

Christmas, 1994
The Bird's Nest West
1103 East Second Avenue
Monmouth, Illinois 61462

(309) 734-3543
toms@wpoff.monm.edu

We are sorry that we cannot send you our usual note of Christmas cheer this year, but we are all still in shock from the sudden death of Tom's sister Doris on November 5th. She had gone to an Indian reservation near Norwich, Connecticut, to play Bingo with some friends. They had been there about an hour when Doris felt strangely warm and left the Bingo hall to go to the rest room. A few minutes later her friends were paged to learn that Doris had collapsed and was receiving CPR. These efforts were futile, however, and she was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. She was only 42 and had had no warnings of serious medical problems. A massive heart attack or blood clot was the probable cause of death. All five of us rushed back to New Jersey for the funeral. We were all most touched by the many warm expressions of sympathy and grief, from her fellow teachers and, especially, her students at Hoboken High School, who came to the funeral parlor in tears and in large numbers. Two busloads came from the high school to the funeral mass and then, as the funeral procession passed the high school, students, faculty, and administrators were lined up on both sides of the street in silent recognition. Even now it is still difficult to accept.

Until November 5th we would have said that our lives had been going along at an even but busy keel. Tom is having his busiest semester ever at the college and is looking forward to a sabbatical in spring semester. He plans to spend it hiding out at home to finish writing several books. Anne is teaching half time at Monmouth College this year, French and Freshman Seminar in the fall and two French courses in the spring. She says that just Freshman Seminar is a full-time job since it includes lots of advising and Anne is fast becoming known to her students as Professor Mom.

Marie (17) is now a senior at Monmouth High School. She is taking a heavy load including Chemistry, Physics, Calculus, and Latin IV (Vergil) plus four credits of work at the college. She has also been busy looking at colleges and is currently planning to apply to Bowdoin College in Maine, Lawrence University in Wisconsin, the University of Dallas in Texas, and Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. She plans to major in biology with an eye to veterinary school but also hopes to concentrate seriously in music. She still spends a lot of her time playing trombone in the school band and in the municipal orchestra as well as playing piano and taking voice lessons. Marie's big thrill of the year was finally getting her driver's license last January.

Julia (14), a high school sophomore, is studying Algebra II, Latin II, Biology and World History, among other things. She is news editor of the school newspaper and is working on a comic skit for the speech team. She, too, has her musical activities. She takes piano and voice lessons and plays french horn in school band and the municipal orchestra.

Richard (12) entered Junior High this year. The transition was not easy for him and he suffered from a nervous stomach many mornings this fall, but academically things have worked out well for him and he now seems happy in his own environment. He chose to continue piano lessons of his own volition this fall and is progressing well. He was also pleased to be invited to play the trombone in the junior high show choir ensemble. Like his sisters he, too, plays in the school band and in the municipal orchestra.

Animals are still an important part of our lives, although we suffered the loss of our 20-year-old cat Knish this summer. It is hard to believe that Anne and Tom acquired Knish the spring after they returned from Paris in 1974! We still have two other cats, Minou (4) and Daphne (1) as well as our very lively poodle-type pup, named Allegra (1). Since last year we have also acquired two parakeets, Cheeky and T-Rex, who are already showing their own unique personalities and are beginning to say typical human phrases like "Pretty Bird". Allegra and the birds rode East with us this summer and seemed to enjoy the trip.

In addition to our usual trip east to New Jersey and to Maine, we also traveled west this summer. With our friends the Tylers we spent a week tasting several National Parks, including Rocky Mountain, Colorado National Monument, Arches, and, of course, the Grand Canyon. We camped most nights and managed to have a great time. The Tylers and the Sienkewicz all agree that this tour went so well that we are planning an encore next summer.

The Sienkewicz lingered in the west a second week so that Tom could read two papers at a summer institute on oral epic at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Although we arrived in the middle of a major heat wave (120 degrees in the shade!), we still enjoyed Tucson and environs. We highly recommend the Desert Museum and Saguaro National Park. We even spent an afternoon in the Mexican border town of Nogales where the locals endeared themselves to us by noting how delicious Allegra would be to eat. On our way home we also had a brief visit with Tom's cousins Barbara and Joseph Esposito in Phoenix and stopped at the Petrified Forest and Mesa Verde.

Those of you on the Internet highway may want to take note of our e-mail address printed in the letterhead.

We all wish you a joyful holiday season and a happy 1995.

Anne, Tom, Marie, Julia, and Richard SIENKEWICZ