

2006

Holiday Greetings

A critical mass of family news and self-imposed guilt moves me to write to friends and family with updates of the past five years. Forgive me if this missive bloats into a booklet given my failure to report recently and regularly.

Gary's oldest daughter Tanya and her husband Chad Hovland are raising four beautiful children: Hailey (almost 7), twins Ivan and Nolan (almost 5), and Violet (almost 3). I am jarred just writing their ages, as it seems just like yesterday that they were infants --- yet they are quickly growing up to be bright, well-behaved, and thoroughly delightful. Chad, Tanya's husband, pursues teaching and Tanya combines homemaking and daycare, where she literally pursues children! Hailey is in 1st grade, top of the class of course, and the boys are in pre-school. Hailey was recently selected as the crown bearer for the Farmington Homecoming ceremony. All four kids had key roles in Lesanna's wedding and stole the show because they are so uncommonly cute and well mannered.

Crystal, Gary's youngest daughter, and her husband Nick Dauer are proud parents of a new baby girl, Skyla, born last August. Although she arrived a couple weeks early and was initially small, Skyla is the picture of health and vitality now. Living next door to Tanya, Skyla receives plenty of attention from the Hovland crew. Nick and Crystal are both special education teachers for a nearby school district. Crystal returns to work in January after enjoying several months of being able to stay home with Skyla. Tanya will care for Skyla when Crystal is working.

Nick, Gary's son, works in banking and enjoys boating in his spare time, weather permitting. He and his roommate Andy are often busy with home improvements, and Nick makes a hobby of woodworking, turning out some very nice projects. Although he left the field of music education a couple years ago, Nick continues to expertly play several musical instruments and performs occasionally. Andy is a 911 dispatcher and fireman. We are fortunate that Nick and his sisters' families all live in the Twin Cities area so we can keep in close contact with them. Their homes are often destinations when Gary takes his motorcycle out for a spin.

Jaslyn Jean and her partner Jim Haughian moved to Longmont Colorado after receiving their graduate degrees from Univeristy of Wisconsin, Madison (Jaslyn's in soil science and engineering, Jim's in biology). Jim is working toward a PhD at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His research is actually performed at a hospital east of Denver. Jim grows marvelous vegetables each year although he laments the dry conditions in Colorado, and together he and Jaslyn have made many home improvements including major landscaping renovations. Employed by the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, in Denver, Jaslyn has earned national recognition for her work and does a fair amount of traveling. Recently she decided to return to school while continuing to work, and has entered an MBA in Sustainable Business program offered by Bainbridge Graduate Institute. Jaslyn wrote an EPA grant to investigate the behavior of prions ("mad cow" infectious agent) in wastewater, which is being researched by the UW, Madison.

on July 6th 2004 following a 2-day bout with pneumonia. Grandma has always been counted among my heroes. Her wit and mental acuity remained sharp even as she aged well beyond the statistical norms. Those norms were evidenced by the anticipatory "19" carved, for the year of her death, in her tombstone when her first husband was buried in 1940. The death of two husbands, three sons, all her siblings, and a grandson mightily tested her mettle, yet her industry and spirit never waned. She displayed a bit of her firepower when a wayward resident of the care center wandered, unwelcome, into her room during a visit Gary and I had paid her. She turned her gaze toward him and mid-sentence in our conversation said, "Go away. You don't belong in here." The look in her eyes and resolve in her voice were forceful beyond what one would expect from a small woman of 102. The gentleman made a hasty exit. Although she lived in her own home until after she was 100, she decided to stay in the senior care center the last two years of her life, and she certainly called the shots at the Sheffield (Iowa) nursing home.

Having been widowed in 1940 after raising five children on a farm, Grandma moved to town and started a different career. She owned and operated the local variety store until her mid-70s when she finally "retired" to a life full of charity work, sewing, crocheting and quilting. Her resilience and generosity, inspirational to five generations, are goals I can only dream of achieving. She set extremely high expectations for herself and those around her. I am blessed to have shared time with her. In fact, I enjoyed two wonderful Grandmas, and described my Grandma Harpole, Irma Florence, (1902-1998), in a previous holiday letter.

Gary continues to build roads. He is in Fairmont right now taking advantage of a warm December. Three years ago he spent a few days in the hospital having a congenitally defective heart valve replaced. While finding out about his problem was unsettling, as it involved a 911 visit to our home, the surgery fixed the problem and he's fine now. His heart surgeon informed him that the titanium valve and Dacron aorta that were placed in his heart have a 250-year warranty! He takes advantage of every opportunity to ride his motorcycle. Typically this involves visiting the kids and grandkids in Farmington or Maple Grove, but he visited Jaslyn in Madison, Chicago and Colorado also. This year he's considering a trip south, if he ever gets done moving dirt. Attracting and feeding wildlife has become quite a hobby for Gary. I'm confident birds (and raccoons and squirrels) throughout the area know that our feeders are consistently full. In addition we offer a dozen wood duck homes every spring and typically there is "No Vacancy" although the occupants are not always wood ducks. Recently several American Kestrels have found the lodging to their liking. A breathtaking Piliated Woodpecker found our suet recently. A doe and her twin fawns have spent two years in and about our farm feasting on corn right alongside the pheasants.

My brothers have been on the move. Jim and his family spent a few years in California, returning to Minnesota to settle in Eden Prairie. Kristen moved, this month, to Seattle, Washington, joining Ron who has been there since July. John and Janna are both in college in Oregon.

the first time in 22 years and flew to California to take a bar examination required of students in non-traditional law programs. I studied several hours a day for nearly a month in preparation knowing that the day-long exam is designed to be so difficult that only 20% pass. After my unpleasant airport experiences, I believe that my self-imposed moratorium on flying suits me, so it is fortunate that I passed on my first attempt. In addition, I stay busy caring for the animals, the yard, the house, and occasional sewing. I managed to find time to sew Lesanna's bridal gown and the dresses for the bridesmaids, Jaslyn and Dorissa.

As I reflect during this holiday season, I am thankful --- particularly to my parents for the wonderful role models they were and the guiding lights they continue to be in my heart and mind. I am truly blessed with a wonderful family, circle of friends, delightful animals, and a beautiful environment in which to live. It saddens me to know that others, human and animal alike, are less fortunate than I. At times maintaining a positive outlook for the future is challenging, as humankind's sprint to the precipice of sustainable civilization seems almost lemming-like. Yet, a close look reveals areas in which we as a society are making progress. And in the charming, innocent smiles of my grandchildren I see hope and goodness.

May we each and all find Peace.

Rosalyn and Gary

