



Christmas 2007

Dear Friends and Family,

Well, we pretty much dodged the Hurricane bullet this year, but further escalating insurance rates and ever increasing property taxes created yet two more sucking chest wounds. In case you haven't heard, the Florida Legislature got together and assembled the Mother of All Tax Breaks. Translated, that will work out to about \$150 per Florida Family or the equivalent of what Bonnie spends when she drops in at Wal-Mart with the intent to just get one or two quick items.



Also, since the Hurricane Season was a "no-show" the insurance companies only made a gillion gazillion instead of just a few gazillions, they are probably now lobbying for rate hikes. As for me, I'm trying to decide what to do with 60 sheets of plywood, plus I am slowly emptying the bathtubs by keeping the shrubs watered.

Let's go back to Thanksgiving. We had a nice one and hope you did, too. Being together with friends and family almost overcame Bonnie's depression that our Christmas "stuff" wasn't up yet. So on December 1st I was up in the attic for what seemed like most of the day passing down boxes of ornaments, trinkets, bows, garland, wreaths, indoor and outdoor lights, tree decorations, Christmas place settings for 18, Christmas mugs, nut crackers, Hummel figurines and plates, angels, Santas, ribbons, artificial poinsettias, baskets, wrapping paper, ceramic trees with lights, lawn sets, table clothes with matching Santa chair covers, and a variety of bargain gifts purchased nearly a year ago at post-holiday sales. Still looking for the yard sign that says, "Santa, please stop here." It's gotta be up there somewhere. Eleven months of the year our electric bills are of concern; for December we suck down enough kilowatts to power a third world city. But Bonnie is humming fa la la and that's what counts.

Our latest home improvement endeavor is "remodeling the kitchen." Bonnie and Robert forced the issue by tearing down the old ceiling and lighting. I learned of this project when I walked in the door. Usually Bonnie makes the "guess what I'm doing" calls when I'm at work and can't scream loud enough or drive home fast enough to stop her. So then I find myself at Home Depot with a customer service representative designing a new kitchen on their auto-cad. You just can't say take out the old kitchen and give us another one with new cabinets and countertop. What you have to do is measure and virtually build every cabinet and piece of trim step-by-grueling-step. No kidding – we've spent six hours on that blasted design sitting there across from the Home Depot techie. I'm convinced that this could really be done in 30 minutes, but the object is to get you so invested in the design that when you find the kitchen upgrade will cost more than what you originally paid for the whole house you'll just roll over and sign the contract.

Stetson University deactivated its virtual school so a February trip to San Francisco was the last fun travel on that account. Nonetheless, I am still working from home two days a week. Beginning to think about not working at all, but I'm afraid that I couldn't handle the plans Bonnie would have for me regarding home projects.

Bonnie is more into home remedies than ever. Our cupboard could stock a GNC store for two months. If you have a problem, she has a solution: pills, dissolve-on-your-tongue tablets, herbal mixes, ointments.... And no doubt suppositories if we'd tolerate it. I have to be very careful around the house; if I cough to clear my throat she's right there with fourteen pills and three glasses of water. Her latest is a Doctor Oz breakfast shake. You may know of Dr. Mehmet Oz, an award-winning heart surgeon with degrees from Harvard, Wharton and the University of Pennsylvania. I know him as a co-conspirator in Bonnie's health kick. She makes this concoction in the blender using whatever is in the refrigerator and vast quantities of "nutrients" from plastic jugs. All I know is that if I don't drink it within five minutes it conceals into the consistency of toothpaste – I'm wondering what it is doing inside me.

Karen moved again, this time from Ft. Myers to Naples. Had to downsize to be able to afford her upsized (triplets) family. Hard to believe they had their first birthday on November 8th and are now all walking. If you think they were a handful in cribs and play pens, you should see them now. However, they are so sweet that they can be forgiven for about anything – and it looks like they know it.

Sandra and Steve's newest addition Sydney keeps things lively at their house, as if Seth and Savannah needed any help. Seth and Savannah like sports; Seth is now into soccer and Savannah plays basketball at school.

Anne has completed her fourth full year of teaching kindergarten, and is into her fifth. This year she moved to Sessoms Elementary, which is not a Title I school. This means she gets to spend some part of the day teaching instead of helping potty train the kids. Also most speak English and knew their numbers even before the beginning of the year. The arrangement she has at the school is called a triad. This is where three teachers share about 48 students. Actually I'd call it hitting a trifecta because you'd think the teachers could collectively play it smart and only work one-third of the time.

Robert is now in England, working to establish a campus ministry near the University of Birmingham. But then you all know that because he get hold of my Christmas list and hit you all up for money to support his mission. As you know, he departed in mid-October and is now searching for a campus house from where to operate. The exchange rate is a killer; a Big Mac combo is about thirteen US bucks. Robert does a pretty good job with his regular e-mail updates, so if you'd like to be on his mailing list let me know.

My Mom (here in the area) is well, and we are glad for the times we can get together with her.

The latest feline is Mosby, named after the Civil War colonel who was called the Gray Ghost. Mosby is a Maine Coon Cat. A search of the Web reveals that "the Maine Coon is well known for its loving nature, kindly disposition and great intelligence." Well, that makes two of us in the house.

Bonnie and I still play volleyball twice a week, and Sandra continues to join us on Tuesdays nights. Steve is still getting Brownie points for watching the kids while Sandra plays. I still play racquetball about three times a week and get great pleasure from beating people half my age.

We always remember that God has blessed our family with too many blessings to count. He continues to amaze us with the miracles of every day life. For that we are so thankful.

The Braden Family: Jay, Bonnie, kids and kat
BradenClan@aol.com www.BradenClan.com



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