

Dear Friends,

December 12, 2008

It was a sad year for us, but now at Christmas time we again feel hope and new beginnings.

This has been a sad year in that we lost two people who were important to us. Joe's mother, Margaret, died at age 94 in May and Judy's brother died in August of cancer at age 70. Death became very real to us. Joe's mother had a very exciting and full life. Her body and lastly her mind gave out. He called his mother several times a week for the past couple of years. He would usually ask "How are you this fine day?" Margaret would answer "Fair to middling" and then go into her aches and pains and what was happening in Ogema. Judy's brother, John Brandl's death was far more challenging. John was a noted Minnesota legislator and teacher and a wonderful person in the prime of his life. John was both a politician and an economist. How we miss not being able to ask him what he thinks of the election and the economic downturn. John said at his retirement event at the University of Minnesota where vice president Walter Mondale and many governors and dignitaries attended that he was not afraid of dying. We were at John's anointing in the hospital when he and his wife Shelly made his funeral arrangements. Joe is totally impressed how John's faith was so strong that when Joe left John in the hospital he told John that he wasn't going to say goodbye, but farewell, as he expects to see John again in the next life.

This has been a year of travel for us. We just realized we have both been home for almost two whole months. In February we traveled to Puerto Rico to visit the missionary school where Judy taught English after college. We traveled with Joe's brother Bill and his wife Kathy. Kathy was Judy's partner in Puerto Rico and later married his brother Bill. Some of the same nuns were still teaching at the school. The best snorkeling was on the west side of the island. There have been so many good changes with safer roads and more kids in school. Still the people have beautiful manners and are kind and welcoming.

We both had 50 year high school reunions in Minnesota. Are we that old? On our last trip from Minnesota we had a load of stuff from Joe's Mom's house to distribute to Joe's brother and our kids. We drove Mom's van and took a side trip to Glacier Park and Dupuyer, Montana. We stayed at a bed & breakfast in the small town where Ivan Doig, the author, had lived. We attended our nephew Luke's beautiful wedding in the Botanical Gardens of Denver, then saw Amy in Boise, Idaho and Becky in her new home in Veneta, Oregon. In March we spent a week and a half in Kauai, Hawaii with our daughter Amy and Mike and family. The extra half week was due to an airline bankruptcy (we could have been stuck in worse places as we got in some more snorkeling and playing with our 3 granddaughters).

While vacationing in Hawaii Joe was elected parish council president. Our parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe, has about 3500 families with about 2/3 Latinos. This summer he was appointed finance council chairperson. Joe is passionately involved in our parish and the diocese. He keeps seeing opportunities to make our parish a more loving, caring community and to survive our current economic recession. We will lose about half of our parish priests in the next 8 years and Joe is working on a parish program called "Anointed Lay Minister" to train lay people to perform many of the sacraments and liturgies. He is also working on a diocesan program to provide lay people to run parishes without priests. Joe claims our pastor; Fr. Angelito is the best pastor in the world.

Judy still loves photography and the ever changing digital world. She is into designing books on the computer. She wrote her first children's book and had our grandchildren illustrate it. It is the true story of our chicken, Joey's dog, and a fox that Joe saw running across our land one morning. This last Sunday Judy hosted the annual Professional Photographer's Christmas party. One of the members led an 11 piece bell ringing group in our living room. It was so beautiful it gave us goose pimples.

Joe's vineyard is one of his joys. You can see the grapes in our Christmas picture. The beautiful red colored grapes behind us are Petite Sirah. He is also growing Zinfandel, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Joe likes Petite Sirah so much he is adding another ¼ acre to the existing ½ acre of grapes next spring. He now realizes a potential of selling grapes for hobby wine makers as he has way too many grapes for our wine consumption. Joe plans to continue taking wine making classes at the local Junior College next year.

We are blessed with a healthy and still employed family. Dave and Becky live in Oregon and just moved to the small town of Veneta near Eugene to be near Dave's new job as a district forest manager. Becky has started substitute teaching. We saved their son Josiah's voice on our answering machine when he called to announce losing his first tooth. Mary teaches school and her husband Frank is managing the payload for a big government space satellite. Ryan will graduate from college this year and Will is a junior in high school. Nate, 4, and Tyler, 2, look so much alike people can hardly tell them apart. Tyler repeats word for word everything that Nate says. We're surprised that Nate isn't bugged by having an echo. They are in the rough housing or should we say fighting stage that Joe tells Mary will last at least until age 30. Amy and Mike live in Boise, Idaho. Amy works almost full time at Hewlett-Packard and Mike has a new job working for the state where he is in charge of fish (trout and salmon are very important to Idaho). Rachel has joined a wrestling team and won a medal. This is pretty cool for a vegetarian second grader who likes to do needlework. Emily enjoys Montessori preschool and writing words. Jennay, 2, is starting to put words together. Mike keeps saying "Don't you think Jennay is a particularly pretty little girl?" And of course we do. Joey lives near us, and he is a project manager building a huge residential house. Belinda started teaching full time at the Christian school that Katie and Anna attend. Katie does well in gymnastics and Anna loves kindergarten.

Many blessings to you this Christmas from Joe and Judy Tembrock