

Christmas Greetings
from The Bird's Nest West
1103 East Second Avenue
Monmouth, Illinois 61462
(309) 734-3543

Our Christmas card, designed by Julia (11), highlights Minou, the one-year-old calico we adopted last year. She really does sit like that, by the way. In addition to Minou, we still have Knish, our 17 year-old-cat, who has grown old with dignity and has even become more affectionate to the children over the years. There is also Chatouille, our 16-year-old beagle, now blind as well as deaf. Plus three guinea pigs, Marie's cockatiel, Joe, a large cage of zebra finches, and a few goldfish. Despite appearances we did cut back on pets this year and dismantled our tropical fish tank.

What are we going to do with this menagerie next September when we all leave Monmouth to spend an academic year in Florence, Italy, where Tom will be teaching in a study-abroad program for college students? The kids will all attend Italian schools and we are all frantically studying Italian already. This time next year you can all imagine us in a frenzy in Firenze.

This year has been busy enough. The Florence opportunity led us to take a good look at Julia's schooling. The chemistry in her class, with a boy-girl ratio of 2:1, had not been good for several years and we were concerned that Julia would miss her seventh grade in Monmouth while we were in Italy, so we petitioned to have her skipped this year from sixth to seventh grade. This meant that Julia had to study both sixth and seventh grade math during the summer so she would be ready for the 7th grade honors math class, which covers the 8th grade math curriculum. Julia appears to have weathered the transition successfully and is happier in school this year than she has been in years. She was even elected to the student council in her new class. The academic skip also means that she skipped in Sunday School and will be confirmed this spring.



Meanwhile Marie (14) has entered high school, where she is studying Latin (to her father's delight), Geometry, Biology, and Earth Science in addition to the standard curriculum. She tried out for the fall play and was given two small parts in a production called "Voices from the High School". She thoroughly enjoyed the experience and is now looking forward to the next challenge.

Both girls are in school band, continue with their piano and are in the children's choir at church. Richard (9) follows in their footsteps in his own way. He started trombone this year (a year early because of Florence) and insisted on joining the choir even though 4th graders had not been eligible before. This fall he and his buddy Greg Gladfelter persuaded their fathers to build them an impressive treehouse in the tree behind our garage. Even the girls enjoy climbing up the 18 feet to the platform and looking out on the world.

Anne had a dose of single-parent motherhood this summer as Tom spent eight weeks in Rome while Anne and the kids were in Maine. Ironically, Tom had a special grant to study the ancient Roman family. He spent most of his time at the American Academy in Rome but also traveled down to Salerno to visit his Italian cousins.

This fall Anne has been teaching two French language courses at Knox College in Galesburg while one of their faculty is in France. Beginning in January she will teach three courses at Monmouth due to the sudden resignation of the French professor there. The kids seem to have accepted the reality of a latch-key home with aplomb and Anne certainly enjoys the teaching.

All three kids are still active in scouts. Richard had another glorious week in Scout daycamp in Maine last summer. Anne is still leading Girl Scouts, but probably for the last year. She and Julia actually went horseback riding this fall.

If you plan to visit us in Florence next year, you'd better make your reservation early. **Verbunm satis sapienti.**

Tom *Julia*
Anne *Marie* *Richard*

Anne, Tom, Marie, Julia and Richard
SIENKEWICZ

