Mistletoe Missive 2009!

Often *imitated*, never <u>duplicated</u>...

I know you have all been patiently waiting, and as they say, "Good things come to those who wait!" The wait is over... the Holidazed newsletter begins now! Pull up a chair by the fire, warm up your hot toddy and settle in for a long winter's night.

As has become tradition I will start, where else, but at the beginning! January 2009 found me wrapping up work on my final Red Ribbon Dinner & Great Art Auction, a fundraiser for AIDS Project Quad Cities. After serving the previous two years as the event chairman, I stepped down last year and served in more of a "chairman emeritus" position helping where I could, but not in the capacity of running the whole she-bang. The event went well and a good time was had by all. (Please note, APQC continues to serve the afflicted of the Quad Cities and surrounding areas and the RRD is an ongoing concern and can use your assistance, my past support has included 6 years on the RRD committee and 4 years on APQC board of directors.)

As February drew nigh, Dick & I found ourselves preparing for what would be a true trip of a lifetime. On the first of February we found ourselves in the lobby of a lodge in Arusha, Tanzania, gathering our duffle bags in anticipation of setting out on a photo safari in Africa!!!

We spent the next week in lodges, tent camps and a great deal of time in Toyota LandCruisers soaking up the stunning beauty of Africa. Hardly a week goes by to this day that I don't find myself talking to someone about this trip, it was truly amazing and if there is one item to put on your own "bucket list", you should make it a photo safari to Africa. If you want to see more pictures from our trip (and who wouldn't!?) click here. We saw all of the "Big Five", that being lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo (that is, Cape Buffalo, please don't call it a Water Buffalo, those are only indigenous to Asia!) Additionally we saw zebras and wildebeests literally by the thousands, baboons, blue monkeys, giraffes, ostriches, flamingoes, gazelles, antelope, warthogs, hyenas, dik-dik (go ahead, Google it! It's not a joke), hippos and cheetahs, wheeeew! On one day we also were taken into the bush to visit a native tribe and see how they live. This was no Disney-setup, these people lived off the land and by all measures appeared to be happy and content... with no running water, no electricity, phones or computers and no permanent housing, maybe they know something we don't. The landscape was just as awe inspiring as the wildlife having visited Ngorongoro Crater, Olduvai Gorge (site of Louis & Mary Leakey's anthropological work) several national Wildlife Parks and the vast and open plains of the Serengeti. Suffice it to say, everyone should see this and do what they can to help save it from exploitation and ruin.

Of course we had to return to civilization after our wonderful trip and after a grueling 36 hour "day" of travel (during which, honest, Dick ran into someone he knew from Drake University while we were on the plane leaving Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.) In the end we found ourselves back in the snow and cold of the Midwest where we hunkered down for the balance of winter. But with the advent of spring and the warming of the air we once again found ourselves ready for a season of outdoor work.

Springtime in Davenport was a little stormy as evidenced by repeated storms and the subsequent power outages. We had a period where we lost power for several hours each weekend for THREE weeks! You'd think we were in the boondocks somewhere, not just one mile from downtown. These storms caused very little damage on our property, well, at least until the last storm. There were the occasional small branch from a tree in the yard ("small" being six inches or less in diameter), and one Saturday afternoon late in May after one such storm we were looking around the yard and chatting with our neighbors, Rob & Denise McMonagle, when Denise asked, "has that always been there?" pointing at a large tree apparently growing out of the roof of our carriage house rental behind the main house. The answer, "NO!" Unbeknownst to us (and our tenants, as they were out of town!) a rather large tree, with a main trunk approximately three feet in diameter, had "tipped over" and was laying on the roof at the back of the carriage house. Thankfully, the damage to the building was very minimal, having "bent" the eve of the gable end, but no holes in the roof and no damage to the structure of the building. Whew!

Looked like we would have some unscheduled maintenance on the carriage house. After the tree service removed the tree from the house, our handy handyman Curt began the repairs. We had previously discussed replacing the deck on the carriage house as it was getting a little too rickety and we didn't want to be that landlord on the news whose tenants had a party and collapsed their deck with accompanying carnage and mayhem… ***no siree Bob!*** (If that tree had just "tipped" another ten feet to the north the demolition would have been done for us!) Anywhoo, to make a long story longer, the old deck was removed and replaced with a new deck twice the size AND built to code... unlike it's predecessor. And since the carriage house projects were started, we decided it was time to paint the exterior so that it would coordinate with the main house and while we were at it, we had Curt replace the leaky old windows which barely kept the bugs out, let alone the winter winds. Our tenant tells us she could tell the difference instantly, the wind no longer blows through.the living room.. kidding... sorta!

In the "Big House", we continued with the re-wiring project, the basement, first floor, attic and 90% of the second floor is done, the biggest issue will now be installing a new sub-panel in the attic to serve the attic and second floor. At least right now the wiring carrying the current is new! In the yard we planted multiple new trees around the yard as part of our own re-forestation project in addition to the annual flowerbeds and general mowing. And after five years I can proudly report the kitchen remodel is truly finished as the replacement countertops went in in May... finally! (This happened to correspond with Dick & I hosting a Lane & Waterman function at the house for his law partners and associates, you knew there had to be reason we finally chose new countertops, right?!)

July had us making the only extended travel experience of the summer, a long weekend in St. Louis, MO, meeting up with Kansas friends David & Daryl. General sightseeing including the Gateway Arch, St. Louis Zoo and a Train Museum (can you guess who chose the museum?) A good time was had by all, D & D and me even enjoyed the museum, honest! And speaking of trains, the next weekend we did have a Plains, Trains and Automobiles adventure. We drove to Chicago, caught a flight to Minneapolis and the following morning we boarded a steam train for a day long excursion back to Chicago and then drove home. Have I ever mentioned Dick really likes trains?!

Summer means family picnics and reunions and 2009 was no exception. The annual Sorenson Family picnic was moved this year from it's usual location in Scott County Park to cousin Tim & Cheryl's new home in Clinton, complete with pool... who needs a park, huh! This year also marked the biennial Davidson-Peterson Family

Reunion. We had the pleasure of gathering in Cedar Rapids for what would become known as the 80-70-50-40-30 Reunion. Birthdays of each of these landmarks were celebrated during this calendar year by various members of the clan. Of special note, Jim Davidson, Dick's dad, proudly observed his eightieth b-day, but even more importantly to him, he celebrated his son's (Dick's) HALF CENTURY mark! Jim has been talking about this for years, apparently during Dick's youth, he made a big deal about his dad's fiftieth and so ever since Jim has been "laying in wait" to return the favor!

The final family picnic to report on is kinda distant connection, but try to follow along. Taking place in Stockton, IL, I went with my mother, Sharon, and her sister, my Aunt Gloria, to what remains of the Hatheway-Papke Family Reunion. As little kids, my mom would "drag" us Sorenson boys to this reunion most summers. It was a picnic where we kids knew virtually no one! And you guessed it, that holds true now more than ever. The reason? The family connection is through my great-grandmother (on my mother's mother's side of the family) and her siblings. Oh, did I mention, I never knew my great-grandmother as she died when my mother was little girl. But it did give me the opportunity to see my great Uncle Al (Grandma Marshall's brother, of last year's burro riding fame... check your archived Xmas letters!), my great Aunt Mugs (Grandma's sister) and two of her children whom I haven't seen in probably forty years! It was a fun afternoon spent listening to old stories and perusing through boxes of really old photos of previously referenced "unknown" relatives.

To a little family news closer to home, September marked the thirteenth year of Dick and I meeting, can you believe it? Well, as some of you may know, Iowa, being one of the more progressive states in the Union, had a case before the Iowa Supreme Court reviewing the constitutionality of gay marriage, and for anyone living under a rock, I won't keep you in suspense. The supreme court of Iowa came out with its ruling stating that it is unconstitutional to deny same-sex couples the right to marry. So... with absolutely NO pomp OR circumstance, on September 28th, on the occasion of our 13th anniversary Dick and I were married! You didn't miss anything, there was no ceremony of any kind. Contrary to common belief, for one to get married, all one has to do is get a license from the state, complete the paperwork and file it with the clerk of court, no service or ceremony is needed for the state to sanction a marriage. Bing-bang-boom, we're married!

Now, here's some real news... after ten years I finally got a new car! I had my dear old VW Jetta since September 1999, but in September of this year, after years of looking (half-heartedly) I finally took the leap and got another new VW, the CC Sport as seen in those cute Volkswagen commercials with the car cruising through a city scene at night driving through "quotes" hanging in mid-air. And yes, I bought another manual transmission car... do you know how hard that is getting to be!?

October, colder than normal came and went with little activity. We did make a quick run down to Topeka & Kansas City, KS to see friends and attend a performance by "Miss Richfield 1981" a very funny entertainer best described as a Midwest version of Dame Edna. November fortunately warmer than normal was fast upon us getting ready to usher in yet another holiday season. Thanksgiving found us headed to Dick's Aunt & Uncle's in Manchester, IA, where we met up with his parents and cousins for a festive dinner. A

second Thanksgiving was then held in Clinton at my folks on the following Sunday with my brother Doug, and step-brother Tom and his wife, Sharon.

The holiday season fully in gear now, the first part of December blew in with six inches of snow and as of today highs in the teens! Cookie selections are still being made for the baking yet to occur, and shopping for gifts? Are you kidding?! Think about it, I am just now doing "The Letter", do you really think the shopping is done? Yeah, right. Hey, the decorating is as done as it's going to be and it's time to wrap this up. Wishing you all the best of the holi-dazed season, now and throughout the year ahead.

Merry Christmas everyone and we look forward to our next meeting be it in person, or here again next year!

Mark & Dick