



Christmas 2013



Dear Family and Friends,

Best wishes and blessings for the Christmas season and the upcoming New Year. We hope 2013 was good to you.

One of the big things this year was that another family member took a vow of poverty. You thought Anne was already there as a school teacher, but she outdid herself by marrying Rusty Zwerner, a Youth Pastor at our church. Material Girl is now living in 535 square feet of married student quarters at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and is currently learning 100 different ways to fix Cajun style rice and beans. Anne was hired (via Skype) as a 4th grade teacher at a private Christian school in the area, and Rusty, studying for his Masters in Divinity, has now completed his first semester where he carried five courses that included Hebrew. His class average in that subject was 98. Most students now-a-days don't score half of that *in English*. Rusty is a great guy and the whole family rejoices with Anne.



Life with the grandkids here in the Tampa area revolves around sports and similar programs: baseball, soccer, basketball, track, gymnastics, softball, kick boxing . . . I'm hoping the various local concession stands get together, go on the stock exchange, and have an IPO. Put me down as "all in." It seems like I'm already there anyway.

Ah, technology. After 13 years and 280,000 miles we had to say goodbye to our GMC Jimmy. And after 13 years and 280,000 calls we said goodbye to our flip phones. Now we have both a car and also phones that are smarter than we are. So far we have learned that screaming at them is satisfying, but not especially effective in getting them to work.

Continued from 2012: November was the biggest month this year for Jay's book. He sold 10 copies. We know you think this is a typo and that there is a K missing somewhere. Well, not all great artists are discovered immediately after their works are published. Hey, here's an idea: Want to know what might be a GREAT Christmas or New Year gift for all your friends and relatives?

More 2012: And our wonderful collection of University of Florida *Gator* jokes has grown from 100 to 150 this year. When you are retired, you can find lots of ways to waste your time.

Joe and Jill Jock: Golf: After about 18 months of bad golf and almost that many lessons, my game has taken a turn for the better lately. I'm thinking all the mistakes in my swing must be canceling out each other. ❖ Racquetball: Won the Polk County Senior Games in racquetball – for the third time. Came in second in the State Senior Games – for the second time. Got smoked in the finals; turned out my opponent was something like #3 in the nation for our age group. Second is still the first loser spot. ❖ Tennis: Bonnie continued with tennis. In her spring league things went pretty well but in the fall she got to practice humility as her team won only two matches. ❖ Working Out: Bonnie is also still doing Zumba, and I'm still not sure what that is . . . my best guess to date is that it is somewhere ladies meet do discuss the faults of their husbands and it requires expensive and stylish workout gear that doesn't necessarily get worked out.

Bonnie and I spent 2013 noting the numerous times House Republicans have tried to repeal Obamacare. If the Republicans are serious about making it go away, they should just support it as a conservative non profit. Then they'll get the IRS on their side to completely suppress it.



Q: What has 38 legs and the appetite of a plaque of locusts?

A: The Braden Clan in the buffet line on the Carnival *Ecstasy*. Thanks to Jay's Mom "Nanny" for helping with some of the expenses. No, we don't remember where we went but we can tell you what was served on formal night.

Savanah, Seth, and Sydney are doing well. Savanah and Seth played Middle School sports. Savanah track, and Seth basketball. They also played Rec League sports: Savanah softball and basketball; Seth baseball and soccer. The triplets: Braden, Daylin, and Skyler, are now seven, in the second grade, and also doing fine in all respects. Benjamin and Everett in Alabama are doing fine and expecting a brother in January!!! This year I helped coached Braden in both Tee Ball and in soccer. In Tee Ball, by the fourth game we were able to get *most* of the players to head for first base instead of third base if/when they hit the ball, but in soccer forget it – no amount of coaxing, cajoling, screaming, threatening, or begging can induce a child to play his or her position. They fixate on the ball and it's off to the races – and it's a great day if they kick the ball in the direction of the opponent's goal and not their own. (Robert, in Alabama, had a similar soccer experience with Benjamin; reporting that in one game the only time Benj made contact with the ball was when someone kicked it into his chest.)

This year grandkids Sydney, Daylin, and Skyler spent some months enrolled in a local gymnastics program. Bonnie and I would go watch, and I became quite a student of how to train young ladies in the sport. Evidently you need to have one hour sessions – probably something to do with attention spans, though 60 minutes exceeded mine by quite a bit. The time at the facility is spent as follows: checking in and waiting for the staff to get motivated enough to begin the session, participating in mind-numbing stretching exercises (we cannot have any six-year-olds pulling a muscle from running and jumping), taking a water break (wouldn't want the darlings to get dehydrated and suffer heat stroke), following each other in a line around the gym on tip toes doing an occasional summersault, sitting while the staff determines what to do next, listening to a summary of the session, and having the kids pick up the bill to take over to their parents. Oh, did I mention maybe five minutes on an actual piece of equipment, like the uneven bars?

Bonnie and I are now spending a few days each month helping out with our church's Shower Ministry. The church has a portable unit that is ready to go to aid of people in case of emergencies, but is parked and hooked up for use by homeless people when not deployed. People who use the unit and are provided towels, soap, shampoo, etc. Bonnie asked one of the men whom she had come to know if he wanted a razor, as he had a four day growth of beard. He replied, "No, it will hurt my business." That made Bonnie ask, "What's your business?" And he reached into his back pocket and unfolded a cardboard sign that said *Homeless. God Bless.* He said, "Can't be clean-shaven if you want to make any money." Now we are not characterizing all the people who use the unit as "working the street" and we do have great compassion for those we see there, but I am picking up some pointers in case the economy gets worse. And I haven't shaved now for three days.

Bonnie and Christmas. A few days ago when the garage door was open I saw a silk poinsettia sitting right there in the center of everything. "Want me to take it inside?" I asked her. She replied, "You can if you want but I put it there for anyone looking into our garage." Okay, everyone out there who decorates the *inside* of your garage for Christmas raise your hand. I thought so. In previous years I have reported on the number of boxes of Christmas "stuff" that comes out of the attic this year, and on Bonnie's Christmas crafts, and on her Christmas shoes and Christmas sweaters. For this year would you like to know how many lighted Christmas trees we have (and we're talking about trees that are at least five feet high)? One live and one artificial in the house; three artificial outside. Raise your hand if you can top that. I thought so.

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

The Braden Family:
BradenClan@gmail.com

Jay, Bonnie, kids, grandkids, and (spoiled) kat
www.BradenClan.com

