

For the sheer shock value, I thought I might try sending our family Christmas letter at Christmas. It seemed like a novelty; though writing it and getting it in the mail are two very different things in my world!

Time seems to evaporate, and we have found ourselves with a teenage driver this year. Talia turned 16 last week, but in Ohio you can get your temporary license at 15 ½. It seemed like a clever idea, until I found myself in the passenger seat, realizing just how narrow country roads are and how deep the culverts. She is doing a wonderful job and doesn't lack confidence. She was busy in June visiting Costa Rica with her High Adventure Girl Scout troop (HAGS), so she didn't get her temps until July. Christopher's first trip with her lasted nearly 6 minutes and ended with loud chanting that may have alluded to a religious experience. Aunt Biz was a much bigger help; she bought driving helmets, and taught Talia that all trips ended with Talia fetching Biz a beer. As a driving teacher, I recommend laughter, and a lot of door and tongue holding! Talia finished her freshman year with straight A's, and as a sophomore she continues to be active in student council, drama, and band. She marched with her tuba last year, but has transitioned into the color guard this year. She stills plays her tuba in concert band, and they have been invited to perform at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, this spring. (Road trip!) She was selected to participate in a "Pre-Professional Academy". It is providing her with the opportunity to pursue writing opportunities. She is also quite the social butterfly, planning outings and parties including a summer tie-dye party, and a pre-Homescoming party for 30 kids and their parents. She is also a voracious reader and very hip on all the latest shows and music. She keeps tutoring me, so I don't fall into the black hole of 80's and 90's!

Olivia is in eighth grade this year, and is growing like a weed. This summer she passed Talia, then me, and by fall she had passed Uncle Jimmy. She is putting those long legs to work running cross-country and playing basketball. Her team won regionals and she significantly improved her personal time over the cross-country season. Her basketball coach raves about her, and the high school coach has come down to see her play. In typical Olivia fashion, she isn't sure basketball is for her next year and may swim. She is a girl that knows her own mind, and is not easily swayed. She continues to play oboe and is looking forward to high school band next year. Her band was invited to participate in a special program in Columbus this fall, and it included an overnight stay. She is also a member of her school leadership program and is working on earning an honors award offered by her school. She is a thoughtful person and wanting to right the wrongs of the world at large, as well as the perceived injustices that surround her.

Sophie moved into double digits this year. We share a hallway at school, and I often think that, that must be a heavy burden to carry. With children and parents waiting to tattle on her to me and vice versa. However, she has excellent teachers and has handled it all with grace. If I really want something, I send her as my ambassador; as our principal and the secretaries think she walks on water (barefoot still) and never tell her no. She also has her daddy wrapped around her finger, still getting breakfast in bed 2 years after her broken leg healed! They watch Sponge Bob together too, though I have caught Christopher watching it without her more than once. She has been invited to participate in a Math Club and has a Spanish pen pal. She has become quite the little reader. She has read every American Girl book multiple times and has been working on Harry Potter. We catch her up with a flashlight often. She was dedicated to daily tree climbing through out the summer and fall. When she sets a goal, she is very determined to achieve it. She is also in Girl Scouts and has started guitar lessons this year. She is also the proud parent of a baby bunny, Beano.

Christopher is still working at Philips. When he is home, he lives in and around the Taj-ma Garage. We visit him there, leave food offerings, and he does come in to sleep. The results are stunning. He and his father sided the entire garage this fall. Olivia also helped quite a bit, and Sophie loved to supervise! The upstairs has been divided into 2 rooms, wired for all future technological possibilities, thus I'll need a kid to operate it. He has also done extensive insulation and the drywall is complete. He is currently installing a former maple gym floor upstairs. I hope his kids let him have access when he's finished. He spent 9 days in Florida helping my parents remodel their condo kitchen last spring and spent 2 additional weeks in Chicago this fall working the RSNA show. He has also spent some time helping his father work on their cabin in SE Ohio. Each absence reminds us just how much he really does here. Four out of four polled agreed, it

is ok to take Daddy with us or leave him home, but we do not like being left! The driving schedule alone is enough to do me in!

Forty and I had a fabulous encounter this year. We celebrated the occasion in style with my friends and family conspiring to throw me a party. Biz, Todd, and Mom did all the food and with their usual flare and class. It was a wonderful time to count blessings for the supportive friends I have collected through the years. The fact that my family knows so many of my friends by name is a testament to their willingness to bridge the distance of space. Even my cousins from NY were able to make the trek. We laughed until we cried; I don't think I've ever enjoyed a party as much. In reality, what more could anyone ask for than the gift of love, support, and laughter? And really yummy food! However, there was more, with Christopher plotting with my co-workers and family to have another surprise dinner with my entire immediate family on my actual birthday. Christopher also nudged me into new technology with a tiny (AKA netbook) computer – and I have become a Face book connoisseur. . It has been wonderful to catch up with old friends sitting in my Jammies! Though I still, much to his dismay, refuse to e-mail him when he is next to me! My fabulous at forty image was further boosted with my dream car, a VW Bug. I've never been one that is much about speed, or cars for that matter, but let's just say the little old lady from Pasadena may have some Hiram competition. Christopher may even get the excellent husband award this year!

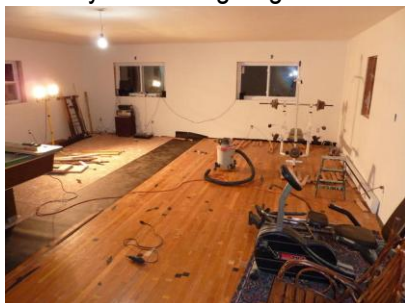
The cute car has made several short jaunts to New York and Dayton. I spent at least a portion of 13 out 14 weekends in one place or the other this fall. You know I hate to miss anything! One weekend, my friend Sarah and I completed the Air Force Marathon, beating our own time goal by 20 minutes. I have also dragged other co-workers into walking programs. I still love teaching fourth grade, and learn something new everyday. My book club friends keep me grounded, and my kids keep me on the road! Though I always find time to travel! While Christopher was busy planning the 2 day 4th of July festival, Olivia, Sophie and I joined Jimmy, Krissy, James and Mek on a 2 week western adventure. Talia was in Costa Rico. Jimmy borrowed the silver bullet (Dad's Airstream), Mek and I tent camped. PS It is still really cold in the mountains in June, in a tent. Sherpa Mekay saw to all our needs though, and once I was warm at night, all was well! The Tetons have always been my favorite park, but I believe Glacier National Park may have surpassed its place in my heart. The beauty and peacefulness is indescribable. Having Jimmy, the professional spotter, helped us check almost every animal off our list. We saw a grizzly mama and her cubs, black bears, met the mountain goats, hiked with moose, and played chicken and tag with a pair of buffalo for several miles along a mountain road. In the words of James (age 2 ½), "WATCH OUT BUFF-U-E-O!" Visiting the sights we loved as children, with our children was a riot, there is always new perspective! We also spent our annual week in Allegany State Park with my sister Biz, Eili, Ben, and assorted cousins, and aunts. Teenage girls significantly out numbered everyone else this year. They give an entirely new flavor to the campfire. We learned several new songs and coordinating dances. I will never look at a sprinkler the same way again! And there are jokes about bacon, and when we like you better, that cannot be explained without joining our experience. You may consider this an invitation to come! Our annual summer camping has made our other times together all the sweeter. In fact, we have gathered a small following of friends that now attend Grandma's Christmas party so they can hang out again. Cousins were a huge part of my growing-up, and it pleases me immensely to see my children share in that same heritage. Bad Dog still lives here, though I've offered her to everyone we know. She is smart and cute, just bad! She comes with a bow, and a bag of food! The garden is still growing and as Christopher planted his garage in my garden, I had to expand it further into his grass

We hope this letter finds you counting blessings and facing the New Year with a smile.

The Cobbs

<http://www.5cobbs.com>

Gym floor in garage



Bug



Garage with siding

