

Dec 2007

The Second Annual Milz Family Christmas Letter

2007 has been a year of great joy and great sorrow for our family. Let us begin by explaining why our Christmas letter is arriving after the new year. As many of you know Steve's mom, Mary Ann, was diagnosed with bone cancer in the fall of 2006. At the on-set of her illness she set a goal of returning to Disney with Steve's dad, Jim, to see the Animal Kingdom and attend "Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party." After numerous rounds of chemotherapy, three surgeries (including a femur-knee replacement), pneumonia, hospitalizations, "experimental" chemo pills, and countless doctor appointments and tests, she made it to Disney the first week of December. After a wonderful week at Disney, which included Mickey's party, a room with a great view of the Animal Kingdom, and trips to all of the Disney theme parks, Jim and Mary Ann rented a van and headed to visit us on December 12th. Unfortunately Mary Ann's health started to decline on the trip and continued to decline at our house. We had her transported to the hospital on December 15th where she lost her valiant 15-month battle with cancer the following day. There are not words to express the sorrow and great loss that we are all feeling at this time. Of course we traveled to Pennsylvania to help with arrangements and attend the wake and funeral. Mary Ann felt strongly that Jacob needed to spend his first Christmas at home, so we returned to Florida on Christmas Eve (after our flight was cancelled on the 23rd) in time to celebrate Peggy's Aunt Sally's birthday and attend Christmas Eve services at Trinity United Methodist Church. We also had quite the surprise when we awoke to a white Christmas in Florida – a hail storm covered the ground and rooftops with a layer of white!

We did mention there was joy, too, right? Oh yes – JOY, or should we say – BOY?!? We spent the first quarter of the 2007 continuing to settle into our new home and preparing for Baby Jacob's arrival. Peggy's friend Brenda came from Cleveland to visit one weekend, giving us an excuse to take a break from baby preparations and take the scenic drive to Seaside and walk on the sugary white beaches we love. We attended child birthing classes at the hospital and met a wonderful couple, Moni & Carrie, who were "older" first time parents just like us and only live about 15 minutes away. Peggy's cousin Vicki and her mom Joan hosted a lovely baby shower in Pensacola. Unfortunately Steve's sister Janet and our nieces, Rachel and Sarah, got stuck in PA by a nor'easter, but Peggy's friend Mindy made it down from Chicago. It was a Mardi Gras-themed shower, just like Peggy's bachelorette party, which was held exactly one year before. It is amazing that we went from beads and beer bottles to beads and baby bottles in one short year. Of course that was just the beginning of the changes... Baby Jacob arrived via c-section on April 5th, Peggy's parents' 41st anniversary. To say Peggy was upset about having a c-section would be an understatement. She loves her OB (and so does Steve because she let him bring a cooler of beer into the L&D room), and even got her upset, but once Jacob was safely "outside" they were able to determine the problem – his head had gotten stuck in Peggy's pelvic bone and he wasn't going anywhere without help.

In spite of an excessive weight loss Jacob came home from the hospital on Easter Sunday where Gramma & Grandpa Bowling, Uncle Seth, Aunt Sally, and our dog Riley were anxiously waiting to greet him (actually at 15+ years old Riley wasn't overly excited about greeting a new addition to the family). In addition to the welcoming committee and the Easter Bunny, there had been another visitor while we were in the hospital – our pool contractor. They broke ground for our pool the day after Jacob was born. This was much later than we originally wanted, but it worked out well because Peggy was around to keep an eye on things during her "maternity leave." Peggy stayed home for six weeks after Jacob was born and worked part-time from home. Of course this never would have been possible without the help of Peggy's parents. Her mom stayed with us during most of that time. Jacob lost significantly more than the "acceptable" 10% of his body weight, which required daily trips to the pediatrician for weight checks and ultimately formula supplements. Peggy's newly-engaged friend, Kris, came out from Phoenix before Peggy went back to work full-time and the pre-wedding festivity planning began.

Peggy's first Mother's Day was very low key. Peggy's family came to visit, Steve took his first dip in the new pool, and Peggy was very sick battling her first (of many) round of mastitis. We made up for it in true Milz-fashion on Steve's first Father's Day when we celebrated Jacob's baptism. Steve's entire family came from PA to celebrate with us and Peggy's family. Jacob was baptized at Trinity, by the pastor who officiated our wedding ceremony. His Godparents are his Uncle Seth and Aunt Janet.

July marked the annual running of the Brickyard 400 NASCAR race in Indy. Before the race we headed to PA, where Peggy and Jacob stayed with Mary Ann while Steve and his dad went to the race. On the way to PA we got upgraded to first class and told Jacob not to get used to it! It was a very hot few days in northeast PA and there is no air conditioning at Steve's parents' house. We made the best of it, and Peggy and Jacob were able to attend Rachel's baptism with Mary Ann while the guys were in Indy. From PA we flew to Chicago for several days. Peggy still does some side work for a client there and that is all the excuse we need to go visit our friends. It was a busy several days and some of the highlights included a trip to Brookfield Zoo with the Causas, a cookout/swim party at the Bensons', dinner in Greektown with the Stacks, celebrating Jacob turning 5 months old in Peggy's old stomping ground on the southside with the Campiones, enjoying Chicago-style pizza in the city with Nancy, Jacob's meet-and-greet with Peggy's clients at LaVezzi and SeamCraft, Steve and Jacob's trip to Wisconsin while Peggy worked, and an unplanned cab ride and extra night at a hotel near O'Hare when bad weather delayed our return home. Needless to say, we were all quite exhausted when we returned home after 13 days away.

Jacob's first flight was the first of many this year. The fall was quite a blur and it seems we spent more time out of town than in town. We took monthly trips to PA to visit Steve's family. Each trip was eventful – a surprise 60th birthday party for Steve's mom and dad, Steve's 20th high school reunion, two trips to the pediatric urgent care center when Jacob came down with a very bad stomach virus (that was a ROUGH weekend – especially 1000 miles away from home), a family Thanksgiving celebration, Santa pictures with all of the grandkids, and visits with several of Steve's high school friends: Dave and his wife Julie, Al and his wife Denise, Jay and his wife Danielle, Ray, Henry, and Paul.

In August Peggy's friend Liz and her daughter Kate came from Tampa to visit and meet Jacob. Kate introduced Jacob to his stuffed monkey, who Steve has subsequently named "Bocephus the Rhesus." In September our family "grew" when Liz asked us to be Kate's Godparents. We were very honored.

In September Steve and Jacob had their first bachelor weekend when Peggy hosted Kris's bachelorette party in Mexico. It was hard for Peggy to leave. Steve and Jacob had a good time, but Steve was glad when Peggy got home just in time for Jacob's first tooth to cut through. In November we left Jacob "parentless" for the first time when we went to Phoenix for Kris and Ken's wedding. It was a very busy, fun four days and thanks to Gramma and Grandpa Bowling, Jacob had a great time too. As if all of that wasn't enough, hours after returning on the redeye from the wedding, Jacob, Gramma Joan and Peggy headed for Long Boat Key, FL so Peggy could attend a weeklong conference. Steve, Grandpa, and Riley joined us the following weekend for some fun in Sarasota. The highlight of the weekend was our trip to the Ringling Brothers Circus Museum with Liz and Kate.

Jacob is truly the light of our life. He attends a family daycare and is very happy there. We absolutely love his daycare provider, Ms. Brenda, and she loves Jacob. In addition to spending time with his daycare friends, visiting Kate and his cousins Rachel and Sarah, he also has fun swimming and playing with his friend Adeline. It's nearly time for Jacob's 9-month checkup and to see him now you'd never believe he had weight loss issues when he was first born. Topping the scales at over 22 pounds already, he's quite the growing little boy!

Steve still loves working as a software engineering consultant for the Air Force and is traveling from time to time working on the new Joint Strike Fighter project. In addition to being a full-time mom, Peggy is still a Director and the Ethics Officer for L-3 Communications Crestview Aerospace. Like many new moms she is still trying to juggle all of her roles (including her volunteer work) to find a good balance. We have two guest rooms and a pool, we are minutes away from the beach, and we love to have visitors, so please plan a trip to visit – it's beautiful! Despite the hardship we faced this year, we have been truly blessed and wish the same for all of you. We hope you had a very Merry Christmas and wish you a Happy New Year!

Steve, Peggy, and Jacob Milz

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