



CHRISTMAS 2012



Dear Family and Friends,



You are receiving this letter because Bonnie has convinced me that my procrastination will not pay off. I figured there was some chance that the world, like the Mayan Calendar, might end on December 21st. So why do a Christmas letter – or even Christmas shopping? But even if Bonnie made me do it, I got in the last laugh – I put the stamps on a credit card.

The New Year started out very interestingly. Grandkids Savannah, Seth, and Sydney wanted a dog for Christmas so Sandra and Steve bought them not one but two . . . hamsters. We're talking Chinese Hamsters, about 3" in body length – yep, small. So on Day 1 Seth is holding one of them when it jumps out of his hands and scurries for freedom in the house – not to be found for 2½ weeks except for the evidence of its nightly raids on the food traps unsuccessfully set out to end its liberty. But one day he ventured out too far and, after being chased under the couch, behind the refrigerator, into the closet, under the stove, was finally captured and Sydney was soon rewarded with two bites as she attempted to pet it. The hamsterburgers tasted good!

My last day with Stetson was in early February so now I am fully retired. And . . . I am now in assisted living. I assist Bonnie with the cooking, assist Bonnie with the cleaning, assist Bonnie with grocery shopping, assist Bonnie with the laundry, and assist Bonnie folding the wash; while she is living it up going off and doing Pilates, whatever that is, hopefully not the name of some young Greek guy that hangs out at the gym.

Actually, when not working for Bonnie, I have rediscovered golf and made good on two promises: One, as a loyal FSU grad, was to post 100 University of Florida *Gator* jokes on the family Web site, and the other was to finally publish the book that I have been working on for something like nine years. As for the book, no doubt it will go viral – or whatever a book does when it sells millions of copies. Look for me on a book signing tour in *your* hometown.

By July the hamsters were gone and the Roberts kids had worn down Steve and Sandra, so there was a new addition to the family: Grace, an eight week old black schnoodle, a cross between a Schnauzer a Poodle. This quickly added new dimensions to the concept of credit card debt, even after paying the breeder. Let's see: puppy food, puppy toys, puppy cage, puppy bed, puppy vet, puppy groomer, puppy accident cleaner uppers and disinfectants, puppy shots . . . And then there was - and is - the regular walks outside, adding serious meaning to the question, "How long can we be away from the house?"



Summer was sports and other activities: Steve and I coached Savannah and Seth's soccer team, and Sandra and Anne coached Sydney's soccer team (imagine trying to coach eight 4-5 year-olds!!!). Daylin and Skyler are into gymnastics, and Braden played Fall Tee Ball with yours truly as an Assistant. Coaching kids is fun, and I don't have that much problem with their short attention spans – you do remember that I'm married to Bonnie?

This year the triplets graduated to bicycles that they learned to ride in *one day*. I recall that I was something like 14 before I could ride a two-wheeler . . . and then only with training wheels.

Sandra continued as a Third Grade teacher, and she's good at it. Except for the periodic "observations" that she goes panicky preparing for – understandable since she is in a new, non-tenure based system where observations affect merit pay and even retention. Of course she ends up excelling in each so she's getting a bad reputation for crying "Wolf!"

For this school year Anne moved up to be a District Resource Trainer. Previously, she was a Reading Coach at a school training teachers how to get kids to read. Now she works out of the district office and trains reading coaches. She has a number of schools that require attention, and this keeps her busy with visits and

other assistance. Anne's work gives added meaning to the phrase, "If you can read this, thank a teacher." I think it also means, "If you can read this, thank your parents for keeping you off the TV and off video games."

The triplets are in a new home for Christmas. Their lease expired on October 31st and we thought it would be renewed. Wrong! So that sent everyone out house hunting. Their new abode is within walking distance to their school, so that's nice. This year it's Kindergarten, and Braden, Daylin, and Skyler are – by request – in separate classes. As grandparents, Bonnie and I can only conclude that the school wanted to raise the average IQ in *three* classrooms instead of one.



This has been projects year for us. One was to *finally* get Anne's dryer vent installed. You can tell that Bonnie and I are getting good at these kinds of things because it only took 14 trips to Home Depot. We had to rent a machine to bore through her concrete floor and another machine to bore a hole through her wall to get the vent to the outside. The trick was to do the drilling without cutting through water lines, sewer lines, and electrical lines. Whew. Many prayers answered.



We also journeyed to Lanett, Alabama, to install a swing set for Benjamin and Everett. Years ago we would have bought treated 2x4s and 4x4s and some swingset hardware from the lumber yard. Then we would have cut and assembled everything in about four hours for about \$250. But in 2012 we got to buy a perfectly pre-cut and pre-drilled manufactured set with 53 pages of instructions, not counting six pages devoted just to identifying the pieces and hardware. One wouldn't want to accidentally confuse piece A76 that was 1" x 5" x 46 1/2" with piece A77 that was 1" x 5" x 47 3/4". Oh yes, this takes four times the effort and costs four times as much.

Karen, when not taking care of the triplets 20 hours a day, spent some of her time this year being "into" couponing. Since she knows I don't have the patience, dedication, or motivation to do this, she takes great pride in bringing me her Publix Supermarket cash register receipt confirming, for example, that she bought \$752.24 worth of groceries for 63 cents, and got four \$10 shopping cards to boot.

Robert, now full-time with CharterBank, evidently decided that he needed more motivation to work – like taking on the mortgage of a larger home. So December has been moving and all the associated house renovations. Natalie works with their church as the college ministry for their very successful program for students at nearby Point University. Everett (1) and Benjamin (3 1/2) are fine. Benjamin, when asked where MiMi (Bonnie) and Papa B (Jay) live, and probably remembering family get togethers, says, "In a hotel."

By the way, Everett is now walking, and Benjamin holds the distinction of beating Robert – seriously – in the video game *Temple Run*. Benj has also been known to pick up a loose cell phone and call relatives. Note to self: Do not put number of bookie on cell phone or it could cost lots of money. Or maybe not!! Hmmm.

Racquetball. Largely good news. Won (in my age group) the Polk County Senior Games. The trick was to kick the crutches out from my competitors. Came in second in the State Senior Games . . . Hello Ektelon, ProKennex, E-Force, Head, Wilson . . . I'm now available for sponsorships.

Have I ever mentioned Bonnie's enthusiasm for Christmas? As in 13 different Christmas sweaters (*and we live in Florida where sweaters are required maybe two days a year*). Plus this year I found – no kidding – four sets of black Christmas slipper shoes; one pair with holly on the toe, one pair with a wreath, one with snowflakes, and one with Santa. She almost has more Christmas shoes than I have shoes. And who out there has a Three-Wise-Men shower curtain? Yep, that's what I thought.

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

The Braden Family: Jay, Bonnie, kids, grandkids, and (spoiled) kat
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