HO-HO-HO!

Could another year have gone by already since last I wrote you? Actually, a year plus! Sorry I am so late, seems time has slipped by and here it is within days of Christmas and I have just settled down to peck out my **"Mistletoe Missive 2008"** on the keyboard. I heard somewhere that time *actually* is slipping by faster; scientists have discovered that the number of seconds in a minute has deteriorated to something like 58.375, alleged to have been caused by global warming or the auto industry bail-out.[1] In any case I better get this done. From the beginning then...

January saw me working diligently, for my second and *final year* as chairman on the big annual fund raiser for AIDS Project Quad Cities (a.k.a. The **Red Ribbon Dinner**.) We had a major change in place for January 2008's event, literally... the place! We moved it to a new facility for the first time in 6 years. But it went off with few (visible) hitches! We again broke the $100K mark in donations and some attendees were heard to say it was the best they had ever seen in fifteen years... who am I to argue?!

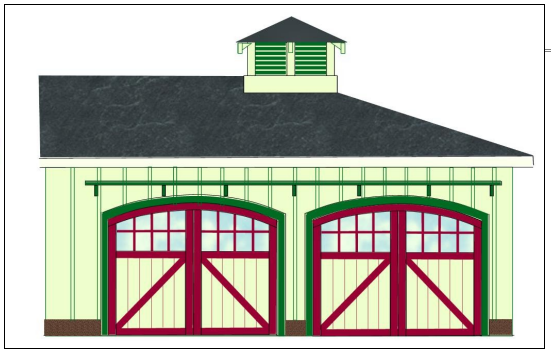
Also of note in the month of January, my niece, Melissa, got betrothed down in Virginia. She is now ***Mrs. John Powell***. Congratulations! And speaking of the Sorenson's of Virginia, in February, **brother Bob** came a calling for a weekend visit to introduce the family to his then fiancé, Sharon. Yes, Bob had realized after much rumination that he indeed was ***not*** getting any younger (as I *so oft times* remind him!) and needed to find someone before he started losing (more) hair, teeth (or fingers!) The most amazing aspect was that the soon to be ***Mrs. Sharon Sorenson*** did not run away screaming after meeting us all and went through with marrying him anyway... *go figure!* **;)**

The balance of the winter of 2007-08 was nearly uneventful, except for another ice storm. Contrary to what those around the country reading this may think, Iowa does not get ice storms very often. Snow? Yes! Cold? Oh MY yes! But ice? No, not often. But the last two winters we have, multiple times, and *we don't like it!* Unlike the previous winter's ice storms, this year we did lose a small elm tree to the ice, but other than that we escaped *relatively* unscathed (not a single relative was scathed!) Dick was so busy lawyerin' during the first 5 months of the year WE didn't escape on a trip anywhere. HE on the other hand did jet off for a very quick two days in April, accompanying his Dad to Augusta, Georgia, to see a practice round of the Masters Golf Tournament. ***Jim Davidson*** had been on the waiting list for 10 years waiting for tickets, just for the practice rounds. [2]

As spring sprung, none too soon for my likes, we did get off to Chicago for a long weekend, meeting up with all our regular travel friends scattered (sort of) across the country, **David & Daryl** (who also by the way, attended the Red Ribbon Dinner again, *thank you!*) and **Doug & Richard**, all from Kansas, and **Fred & Larry** from L.A.-L.A.-LosAngeles. Basically we did some shopping, some eating and some light sightseeing, but mostly... eating!

1 I either saw it on Fox News or dreamt it, either way, it has to be true now... it's in print.
2 As noted in the Davidson 2008 Christmas Letter, Alice Mae Davidson, author.

With Memorial Day past and the weather *finally* turning warmer, the flowers were planted, and the yard work began in earnest. And a milestone was reached; after a mere seven+ years at 1802 East River Drive we can finally announce that the exterior of the house is free of aluminum siding and completely painted! After several revisions and changes in design, the exterior of the attached garage (circa 1960's, vs the house, circa 1890's) had finally shed it's aluminum "skin" and was remodeled so as to more appropriately coordinate with the house. The design was based on an old photo we have of a long gone barn (and I do mean *barn*), that used to sit behind the house where our "carriage house" rental is now. Truth in advertising requires that I tell you the "carriage house" never saw a carriage, or horses for that matter, but was a very early automobile garage, all be it a very large one, long ago converted into a two bedroom house.



(Left) My Rendering

(Right) Actual effect – work in progress

In the summer, in Iowa, you do not get ice, but you do get severe thunderstorms and/or very strong winds. You guessed it... power outage, UH-gen! This time at least we didn't have to worry about heating the house and keeping pipes from freezing! The bulk of the damage was on the Illinois side of the river, but we were without power for almost exactly 12 hours. I continue to do freelance computer work (when the power is on) and added a few new clients to my roster, but not so many that we cannot still travel when Dick's schedule allows for it. And it did allow, the first week of September.

We headed off for an adventure touring lands not before seen by either of us! Quite a challenge you know when Dick is in the equation, he being a long time, seasoned world traveler. This year our big vacation took us on a cruise out of London, so said the itinerary (actually from the port of Harwich, England, some two or more hours by train outside of London). We boarded the Celebrity Cruise line's ship the Constellation along with some two thousand of our closest friends to sail around the Iberian peninsula. For anyone who has not brushed up on their geography since the eighth grade, that would be the southwestern portion of Europe that sticks out (also called a "stickout") and consists entirely of Spain and Portugal. We did have one stop in France (Le Harve) which included a bus trip to the ancient town/monastery of Mont St. Michel. Other stops in Spain included Bilbao, La Coruna (Santiago), Cadiz (Seville), and the island of Ibiza, before ending in Barcelona.

But the highlight of the trip, at least in my eyes, was the two days spent in and around Lisbon,

Portugal. In the immortal words of one pundit (Dick), "It looks like a former imperial power which long ago lost it's colonies... and ran out of money!" It was an amazing trip, a little damp at times while on the Atlantic side, but overall another one for the record books. Amongst the 2000+ people on this adventure were our "original" travel friends Doug & Richard, the others apparently still recovering from the whirlwind two days in Chicago, probably from a "food coma"!

And speaking of food, it was after the cruise that I admitted that I had to drop a few pounds. And fortunately for me I had some incentive. The gym which we have a membership to here at home, was holding their version of "The Biggest Loser" contest. They give you eight weeks to lose whatever you can and hopefully change your body's lean to fat ratio for the better. I literally signed up the day after we got back from the cruise! And eight weeks later (just a bit before Thanksgiving... Mmmm!) I weighed in and can report I lost 20 pounds, and dropped better than 5% in body fat. Even better than that... since then I have managed to keep it all off, dropping another pound or two by continuing the exercise regiment! Now if I can just get through the next few weeks of Christmas/New Year's snacks! The contest itself ran much more than eight weeks, actually ending today as I write this, so I don't know how I did in the big scheme of things, but I don't care; I am happier and healthier no matter where I place in the results.

November started off warmer than normal, but ended much, much *colder!*. During this time we celebrated numerous family and friend's birthdays, two of note: **(1)** Dick's nephew **Ryan** turned 16 and YES, lookout! He's driving!... in Memphis, TN! And **(2)** my **Great Uncle Al**, who turned a very spry 80, and rumor has it, saw him riding a burro with a sombrero, he wore the sombrero, not the burro, and truth be told the burro was wooden, and in a restaurant. Ah, what I wouldn't pay to have seen that! And **brother Doug** & I celebrated our birthdays with a dinner outing in the "twixt time" between the days. Thanksgiving was spent in Manchester, Iowa, with Dick's parents, **Jim and Alice**, at his **Aunt Sylvia & Uncle Mike**'s home along with their children. The day after, we went to Des Moines and meant up with the aforementioned Kansans David & Daryl (and their pooches!), and finished the weekend off in Clinton on Sunday, at my folks, **Tom** & **Sharon** for yet another feeding!

And now here it is December! The snow is falling, again, the holidays are kicking into high gear, the projects continue around the house (I said the exterior painting was done, NOT the *whole* house! Dick is literally in the basement at this very moment re-wiring it!) And I am still working on the fund raiser, but only as a "plebe" on the committee, not as chairman, for one last year. The Christmas baking still needs to be done and eventually some shopping (come on there are still five days left!) That pretty much sums up 2008, I hope you found this entertaining and that it put a smile on your face (like that bit about the burro!) And I hope this finds all in good health and good spirits during the holidays and through out 2009.

From our "Little Village" to yours...

...Wishing you all the best,

Mark & Dick