paper at university on the terra cotta warriors and the farmers who discovered them. In the process, Jack became friends with one of them who is still alive. Jack arranged for us to meet him and speak to him for nearly half an hour, with Jack translating of course! The farmer aided in writing a book on the subject, which he still autographs for visitors. He makes a meager living, but said he is proudest of his accomplishment because people recognize him on the street. After ten days of *REAL* Chinese food (YUCK!!! Don't ask!) Dick & I were more than ready to return home.

Back in Iowa, we got to work tending to the new grass and picking up (and recycling) the aluminum siding as it came down in stages from the house. As fall approached I found myself getting busier and busier preparing for the Red Ribbon Dinner. The entertainer was booked and "big ticket" auction items were getting confirmed. Dick was even busier with his vocation in the fall, but found time for his avocation, internet surfing and eBay shopping... you'd be *amazed* what he can find there! But since we had been home for several months, it was time to get away. So Dick, with his finely tuned "travel agent" skills booked a long weekend in Washington, DC. We were all set to have a White House tour, a Capitol tour, a tour of Library of Congress and assorted other museums, memorials and the like, all arranged over the internet. But, United Express (service provided by Wisconsin Air) had other plans! They kept us from departing the Quad Cities Airport, having us sit for three (yes 3!) hours on the tarmac at MOLINE! We missed our connection in Chicago and did not get to DC as planned and therefore missed our White House tour which was scheduled for early in the morning of what was supposed to have been our first day in DC. Arrrrgh! The rest of the trip was fine, aside from the ridiculous amount of security at memorials and museums. The highlight may very well have been our side trip to Maryland, out to Dulles Airport, to see the satellite branch of the Smithsonian's Air & Space Museum. That place is BIG. *Inside the building* they house a Concorde SST, a retired Space Shuttle and, hanging from the ceiling, the Enola Gay, the bomber which helped to end WW II. This was ALL in one building, one very big building! Oh, by the way, did I mention Buzz Aldrin was there too, signing a children's book he helped write!

Fall is a busy birthday time around here. We were able to meet up with Dick's parents at the Ox Yoke Inn, Amana, IA, for his birthday in September, as well as dinner out with local friends here in the QC's the following weekend; Dick's mother's birthday brought another trip to the Ox Yoke; for my birthday we went out with friends locally. Unfortunately, there is a slew of birthday's in Memphis in November (Dee Ann, Jim and Ryan!), but we had to celebrate in absentia. The week before Turkey day we made a quick drive to Rock Falls, IL, to join an extended family gathering to celebrate my Aunt Gloria (mother's only sibling) and Uncle Ralph's Golden wedding anniversary, a true landmark and a joyous occasion! And I had time to catch up a little with several of my cousins whom I haven't seen in *years!* November of course starts the holi-dazed season! Thanksgiving day we traveled to Clinton for dinner with my folks and Clinton based siblings and respective spouses. After serving up my homemade pumpkin pie, we headed further north to Manchester, IA, to the Carr residence, home of Dick's Aunt Sylvia & Uncle Mike (his mother's brother) where we met up with Dick's parents, who were up from Cedar Rapids, IA, as well as his cousins for an early supper and a lovely visit.



The last month of the year still held one more trip for the two of us. For my birthday, all that I had asked for was trip to Redwood City, CA, to visit my Aunt Mary & Uncle Bob (my dad's brother) whom we don't get to see often enough (4 years since our last visit.) It was a relaxing 4 day weekend, and without any hitches in travel, a very pleasant trip. The night we left from Moline, the Quad Cities received the first snowfall of the year, six inches of the "white stuff"! Although Uncle Bob & Aunt Mary *claimed* we brought the cold with us, it sure seemed nice to Dick & I, sixties during the days, but granted it was a nippy mid-to-low 30's at night. All was well in *Cal-EE-for-nee-AH* and after a casual stroll around the streets of SanFran, rides on the cable cars, and two opportunities to visit with family in Redwood City, we had to return to the aforementioned snow... YUCK!

Which brings us to the close of another year. It is just weeks away from Christmas and more family gatherings, the baking will be kicking into high gear very shortly, the decorating has barely even started, and we will again have guests for next month's Red Ribbon Dinner all the way from Kansas. So, Merry Christmas to one and all and we hope this finds all safe, happy and healthy during the holidays and throughout the upcoming year!