



Christmas 2004

**The Sienkewicz Family
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Believe it or not, we are celebrating our twentieth Christmas in Monmouth this year. It is hard to believe that we have been here this long. Every year is different. Last year we had bumper crops of peppers and eggplants. This year those crops were mediocre at best, but we had so many tomatoes that we actually left some to rot on the vines. We lost one of our 20-year-old apple trees in a windstorm but our new pear tree continues to produce prolifically.

The highlight of this year for our family was Richard's graduation from Lawrence University in June, outside, in a downpour. The photos of everyone soaked and shivering in rain ponchos are priceless. Richard actually had to wrap his diploma in a plastic sack to save it from water damage. Richard had hoped to teach English in Japan for a year following graduation, but, instead he finds himself a post-baccalaureate scholar at Knox College in Galesburg, where he is a teaching assistant in the elementary Japanese class and a student in a Chinese history course. He is also working nights part-time at Dick Blick, a large art supply company located in Galesburg. And, yes, he is living at home. His parents are glad to have him back although they don't see much of him due to his complicated work and school schedules. He remains hopeful that he will find his way to Japan in the near future.

Julia is still a Ph. D. student in Art History at the University of Illinois. She had her first taste of being a teaching assistant this fall and is planning to take her Ph.D. qualifying exams in the spring.

Marie is now a 4th-year vet student and is facing her certification test. She spent the month of September interning at a vet's office in Maine. She is not sure where she will practice after graduation, but either Maine or Illinois are likely bets.

Julia's turtle Piglette definitively grew too big for her 40-gallon tank and the girls' little house in Champaign and has now found a new home in a turtle-rescue pond in Florida. Marie, however, cannot resist filling the house with furry creatures. In addition to their dogs Red Bone and Blanche, they now have a lively puppy named Amber. They would also have had the first kitten which Marie spayed, but her parents agreed to adopt her. Little Minima/ Mimi/ Mischief Mitts/ Terror Toes manages to provide a great deal of amusement, although we are not so sure that our older cat Daphne really appreciates having a baby sister.

It would not be a Sienkewicz letter without mentioning a great deal of travel. Early in the New Year, Tom traveled to San Francisco for a professional meeting where he proceeded to develop such intense back pain that he wound up in an emergency

room. His back really didn't begin to feel normal again for several weeks. While he was in California he still visited his sister Toni and her husband Gary. Toni took him on a wonderful trip along the coast to see the famed California redwoods.

In March Tom took a small group of Monmouth College people on a trip to southern Italy, primarily to visit Pompeii and Herculaneum. He also took the group to visit his cousins Enzo and Maria, who provided a magnificent feast about which the students are still talking. In May Tom drove back East to attend his nieces' graduations. First, Toni's older daughter Chris graduated with an engineering degree from Penn State and then MaryBeth's daughter Tracy graduated from Cary Academy in Durham. Much to Julia's pleasure, Tracy is now attending Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts where she appears to be thriving.

Two days after Richard's June graduation, Tom was off to Russia. He spent two weeks in St. Petersburg and one week in Moscow on a special tour for college professors. He still finds it hard to believe that he has actually stood in the Palace Square where the October Revolution took place in 1917 and was able to visit the wonders of the Hermitage Museum. But the highlight of the trip for him was probably seeing Lenin in his mausoleum in Red Square in Moscow.

Tom and Anne spent two weeks in Maine in late July and early August. Julia was able to be with them this year, but neither Marie nor Richard. Anne's parents have a variety of health problems and she went back to visit them for a long weekend in mid-November. They are both cheerful and thankful that Carl, Jack and Jack's family are there to pinch hit when the going gets rough. Jack's sons Tim and Nick are walking the halls of Medomak Valley High together this year, but Tim will be off to college next fall.

Last September we had a nice visit from our British friends Viv Edwards and Chris Morris. We enjoyed taking them down to the Mississippi river and showing them the grave of Norma Jean the elephant in Oquakwa.

While Tom was in Russia, Julia and Richard began stripping the wallpaper in the front and upstairs halls. This turned out to be a major undertaking, partly because there were two layers of wallpaper, even on the ceiling (!), and partly because Julia decided that the paint also had to be stripped off the banister. When Tom returned, half the wallpaper was still on the walls but we got it all removed by late July. Stripping the banister, however, has become a long and tedious process. As we look toward December, the stripping is almost finished. We've hired a painter to finish the walls and ceiling. The job won't be finished until sometime in January when we get a floor laid in the upstairs hallway and paint the stairs. Hopefully we won't have to worry about redoing the halls for many years to come.

Meanwhile we all wish you a peaceful and happy holiday season and a prosperous New Year.

Anne, Tom, Marie, Julia and Richard SIENKEWICZ