



Ho Ho Ho! Greetings from Hiram, Ohio - land harboring the lost correspondent! I have been consumed with the activity of daily life, and seem to have lost the ability to communicate with people beyond my immediate sphere of interaction. Last year, being clever, I reserved New Years Day to be my letter writing extravaganza day. I knew you all have low expectations of correspondence from me in a timely fashion. Thus I decided to meet the perceived expectations, and was foiled yet again. Grandma McGowan became ill, and passed away. We spent the start of the New Year in Chicago, and from there time just seemed to slip away.

Christopher, my anti-social husband, has become an elected official and a coffee Guru. He was first appointed to the water board last spring and then had to run for the position the following fall. His platform included a promise to raise rates and annoy the local public affairs chairman. On the strength of such statements, and lack of an additional candidate,

Christopher became the water guy. As water-boy (no relation to the movie) he says enough at council meetings to keep everyone stirred up. On the coffee front, Starbucks has been deemed Charbucks (not by me) and we now have a relationship with 'Tom' of Sweet Maria's formerly of Columbus (and confirming Christopher's belief that Columbus is a sink hole) currently residing in San Francisco. Christopher imports green beans and roasts them himself. He also purchased a LaPavoni, an espresso machine that looks both impressive and intimidating. My friends are exceedingly impressed, and not only do they (and their relatives) seek his 'professional' opinion about coffee paraphernalia, they talked him into serving as a barista at a local community coffee house! All of this and he drinks one cup of coffee a day! He does still hold a day job with Picker/Marconi/Philips. They are now part of a six billion medical division of Philips. He finished upgrading his MSCE to 2k early this year- a computer certification he has but must keep current with continual tests. He also has had to travel more, spending time in Chicago for RSNA the largest medical radiological show in the world. RSNA has conveniently arranged his annual Chicago trip to coincide with Thanksgiving. He drops in for dinner and returns missing the Loewke Christmas Party in Rochester. As he lost his closet, when Talia commandeered the guestroom, he spent the summer digging out a portion of the basement. He has removed a phenomenal amount of dirt. Eventually we should have a new 10 by 12 space under the dining room (It was formerly a dirt crawl space). Some portion will be his closet - he thinks he needs more than a pipe in the basement. The remainder has had several suggestions; I'm still waiting until the space is truly available.

Sophia, who spent last year being eight, has now settled on age 4. Following her November birthday this year, I said, "How do you like being 3?" Her reply, "I four." I foolishly responded, "No, no, Sophie you're three

now." "I four." "Sophie, you're three." "I have two birthdays! I four." And so she did. Her best friend is her cousin Eili (Biz & Todd's daughter), of Dayton who came for one birthday party, and we had another party with her other best friend (my neighbor and partner in crime) Denise and her husband and children. I am hoping that regardless of her new age, that we will experience more controlled adventure in her life. The summer prior to her second birthday, she made a habit of leaving the house to visit her friend Denise across the street. She also went to school to visit her sisters, and liked to strip down and direct traffic in the street. These adventures often occurring when her mother thought she was in bed. We have installed a deadbolt just for her. You'll know we're home when it's locked! She also does not count sleeping in her repertoire of tricks. She and her daddy often are up until midnight, she's up at least once in the night, and she and her mommy spend quality time early in the morning. My mother couldn't understand why I couldn't get anything done, until she tried to accomplish a task while watching the children. Sophie and Eili (a.k.a. "Thing One and Thing Two") began working well together early on. Eili boosts Sophia up, and then Sophia reaches back down and halls Eili up. In this manner they were able to secure Gramie's address book (located in a cabinet over the microwave), and gain access to the liquor cabinet (on the stairs). They shared the wealth with the dog, washing her and the address book expensive liquors. They have also emptied the medicine cabinet, found and consumed Grandma Loewke's ExLax (they were kind enough to share with their sisters and brother - that's how we caught them!) My mother now offers to take Sophie and her sisters away so I can accomplish things! The bottom line is that Sophia is phenomenally focused, smart, and keeps us off balance with a lack of sleep. Her ability to keep up with her sisters is amazing. She is quite the hiker, and is doing great on the tag-a-long bike. In October we joined a Mommy and Me preschool class that meets once a week. She loves school. She brings books to read

to her teacher and loves painting, singing and dancing. Her two favorite friends are Lilly and Scotty (our only boy in a class of eight). She is also quite the cook, loving to crack eggs, measure, and stir. However, she has a limited diet, consisting of any type of meat, dip, salad, apples, noodles and sauce, and any processed food on the market. She has an intense relationship with the ladies at the meat counter, that the ladies at the cookie counter just can't compete with.

Olivia has finished kindergarten and is in first grade. I don't know how that happened. Sophia was extremely distraught that Olivia goes to school every day, all day. Olivia often acts as Sophie's surrogate parent (For a long time Sophie called Olivia MumMum) and they love to pretend together. This summer she mastered both her two-wheeler - on and off sidewalk, and swimming in the deep end. We moved Talia into her own room and now Olivia can choose her own music. She continues to listen to opera (tenors) and folk music. She is also my garden partner. She and I planted a fairy garden this year that turned out to be very cool. She is willing to weed with me and loves to plant. She is learning to read, and loves to hear historical fiction. Recently she opened worship at the children's service at church, and her poise and timing were excellent. Last spring she started playing soccer and the harp. She is our deeply contemplative and spiritual child.

Talia is nine and queen of the third grade. Last winter we redid the guest room for her; one wall is lime green, one hot pink, one purple, and one is chartreuse. Her rug is deep purple and her bedding is a conglomeration of all of the above. It is very cool (even my mom - queen of off white - said it was o.k.). It is also representative of its inhabitant! She was selected for a gifted program at school. They are studying ancient Greece and encouraged to do a lot of writing. I am amazed at her writing ability, as well as her reading level. Harry Potter has had to be in

time out on a variety of occasions because at midnight we find her rereading one of them for the forth, fifth, and sixth time. She also blows through Trixie Belden, Nancy Drew, and a historical diary series of famous queens and princesses. She is currently lobbying for a flashlight of her own so she can read under the covers. She has also started a 'disaster' book club at school. Their first topic is the Titanic. After heavy negotiations with her father, she has become the proud owner of a hamster, named Athena. She is doing ballet; girl scouts, and is a junior volunteer at Hatti Larlhams (a residential school for severely physically and mentally handicapped children.) As we have recently acquired a piano from my aunt and uncle, she wants to start lessons later this winter.

Last summer Christopher and I stripped the woodwork in our TV room, and painted it orange. Christopher installed a mini blind so he can make it really dark and enjoy his nifty new HDTV television that has a multitude of remotes and options that are beyond me. However, the children are fairly competent in this department. The girls and I spent a couple of days with my aunt and cousins in Allegheny State park this summer, and it was pure magic. They have tons of programs through out the day, tons of trails to hike (guided and Unguided), a lake to swim in, and prolific wild life. We saw porcupines, raccoons that had no fear of cars or people, deer, a black bear, beavers, hawks, eagles, we caught creek wild life, and I had an up close and personal encounter with a skunk. He thought sitting under my canvas chair was a wonderful vantage point for watching the 3 a.m. campfire. Thankfully he did not feel compelled to share his perfume with me. My family spent a wonderful forth of July here in Hiram, and the following week we collected my godson Jordan, a popup trailer, and my parents van and headed west. We visited the Arch and had a short Mississippi River cruise (on a diesel boat masquerading as a paddle boat), and continued west. My husband and children didn't believe there could be

so much of Kansas. While passing through, a moving van caught fire on I-70, and we visited the back roads of Kansas. The battle of the GPS and traditional maps allowed my father and Christopher extensive practice backing-up with a trailer in tow. We were part of the nighttime entertainment on two of the dead-end dirt roads we traveled. We eventually camped at Ft. Riley, and spent the following day baking across Kansas. The air-conditioning had issues, though we were grateful that we were registering a mere 92 degrees inside, as Jordan discovered that it was 115 outside, it made the relative coolness of Colorado Springs all the more delightful. We continued the cool down process in the snow at the top of Pikes Peak. However, we also discovered that red kool-aid and altitude sickness are an ugly mixture. We explored Indian cliff dwelling, Garden of the Gods, and the Air Force Academy before heading through the front-range and the hot springs in Saratoga, WY. While laying in the hot springs in the river, a mule deer passed about 15 feet from us. We continued through the snowy range and arrived in Cheyenne in time for Frontier Days. It held all the magic I remember from my childhood. The girls and Ben got cowboy hats, and Jordan found an Indian Kachina. We also attended concerts and the rodeo. Mom, Dad, and Ben headed home, and we continued on to Thermopolis. The statpark has an awesome hot springs that feeds a pool that had a three story slide, high dive, inside and outside pools, hot tubs, and natural hot sauna. It was a great day. We then spent three days in Grand Teton National Park. We day tripped into Yellowstone, but found Grand Teton a much nicer park to stay in. On the way home we hit Devil's Tower with prairie dog town, Crazy Horse, Mt. Rushmore, and spent time with family in Chicago, enjoying the A/C and sorely missed showers. Sophie made several friends with other tourists, who remembered her from national park to national park. The other children (and I) had a great time with the junior ranger badge programs. They provided tons of cool learning opportunities. On the home front Christopher and I have added huge gardens to both the front and back

yards. We have added some paths and places for the girls and their friends to dance through. As we back up to the school, several of our friends use the back garden as a way home. On warm days our back yard has been known to host 15 children and the assorted adults they travel with. Christopher has built some copper arches and I have made several gardening friends to share nifty new finds with. The Kindergarten/first grade planted morning glories here last spring and came back to check on them in the fall. In general it has been a great adventure. I have been drafted into a host of pseudo-teaching positions. I have been doing a first grade writing workshop, doing some co-teaching with the library skills teacher, and I continue to teach our bi-weekly exercise class. I also managed to get drafted into co-teaching the high school Sunday school class with a college student. It is the group of really cool kids that I had threatened to fail in fifth and sixth grade to keep them for myself! I am still the third grade girl-scout leader, and it is a privilege to hang out with such vivacious young women.

This Fall Sophia and I accompanied my friend Ellen to Washington, DC to attend her cousins Bat Mitzvah. As directionally challenged as I am, I was still able to find our old town house and wander in the woods. It was a great stroll down memory lane. With the support and cheering of my father, I completed my first marathon this fall. We were walking and my only goal was to finish, but who knew a mile could be so long? I started negotiating with Daddy to leave me at about mile 18, but with singing, cajoling, ordering, and humming, he got us to the end. Next year we're going to lower my time! Biz and Todd ran the marathon, did well and stayed to cheer for us. I am also closing in on graduation. In December, I took my final class for my masters. I need to implement my research, and will present my paper on March 17th.

For those of you who knew Randi, our smelly but (shhh dare I say dog?) faithful and graceful friend, with her impeccable timing passed away last week. On

a quiet afternoon dedicated to playing in the snow and reading books, she stretched out by her bed and went to sleep. Please forgive my lapse in correspondence; the blessings of friends and family are a priceless gift. Each of you is treasured in our hearts.

Jo, Christopher, Talia, Olivia, Sophia

Summer and misc. trip pictures: <http://www.5cobbs.com/>
Randi's memorial web page:
<http://5cobbs.com/chris/randi/Randi.html/>