

Dec 2009

The Fourth Annual Milz Family Christmas Letter

After celebrating Christmas 2008 with a house full of company for nine days, we would have loved to ease into 2009. Of course with Baby Girl Milz (BGM) due to make her debut in two short months there was no time for rest. We spent the first two months of the year trying to complete as many unfinished projects as possible and preparing for BGM's arrival. After looking at literally hundreds of nursery decors we selected a ladybug theme for the nursery and bought lots of pink clothes. Those girly clothes multiplied when Peggy's work friends threw a shower for her the week before BGM was born. To say we had a difficult time choosing a name for our new bundle of joy would be an understatement. BGM was born on Friday, March 6th and we had to have the birth certificate clerk come back to the hospital on Sunday so that we could name her before being discharged. After much deliberation we finally selected Julia Claire, a.k.a. Baby Sister. Peggy's parents and Steve's dad were in town for the birth - a wonderful blessing especially since Jacob got sick the night before Julia was born.

Jacob continues to amaze us with every passing day. We regularly look at each with an expression of amazement about something he has just done or said. This past year has been a busy one for Jacob. He took swimming lessons with his friend Adeline in the spring. He was apprehensive during lessons, but once he started swimming in our pool regularly he really started getting braver. By the end of June he was swimming alone with his vest, jumping in from the side and off of the waterfall, and having Mom and Dad "rocket launch" him into the air allowing him to come splashing down into the water. In the fall he participated in Mini Me soccer. As one of the youngest kids in the league he got off to a slow start, but made great improvements by the end. He is still quite the talker and we hold our breath every Sunday that he goes to sit on the altar steps for Children's Moments literally praying that he won't say anything that causes us to want to climb under the pew. Jacob's obsessions continue to be reading (and in many cases memorizing) books, trucks of any kind (he knows his truck types better than most adults), tools, and Thomas the Train. He wants Santa to bring him the three Thomas cranes and he told us that he was going to trade Santa cookies and milk for the three cranes he wants. Are we raising a future politician??? One minute he is a very sweet little boy who is singing a song to his crying baby sister and trying to console her and the next he is throwing a temper tantrum or he has moved his chair over to his desk and climbed up to get down a toy he wants from his hutch. Jacob wants to do everything "all by myself!" Ah - the terrible twos!! There is never a dull (or quiet) moment at our house and we are still looking for a way to bottle some of his excess energy and use it for ourselves!

When Julia was a newborn we were concerned because she slept A LOT!! We know - who complains when your newborn sleeps a lot? - but ~20 hours a day was a little scary for us. Of course she is making up for all of that now. Although she was the spitting image of Jacob when she was born, teathed early (seven so far), and was quite the little "tooter" like her brother, she seems to have a much different personality. Julia wants what she wants when she wants it, and she is not afraid to go for it. For a "little" girl she is pretty tough and moves fast. She still prefers "army man crawling" to crawling on her knees, but that's because she moves very quickly. She has been pulling up on things and standing while holding onto things for about six weeks now. She wants to be standing all of the time, but we are extra nervous when she stands on the tile floors. Julia is generally a happy baby, which she demonstrates by smiling frequently and sticking out her tongue. She has this position that she gets herself into, which we call "the pose." It is difficult to describe, so Steve has promised to put one of the many pictures we have of her in "the pose" on our website before our letters are in the mail. Julia attends home day care with Jacob. She is the youngest in the group, which provides her opportunities to demonstrate how tough she is. This week Peggy got to witness her take a toy from an older child and hang on so tightly that he couldn't get it back from her. Amazing! Both kids love Ms. Brenda, who won this year's home day care provider of the year award for our county and the neighboring county. Julia is a wonderful blessing who is growing up way too fast for us!

After several years of unsuccessfully resolving to stay home more, we actually had limited travels this year. In July Steve went to the Brickyard 400 NASCAR race in Indy with his dad and a few weeks later (the weekend before her 40th birthday) Peggy went to San Antonio for her annual Girls' Trip. In September we all headed to Dallas with Peggy, Jacob and Julia piggy-backing on a trip Steve had to Lockheed Martin. We stayed with the Julia's Godparents, Bridget and John Miller and their son Benjamin and spent time visiting Steve's sister Janet, her husband David, and our nieces Rachel and Sarah. The weather was not cooperative but we had a great time with our friends and family. In October Peggy and Steve went to Tallahassee to see the *So You Think You Can Dance Tour*. Yes, we *both* had a nice time and enjoyed some "couple" time even though we were only gone for one night. In November we all headed to central Florida where Peggy was attending her company's ethics conference. Steve and the kids enjoyed the beautiful Long Boat Key Club resort while Peggy spent time discussing ethics. After the conference we headed to Orlando where we spent a few fun-filled days with our friends Dave and Julie Morgan and their kids Emma and Evan. We all spent a wonderful day at Disney's Magic Kingdom. Jacob really enjoyed the rides, parades, fireworks, and hugging Mickey and Minnie. Julia was such a trooper all day and night and we couldn't have asked for anything more from her! The next day we made a stop at Downtown Disney where we had a prehistoric lunch at the T-Rex Café, before heading over to Lakeland to see our Goddaughter Kate and her mom Liz Ruppert.

We had a nice time visiting with them and going to the Lakeland Children's Museum and Dinosaur World. We finished off our 2009 travels with a trip to Gramma and Grandpa's for Thanksgiving. We all had a really great time and enjoyed celebrating with Peggy's parents, brothers Seth and Cale, sister-in-law Connie, Aunt Sally and our new nephew Wyatt.

For those of you who don't know, Steve celebrated his 40th birthday this year. Peggy was able to COMPLETELY surprise him (with the help of some friends and family members) with a party at a beach vacation rental in Destin. Friends and family from near and far came to celebrate this great milestone with us. Steve is still astonished that Peggy was able to pull this off (including getting Steve's dad, grandma, Uncle Frank, sister, brother-in-law, and two nieces to fly in) without any inkling that something was going on. We are so grateful for everyone who came and helped make this such a memorable event!

Staying home more allowed us to keep our guest room pretty booked again this year. After Julia was born the grandpas headed home, but Gramma stayed behind to help out. This was very much appreciated since Peggy started working from home the day after coming home from the hospital. Spring break was a **very** busy week at our house. Peggy's friend Mindy Causa, her husband Mike and their sons James, Ethan, Luke and Adam (a.k.a. "the Causa Boys" according to Jacob) came down from Chicago for a week. They actually stayed at a condo on the beach so we spent time down there too. However Julia and Peggy couldn't go down to the beach. ☹ When Peggy asked our pediatrician's nurse about taking Julia to the beach she just laughed. Steve piped in to explain "she's serious!" and the nurse, whom we adore, proceeded to hit Peggy with Julia's chart. Apparently we won't be winning any Parenting awards this year. The day the Causas left Steve's dad, grandma, uncle, sister, and nieces flew in to attend Jacob's 2nd birthday party (construction truck-themed, go figure) on 4/4 and Julia's baptism on 4/5 (Jacob's birthday.) Of course Peggy's parents, brother and aunt and many of our "local" friends were also here to help us celebrate. In May the Millers came for a wonderful, relaxing, long weekend, and in June the Morgans came for a fun but (too) short visit. The Rupperts spent July 4th with us (including the annual Braxton July 4th party next to the awesome fireworks over Pensacola Bay) and returned from Tampa for another long weekend in August. In September Peggy's friend Nancy stopped in for a laid back night while she was down in the panhandle from Chicago on business. Peggy's cousin Vicki and her daughter Kaelyn will be here for New Year's. Of course Peggy's parents and Uncle Seth have visited numerous times this year and will be here for Christmas.

Yes, we know we need to have our heads examined, but we decided to do even more volunteer work this year. We continue to attend church at Trinity United Methodist in Fort Walton Beach and finally became members last February. Steve is still the webmaster for our church and will take on the Church Council position of technology chair in January. Peggy taught Vacation Bible School again this summer, is serving on the Gifts for Children and Membership Directory committees and just assumed responsibility, with two other mom's in the church, for running the nursery and "supervising" the paid nursery staff. Steve is still a board member and webmaster for both the local Penn State Alumni Association chapter and the shooting range. He continues to be quite the skilled shooter and is always one of the top scorers in spite of his lack of practice this year. He tries to get to at least one International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) match each month but with two kids and the rest of our commitments he isn't always successful. He's the local IDPA group's webmaster too. By now you should understand why our website hasn't been updated for a loooooong time. Peggy has continued her volunteer work with the American Society for Quality (ASQ). She is still the treasurer for the local ASQ section and a Technical Committee Chair for the national Quality Management Division of ASQ. Peggy also volunteered for the county's school mentoring program. She is still attempting to venture into scrapbooking, but always seems to have other priorities.

Steve still loves working as a software engineering consultant for the Air Force. He continues to work on many projects, but the Joint Strike Fighter project is consuming more of his time and driving most of his business travel. He still dabbles a bit with his friends Tim and Jeff in their web development and hosting side-business. Peggy is now into her fifth year (truly unbelievable!!!) as a director and the ethics officer for L-3 Communications Crestview Aerospace. Running the training and continuous process improvement departments while managing the ethics program for a company with 1000 employees is challenging and provides interesting dinner conversation. She still does a little consulting for a long-time client in Chicago.

We have a guest room, a hot tub and a heated pool, and we are minutes away from the beach. We miss our friends and family and would love to have you visit, so come on down! It's beautiful! As this busy, joy-filled year draws to a close we are reminded that we have been truly blessed and wish the same for all of you. We hope you have a very Merry Christmas and we wish you a Happy New Year!

Steve, Peggy, Jacob and Julia Milz

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