



December 1992

Happy Holidays from Seymour, Illinois

The kids are a year older, their parents are a year wiser, life on the Grand Prairie continues at its varied pace---what more can I say? We enter the holiday season with some continued uncertainty about where to live, having not made a final commitment to Seymour, or even Central Illinois. But we keep busy with work and school, manage to travel some, and have made good friends here.

Emily is a robust, talkative, exuberant seven year old; strikes Fear of Adolescence in the hearts of her parents as she begs to call her best friend on the telephone daily. Fortunately she doesn't much care what she wears or how her hair looks and has no fear of embarrassment as she dances in public places...yet. She's still a voracious reader, consuming whole series of juvenile fiction. Reading is probably her greatest passion. But she's gaining enthusiasm for piano, cooking and making interesting craft concoctions and messes throughout

the house She likes being a second grader in a 1st-2nd grade combination class, big enough to lord it over and lift up the small first graders. We've decided we probably did the right thing to have her begin school early.

Stephen is, as ever, more quiet and pensive but a deep thinker, we've decided. His questions stump us daily, and his memory serves where all the rest of us fail. We know that if Stephen says we saw an Apatosaurus at a museum two summers ago in Pennsylvania, he's probably right. He's an inveterate reader too, but less addicted to fiction than his sister (or his mother. We fall into gender stereotypes here.) After some few weeks adjusting to the hubbub of lunchtime and recess (he had it backwards, he actually preferred the classroom), he's now having a great time in first grade. He, too, is learning the piano and teaching his mother when he has the patience.

(I was perturbed to discover that bass clef was different from the treble clef I learned as a flute player thirty years ago, and not only that, both hands were supposed to play two different things at once. I marvel that a six year old will accept this as perfectly normal and possible.)

Chip managed to publish one of two books mentioned in my last annual letter and the second one is nearly done.

Electronic Quills, about the experience of introducing innovations to schools—in this case, computer writing software he and some colleagues in Boston piloted in Alaska

many years ago—is hot off the press, and a great relief it is to have these done. He continues to enjoy teaching, and has some interesting graduate students from places as far-flung as Catalonia Taiwan and El Paso.

My “book” also came out this fall, all 75 words of it—a first grade basal reading story. Chip’s may be more scholarly, but on a per word basis my royalties are more significant, just enough to take us for a weekend to Chicago. We do this more often now, in an effort to enjoy some big city pleasures, like museums, Swedish delicatessens, Indian textiles, big bookstores, fresh tortillas and good bagels.

We also managed to get to Boston and Cape Cod this summer, as well as California. In 17 years’ acquaintance, Chip had never been to my family’s cabin at Lake Tahoe, so we spent several days there, enjoying the mountains, lakes and trees which we don’t have in abundance here. We do find that the absence of scenery or things to do makes it that much more pleasurable when we visit a part of the world that has these attractions.

My work at the College of Education is fairly routine, but I’ve had some interesting opportunities: I organized an adult education course on the University’s museums and collections, and I’ve continued consulting for a youth services agency in New York, which took me to that Big City in October for a little work, lots of good food, some theatre and time with my sister.

These days both Chip and I use electronic communication constantly at work. In fact, some days Chip will receive 40 messages from across campus, across the country, and even the occasional message from Japan, Australia, France. He also gets mail from first graders and from Seymour that says things like “Will you remember to pick up the kids and stop at the store for milk today? Please?” The only problem is that he’s now collected about 40 students who really want him as their primary advisor.

I wish that this wonderful new technology had spread far enough so that lengthy personal messages might be sent with a holiday card and photo to all friends and relations with a simple [return] click.

Anyway, we send our heartfelt best wishes.