

THE PARK RIDGE TIMES

December 25, 2008

Ashore on Malta

When Dave applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to Malta, DeDe had a pretty strong feeling that the day would really come when they'd be flying overseas with six children. Indeed that is just how the family began the year! Three months were spent on the tiny island country which lies in the Mediterranean Sea. For all the details, you can go to the family website at: <http://www.qualitystreetretreat.org>.

We had the help of DeDe's sweet cousin, Isabelle, who flew in from Canada, the first three weeks. A week later, Bill and Shirley made the trip. We enjoyed sharing our time there with them and we're so glad they made such a long journey!

Dave and DeDe also were fortunate to have spent a week touring Italy in a rental car, with Bobby in tow. The other children remained in Malta under the excellent care of the Super Nanny, Nichole Jones Anderson, a friend from the U.S. Nichole was given passage to Malta in compensation for her services, and she and the kids had a great time while DeDe and Dave explored the amazing country to the north. Italy is truly fascinating! Travel vicariously with us by touring our photo gallery of the trip at: <http://picasaweb.google.com/dedegibbs>. Stories are included in the Malta blog.

It's true what Paul, the apostle, said about the "unusual kindness" of the Maltese people. We experienced this first-hand. We also met some sweet, American brothers and sisters in Christ in Malta who remain dear to our hearts! It was truly an amazing time for us. We enjoyed the simplicity of life there, and we realized we can live with far fewer things and be quite content.

Back in the USA

The family enjoyed a two-night stay in London before flying home on April Fool's Day. The kids felt very "grown up" after having experienced international airports and planes, trains, and automobiles of all kinds. They transitioned back into their public school quite nicely, and we even enjoyed a little bit of "winter" before the spring weather rushed in. The kids were sad they had missed the "Year of the Great Snow", but God answered our prayers with a last big blizzard in April. We spent a winter weekend at the lake where the kids worked on their snowboarding skills.

In the spring, Ian and Addison played on soccer and baseball teams, while Rachel returned to gymnastics. We spent July and August up at the lake, entertaining guests, and enjoying the beauty of the Northwoods. Dave worked hard at a summer online course, meanwhile progressing on the many projects on the lake home as well. DeDe worked at drywall finishing. There's still much work to do, but we maintain the motto "work a little—play a little"...so that these precious days don't slip away!

We returned to Stevens Point in late August to work on replacing shingles on the roof there. Dave, DeDe and DeDe's brother, Ron, took on the task. (Thanks, Ron!) Dave continued with trim and siding work, and he did an amazing job. We're grateful for an injury-free year with power-tools!

The boys played flag football in the fall. Rachel returned to gymnastics, and Dave returned to the classroom after four years in administration, on Sabbatical and Fulbrighting. DeDe and the two boys enjoy their time together at home.

To maintain her own sanity, DeDe has been jogging with friends in the early morning hours. She ran three half-marathons this year. She and Dave enjoyed participating in the Malta Half marathon in February. Then in May, DeDe and friends did the Green Bay Cellcom Half Marathon. The perk of this race is that you run a lap inside Lambeau Field before coming to the finish line just outside the stadium. In October, the same group went to the shores of Lake Superior to run the Whistlestop Half Marathon. DeDe ran a PR (personal record) in this one! Besides running, she fully enjoys life as stay-at-home mother, but the finances demand that she look for ways to contribute to the family income. She is doing some subbing, and she enjoys these little tours through the local schools. She especially appreciates the glimpse she's getting into the junior high that her kids will likely attend in a couple years. Beyond that, she enjoys fellowship with her church family. She and Dave are currently being trained to serve as Stephen Ministers. DeDe also completed a certification program in Biblical Counseling through Biblical Counseling Institute. She is amazed at how God continues to draw her into edifying situations, and the recent focus has been toward seeking ways to apply all the amazing truths she's devoured over the years.

We are happy to report that Grandma Nel is doing great. She maintains her active lifestyle and her sense of humor; she's truly amazing as she continues to bless others. Grandpa Bill just received his pastoral certificate. What an accomplishment at age 78! Grandma Shirley is doing well, also. God has been so good in sustaining her; it's clear He has more work for her to do on the earth. She and Bill are leading Life Skills classes which help folks to engage in healthy relationships.

It is great fun for Dave and DeDe to be on the other side of the table at parent-teacher conferences. We fully enjoy hearing the teachers' perspectives of our children. Once again, we were humbled by the glowing reports we received. The kids all are excelling at school, both academically and socially. We hear things like "great contributor," "helpful," "insightful," even "brilliant," and we wonder, "They're talking about OUR offspring?" Truly, it's a treat to see them enjoying school.

David started kindergarten this year. He's doing a great job, and we are happy to see that he's able to restrain himself in the classroom setting. He's so filled with joyful delight, that we worried his charming personality might become disruptive, but he's just a saint in the classroom, and his teachers absolutely love him.

Addison, a second grader, was quickly diagnosed by his classroom teacher as an outstanding thinker, and he is now getting his reading and math education in the Gifted and Talented program. He's also a sweet kid, and his teacher was nearly in tears, speaking of him. How cool that our kids bless their teachers this way!

Ian is in third grade, and he, too, is a star in the eyes of his teacher. He was worried that he was in the strict teacher's class, but he's done a great job, and he comes home happy and positive about the day. He's taking responsibility for his homework, and his teacher said he was her "go-to guy!" What an honor.

Rachel, now a fifth grader, has the schedule of a corporate exec. She's caught on quickly to violin, as she applies her musical background from years on piano. She's also in the school chorus. She's a leader in her class, as safety patrol, and a member of student council. Her teacher says, "She's her own person. She is friends with everyone, and not phased by the drama some of the girls incite." She's a fantastic big sister at home as well. She's also a great cook! What a blessing she is to her mother.

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The Year...in Poetry

The year was filled with folly,
with fantastic times and fun
We are blessed with six sweet children
who can laugh, and play, and run
They're excelling at their schoolwork,
they're musically inclined
they truly are amazing
as they blow their parents' minds!
They're not always so tidy;
no...not quite as neat as pins,
but it's a process we sure work on
and Mom's not giving in!
The house can get quite messy
Mom calls it OOC!
But it's not because of *my stuff*
and it's never *'cause of me!*

Daddy has been working
long hours every day
The job is taxing now
that he's been awhile away
computer languages changing
there's always something new
which causes him some fits
as he tries to make it through
But he's such a gifted teacher
It's a calling we can tell
And his students love his humor
as they conquer XML!

The days are filled with laundry
with dishes and with noise
They're filled with many blessings
with amazing thrills and joys
We are tempted to be eager
for the day when kids are grown
when car seats aren't needed
and the wiping job's their own!
But we know better than to hurry
through these crazy, crazy days
'Cause we've heard from many of you
they fly by fast anyway!

So we treasure every moment
every silly quote and smile
the giggles and the wiggles
and the messes on the tile
The broken heirlooms matter not
in the grand old scheme of things
compared to what these children do
to give our spirit wings
We love them so, so dearly
and our hearts could sometimes burst
Even at the bedtime scenes
when they're hit with awful thirst!
Sometimes we want to send them
off to Timbuktu!
But most days we just love them up
and we know that you would too---
So as another year is passing
we just want to make it known
We'll thank our God in heaven
for the love that He has sewn

One thing we've learned just lately
it's so simple yet profound
is that belief in God's great power
leads to faith that will astound
and faith when it takes root
in our every breath we take
will profit us in hope that lasts
no matter what's at stake
And hope when springs eternal
it's a hope that brings true joy
and it's this that came one evening
In Christ, our LORD, a baby boy

If we could send one present
to all the folks we know
A present that is lasting
There is one, we're sure will grow
It's the gift that God gave to us
long ago in a manger lay
The babe that came to save us
on that first bright Christmas Day!