

Christmas 2009

Dear Family and Friends,

This letter was originally only going to cover Christmas time with our family. Then as I was thinking back over the year last night, I thought it might be nice to share with you the crazy year that Joe and I have had. It was filled with some insane changes for all of us.

Many of you already know how Joe and I met. For those who don't; we met in an off-road suspension class last fall. Our love of Toyota trucks and 4 wheeling brought us together. Even though we quickly became friends, it wasn't until the end of the class that we realized there was something special starting up between us. We continued to take classes together and to see each other outside of class. Pretty soon, we were spending everyday together. Joe and I laugh that we aren't really sure exactly when we officially became a couple. It just sort of happened.

During this time while our relationship was just starting out, Joe was vying for a job with Caltrans. He had already taken his State test and had submitted an application. Just as he was finishing up training for his Class A license (which he passed with flying colors the first time around), he gets a call for an interview. Two interviews, actually. One was in Indio and one in Barstow. His Indio interview ended up taking place the day the big snow storm of 2008 hit. Oh the irony that he finishes an interview with Caltrans only to get trapped at the bottom of the Cajon Pass! I spent the afternoon at home following the Caltrans website, trying to find an alternate road home for Joe. In the end, he had to spend the night in a gas station parking lot and wait for the freeway to re-open. The Barstow interview happened a few weeks later, in January. Joe felt that both interviews went well. At that point it was just a waiting game to see if he would get the job.

A month goes by. It's Friday, February 13th. We are on our way up to Big Bear for a Valentine's Day get-away that Joe had planned for us, when the phone rings. It was Caltrans! They were calling to let him know that he got the job in Barstow and he would be starting in March. That one phone call made our Valentine's weekend that much better and reconfirmed for both of us that Friday the 13th is indeed a lucky day!

As spring time rolled around, circumstances had us each looking for a new place to live. We decided the timing was perfect for us to find a place together. We found a nice house in Hesperia to rent. It was spacious enough for our family of 5 and had room for all of our Toyotas, too! We spent the rest of the spring and summer adjusting to our new family life.

Fall of 2009 brought us the start of a new school year. Eric changed schools and entered 1st grade at a wonderful elementary school in Oak Hills. His teacher is great and the curriculum is challenging. Emily and Caity started pre-school. Both girls were put into the same classroom so it made the transition into school very easy for them. They love their teachers and are getting along well with their classmates. I was staying very busy volunteering in each of the kids classrooms.

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving break I get a call from Joan (Joe's mother). Karrie was sent to jail and her 8 kids have been left with some unknown house guests. Joe, Joan and I quickly made some arrangements to bring the children to our house. We were not going to let these kids get separated into 3 or 4 different foster homes right before the holidays. That night, when the children showed up they were dirty, confused and scared. We put together clothes for them and made up extra beds. After much needed baths, the kids were dressed and ready for bed. My daily activities that first week with the kids consisted of cooking, 4-5 loads of laundry, 2 loads of dishes, oh and more cooking. Joe was working hard at his Caltrans job during the day then coming home in the evening to figure out the logistics of clothing and state aid. Joan was a huge help for us as well. She had, on average, 3 of the kids with her each night. Without her help, I'm not sure Joe and I would have been able to manage everything.

Now here is where the miracle happened. As word started to spread about the situation these children were in (no clothes, no shoes, not enough bedding), different groups within our families and communities started to organize clothing drives. In just a week, donations started coming in. The kids were so excited to get the new-to-them clothes and toys. However, it didn't stop there. In a time when the economy is the worst that we have seen in decades, family and friends pulled together to make this the best Christmas these children have ever seen. We would like to thank everyone who worked so hard to make this happen. Because of the wonderful gifts everyone gave to us, we were able give the children everything they asked for on their Christmas lists. Including an X Box 360! It was so neat to see the excitement on the kid's faces when they received their gifts.

It has been over a month since we added 8 new children to our family and we are finally hitting our stride. We have a system for everything, from mealtimes to grocery shopping and it requires many line-ups and head counts. I must say, it does create quite a stir when I bring 9 kids with me grocery shopping! That is the most I have ventured out with so far, but I know at some point I will have all 11 with me. Never in a million years did I think my teacher training would help me manage my own family!

Even though, this has been a stressful time for us all, I truly believe that it has made our family stronger. It amazes me each day to see how well we work together as a team. Joe is such a wonderful man and a perfect leader for our family. I admire his strength and compassion. I know that God has a bigger plan for us and he has us travel hard roads for a reason. I really believe the trials Joe and I went through before we met have set us up to be the perfect match for each other now. I am looking forward to seeing what God has in store for us in 2010.

Thank YOU for making 2009 a year to remember! Here's to good friends and good family! See you in 2010!

Cheers!

The Anderson family