



Christmas 2008



Dear Family and Friends,

Another eventful year: On the national level there were the Summer Olympics, the Presidential Election, and the financial crisis. Of course the latter is nothing new to the Bradens; all the kids have been by looking for a bail out, citing poor market conditions and the need to keep the grandkids happy. Regardless, Bonnie continues to do her part to keep the economy alive through unabated spending.

This fall Karen moved back into the area so now we are close to the triplets: Braden, Skyler and Daylin. They turned two in early November and they are an energy-packed triumvirate. Love on them, spoil them with candy and anything else they need or think they need, reluctantly give them back, and tell everyone just how great they are. Discipline is never an issue at our house because there is nothing they are forbidden to do. Of course this might give Karen some concerns, but that's her problem.

Sandra is back teaching pre-school at the First Baptist Academy. What a challenge that is three year olds—Sandra thinks she must have slept through the class on potty training as she was working towards her Elementary Education degree. Oh the glories of plastic gloves—another of those missed classes. The kids: Sydney, Seth, and Savannah, are doing great (Note formula for raising Grandkids in paragraph 2). Steve is still with the mortgage business and working into insurance. And with the help of his Dad, he bought a trailer park. Over 65 tenants. This is good because if our stocks go down any further we can probably move in there. Suffice it to say that Steve is learning things he never thought he'd have to learn, all having to do with renters and building codes and septic tanks and contractors.

Anne is at her second year at Sessums Elementary. Still the star teacher, with other teachers putting their kindergarteners in her class. Well, she ought to be good, using up all my ink and paper downloading tons of teaching ideas off the Internet. Then most of the stuff has to be laminated (Bonnie). Then the laminated items have to be cut from the laminate (Bonnie). Then everything has to be organized into files (Bonnie). Then the files have to be moved to Anne's condo where they get lost among all the other boxes of neat ideas that have been collected the same way. As an engineer I get worried about the floor loading from her collection of yet-to-be-used "teaching treasures."

Continuing in the area of engineer concerns, we had a major structural problem this year; but I should have anticipated it. Dumb me; I knew that the tensile strength of steel is *only* 18,000 psi, so it should have been no surprise when Bonnie's steel shelving in her closet failed under the load of her clothes. That generated a two week Extreme Makeover project requiring seven trips to Home Depot. While in the building process, we found cubes with five by five dividers for shoes (that's 25 pair per cube for those of you from the University of Florida and/or from Indiana University). Guess who couldn't fit all her shoes into **two** cubes even considering that I managed to squeeze two pairs into some of the spots? Note that I have six pairs of shoes to my name including tennis shoes and house slippers. And that whole effort set our kitchen renovation back, a six week project that we compressed into 13 months and a black hole of dollars.

Of course the Number One local event of 2008 was Robert and Natalie getting married in June and shortly thereafter departing to continue their campus ministry in England, where they must be achieving success because one of the students they are working with has now declared, "I used to be an Atheist but am now an Agnostic." Well, that's progress. The task of growing the ministry must not be all work: Natalie is expecting and the baby is due in May. Congratulations! Now they and our President Elect will

have something very much in common: implementing CHANGE. In their case it will be changing formula, changing diapers, changing feeding times, changing baby sitters, and numerous lifestyle changes. But we love grandchildren so *their* sacrifices will be worth it.

This year Bonnie and I had a lot of bonding time watching the Summer Olympics. I don't know which "sport" I slept through best: gymnastics or synchronized swimming. Actually gymnastics would be better if it were full contact gymnastics, Put two opposing team members on each end of the balance beam and let them try to knock each other off; the last one remaining gets the points. Or for the mat exercise, put two full teams on the mat and let them play King of the Hill, throwing opposing team members off the mat with the last team remaining getting the points.

Another large event was July's Family Reunion Cruise to Cozumel. My Mom "Nanny" who swore she was not interested in a cruising from Florida, sprung for the whole family, all of us! By the second 13-course meal she was sold. Trying to organize 22 family members including four kids under two gives new meaning to herding cats. Now we just need to talk her into making this an annual event.



Bonnie, Sandra, and Anne made their annual "Girls Gone Wild" trip to the Big Apple. (Next year Karen will be joining them.) They came back with all kinds of stories, but when I thought about what they said, most involved eating Junior's Cheesecake and the fun times they had together doing crazy stuff. Hmmmm. So next year I'm going to change their visit from New York to Tampa, have them stay in a Motel 8, and let them go play with the visitors in nearby Ybor City. I'll even buy the cheesecake online. Save a ton of money and get the same results.

Bonnie has been working this year with our church's Deaf Ministry. The kids love her and the staff is amazed at how well she does with signing and interacting with the students. She attributes her success to 40+ years with a husband who is mostly deaf. Only selectively, my dear.

Back in August my Stetson work schedule changed, at my request, to four days a week. Nope, not any of that flex time stuff, but honest-to-goodness four days a week with permanent three day weekends. Should have done this years ago. Now only driving in two days a week and working in my pajamas the other two.

Bonnie and I continue to play volleyball twice a week, and Sandra joins us most Monday nights. I still play racquetball about three times a week, and Bonnie is faithfully at the gym three or four mornings a week. Together we run twice-a-month volleyball sessions at a nearby home for girls called Steppin' Stone Farm.

May you continue to grow in God's grace, mercy, and love.
We are so thankful for all our blessings.

The Braden Family: Jay, Bonnie, kids, grandkids, and kat
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