

Christmas 2008



Jenny in Madrid

Jenny continues to love her job as a financial controller and similar roles for a number of small companies, working through her employer, Virtual CFO. She “passed” on a number of assignments last summer so she (and Charlie) could help Mark, fixing up his house, and other duties. Then as the economic slump deepened this fall, her assignments were sparse enough that the average hours dropped below the level of a full time employee. She would lose her benefits and have to buy her own health insurance. Hours after Charlie put the check in the mail, additional assignments materialized, and she remained a “full-time” employee. Still it was reassuring that we could handle the uncertainty without concern, unlike many of the younger folks we know.

Charlie officially became old this year... he is no longer a dependent on Jenny’s health insurance – he is now on Medicare. Enrolling was so complex (especially if you are not going to collect Social Security yet) that Jenny had him document the process and pitfalls for our friends (Jenny says EVERYONE is younger) – see www.plesums.com/medicare.html. Charlie continued to have a backlog of projects for his furniture making business, although he pushed off some projects to help Mark this summer. By fall Jenny put her foot down, and got some family woodworking projects on the calendar for after the first of the year.



Charlie's new passport



Stacey, Chelsea, and Mark

Last Christmas Mark switched jobs to be one of the Database Administrators for Ignite Technologies, just a few miles from his home in Frisco. Like most DBA jobs, it has its frantic and irritating moments, but he is working with friends, and the commute can’t be better. Just after Thanksgiving he bought his first NEW car, a 2009 Acura TL. He is continuing to date (2½ years now) a wonderful lady, Stacey, and we call her neat 14 year old daughter Chelsea our “candidate granddaughter.” Part of this summer’s work at Mark’s house was helping him decorate and furnish for Stacey and Chelsea. No diamond or wedding date yet, but things are looking serious.

At the end of March we went to Madrid for a week. Great city, nice museums, but we don’t know about the food... we had one nice lunch, then Jenny spent the rest of the visit “hanging on” and eating light snacks. Language was an interesting challenge... We have had little trouble traveling in Tokyo, Budapest, Stockholm, Vienna, or other cities, but Madrid was a problem. Not many Americans speak multiple languages since English is the second most common language in the world (after Chinese). Since Spanish is the third most common language, not many Spaniards speak English. Jenny’s pocket was picked (just like Charlie’s in São Paulo) so the combination made this less than our favorite trip. That isn’t stopping Jenny from planning something for 2009.

At the end of April we made the “visit family” circuit to Minnesota and Iowa, to visit two of Jenny’s brothers and their family, and her mother and new husband (doing great as a newlywed at 85). One goal was to buy premium lumber from Jim’s favorite sawyer (a part time guy with a home-made sawmill). We got about 1000 pounds of lumber in the back of the Honda Odyssey for the trip back to Texas.

The schedule for the trip north was based on the Berkshire Hathaway Annual meeting. You only have to own one of the cheap “B” shares (not the \$100,000+ “A” shares that everyone knows about), to gets tickets to join 30,000 of your closest friends being entertained in Omaha on the first weekend in May by Warren Buffett and his partner, Charlie Munger.

Jenny has become an avid quilter, has attended major quilt shows in Houston and Austin, and has made countless quilts, large and small. Some things she does less well... on October 22 she harvested the first tomatoes from a plant nurtured all season, similar to the 11 ounce potato crop last year. The silver bowl is a teaspoon.



We wish you peace and joy this Christmas season and hope you have a very Happy New Year.

Jenny and Charlie