



CHRISTMAS, 2012

Seasons Greetings, Everyone,

This will be going out later than it sometimes does. I usually write my Christmas letter on Thanksgiving weekend, but it will be the second week of Advent before I'm done with this year's summary. One excuse is that I've been recovering from a nasty leg injury I had on Black Friday. Of course there's a bit of laziness as well, but the greetings are still genuine and I do hope they find all of you in good spirits for the holidays.

This has easily been one of the warmest years of all time. We had highs in the 50s after New Year's, and our first snow day of the school year didn't come until January 20th. We had tornado warnings in the area in March and April, and by the time baseball season came around the thermometer rose to over 100°. The fall has continued the hot, dry trend. There are many years I remember battling snow or ice at Thanksgiving, but in 2012 we didn't see a flake in the air until we were well into December.

This has been a rather lean year for me, because for the first time in twenty years I've been working at just one job. Iowa Lakes Community College hired a new full-time math instructor who claimed every single night class for the entire year for himself. I'd gotten spoiled with a nice bit of "mad money" coming in from my work at ILCC, and it's taken a lot of adjustment to get by on just my Garrigan salary. I am managing to pay my bills, but this certainly hasn't been a year I've indulged in many luxuries—and I don't expect much change next year, either.

Since the cash was flowing less freely, I didn't do much in the way of travel this year. The only real vacation I took was a train trip to Toronto with my sister Margaret in August. That was done on a shoestring, but it was a very enjoyable getaway. One of the most interesting things I did was to tour the city's historic district by Segway (a self-balancing two-wheeled vehicle). That was something I'd never done before, and while weird, it was really quite fun.

I turned fifty in October, and my colleagues and students saw that the event didn't pass without some celebration. I was presented with an enormous handmade card that everyone at school had signed, and I couldn't walk two steps without having people wish me well on my birthday. It really was quite a nice tribute.

Late November marked the start of my thirtieth year at Garrigan, the only real job I've had in my life. I teach Algebra I, Advanced Algebra & Trigonometry, Continuous & Discrete Mathematics (a course everyone calls "Math V"), and a college-credit Statistics class, as well as supervising the kids who create pages for our school website. I also serve on various committees, I produce the school's weekly radio show, I serve as the P.A. announcer at football games, and I work with speech, student council, and intramural basketball.

My biggest activity continues to be quiz bowl. Last June we made our thirteenth trip to the National Academic Championships, this time in Chicago. While we didn't do especially well at nationals (the kids won one game—but the real honor is getting there), it was a good trip—at least until the final day. That day we returned from a day of sightseeing to find that one of the school suburbans had been broken into and several things (most importantly my netbook computer) had been stolen. The officer who took our report expressed hope that the stuff might be recovered, but my bet is my computer had been pawned before we got back to the park-and-ride. I was just glad that, while the burglar had rummaged through all the kids' stuff, none of them actually lost anything.

Together with one of my colleagues, I attended a fascinating workshop this past summer. The class was about waste reduction and management. We were theoretically supposed to find ways to incorporate that topic into what we teach (something that was a more natural fit for my friend who

teaches environmental science), but regardless of how much I use it at school, the content really was really quite interesting. It also gave me an hour of graduate credit at no cost whatsoever—something almost unheard of in education.

One advantage of not teaching at the college was that I had my evenings free. This past summer I spent many of them watching baseball. Garrigan's team did extremely well. The Bears won the North Central Conference championship (in spite of being by far the smallest school in the conference), and they advanced to state for just the second time in school history. I was pleased to be able to see the majority of their games this year and to get some pretty decent photos for our school website. I also made it down to Des Moines to see a couple of series with Brad Nelson, my former student who was again playing AAA ball in the Texas Rangers organization.

I'm still very active in the First Congregational United Church of Christ, where I serve on the board, chair the Worship and Music Committee, and read the scripture readings at almost every week's service. Our attendance has been pretty pathetic this year, but oddly the church is in best financial shape we've seen in years. I had the opportunity to do some special mission projects through the church, including volunteering at Ronald McDonald House in Des Moines and working on a Habitat for Humanity build in Ft. Dodge.

My other main activity is in the Iowa Council of Teachers of Mathematics, where I seem to be a board member for life. I do two jobs no one else wants: newsletter editor and webmaster. My main accomplishment this past year was a total re-design of the organization's website, including a feature that allows us to take online payments for membership and conference registration. I'm definitely **not** a professional web designer, but I've certainly done quite a lot of work in that field in recent years.

I've had less contact with my family than some years, but I did manage to see all my siblings in November. I went up to northern Minnesota to see my brother Steve (who is doing well and continues to keep very busy), and I joined all the lowans for Thanksgiving dinner at my Aunt Alaire's place in Coralville. It's kind of strange in this family of educators that I'm the only one who continues to teach. Everyone else is retired or has moved on to another career.

Margaret is proudly collecting Social Security now, though she still teaches part-time for Northeast Iowa Community College in Calmar. While she's had a few health problems in the past year, she has still managed **a lot** of traveling. She recently returned from a cruise to Greece and Turkey, and she'll be off to Italy in the spring.

John is also officially retired, though he worked more than full time through the summer. He was employed by the USDA working to control the spread of an insect called the emerald ash borer. John continues to spend his spare time writing. He and Janet are still active in theatre, and they had a nice vacation this fall in Santa Fe.

Paul continues to be co-pastor at a circuit of three churches centered in Perry, preaching weekly services in both Spanish and English (appropriate for a former Spanish teacher). While he has been a Methodist minister for years now, he will be officially ordained as a full-fledged elder at the annual conference next spring. His wife Nancy has had some health issues this year, but she seems to be doing better of late. The two of them had a big vacation this summer. They spent time in Seattle and Portland and cruised up the Inside Passage to Alaska. Both of Paul's kids live and work in the Des Moines area. Timothy is now working in customer service for Mediacom, while Rachel continues to work as a school librarian.

I've seen my Aunt Alaire several times this past year. She had shoulder surgery last winter and has spent much of the year slowly recovering from that. Fortunately she seemed much better at Thanksgiving. I haven't seen any of the rest of the family this year, but reports are they are mostly doing okay.

I hope all of you are also doing well. May you have a wonderful Christmas season, and may the coming year be a good one for you.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

David M. Burrow