

CHRISTMAS 2007

The Sienkewicz Family
The Bird's Nest West
1103 East Second Avenue
Monmouth, Illinois 61462
309-734-3543; birdnestwest@frontiernet.net



Compared to the excitement of 2006, this year has been much quieter, if not just as busy. The enthusiastic comments about the photo gallery feature we added to last year's annual letter have persuaded us to continue the practice. We thought we'd begin by sharing with you the central scene of our Christmas crèche (upper left). We have been buying these *santons* from France since 1973! We have so many we now need two shelves to display them. We used to buy them with francs from our own French checking account from a little religious articles store on the Ple St. Sulpice in Paris, but those days are long gone! Now we order them on the internet directly from the manufacturer in Marseilles! If Anne had her druthers, we would keep them out all year long!

Much of our time in the early months of 2007 centered around the search for a Classics colleague at the college. This hire was something Tom was looking forward to for many years but proved to be a challenging and time-consuming process, beginning with interviews at the professional Classicists convention in San Diego in early January and not ending until mid-April. Tom's new colleague, Nick Dobson earned his Ph.D. at the University of Texas and is a remarkable linguist. (In fact, he is actually teaching German as well as Latin this year.) 2007 was a good year for graduating Classics majors and honor cords in our garden.



graduating Classics majors

While in San Diego Tom was pleased to meet up with a former student, Nyi Htoon, originally from Burma and to meet his parents. Right after San Diego he was off to Greece where he led a student group to Athens, Delphi, and Mycenae—his first trip back since 1999—and was surprised to see how much hosting the Olympics in 2004 had changed Greece, mostly for the better. You see the Monmouth College team at the Parthenon in the upper right.



In March Tom was lucky to receive a college consortial grant to travel to Japan for a week to prepare to teach a new course entitled "Sacred Places." Of course, it was convenient to have Richard there to serve as his translator and tour guide. Richard was a good sport as he brought his father to temple after temple in Kyoto, Nara and Tokyo. Highlights of the trip included a visit to the Golden Pavilion (see photo above right) and the giant Buddha at Nara. The Buddha doesn't photograph very well, so we offer instead photos of Richard with one of Nara's famous deer (at left) and of prayer placques (at right). While in Japan Tom was also delighted to see another former student, Nori, who took Tom and Richard to an unforgettable meal in a traditional Japanese restaurant.



Tom's professional travels also brought him to Los Angeles in May (where he got to visit the wonderful Getty Villa in Malibu), to Nashville in June (under the shadow of Athena in the Parthenon) and then to Chattanooga in July (to work on an elementary Latin book for college students with his friend Ken Kitchell).

Meanwhile Anne continues to hold the fort at the American Red Cross. Her boss and friend, Lynne Tyler, the Chapter director, moved back home to Upstate New York in June and we all miss her in western Illinois. We'd been having Sunday brunch with the Tylers nearly once a month since 1984 and we regret deeply the breaking of that tradition.



When she is not working at the Red Cross, Anne spends a lot of time running a home for geriatric pets. It hard to believe that our poodle “puppy” Allegra is already fourteen and showing her age in a lot of ways. So is her feline agemate Daphne who has had to spend some time with vet Marie in order to work out problems related to hyperthyroidism. Under Marie’s care she has had a new lease on life and looks much healthier. Our only healthy pet is Minima, the cat who was Marie’s first spay. Mimi, as Anne likes to call her, brings us much daily amusement. In the summer we lost our elderly dachshund Sydney, whom we found dead in the garden. At least he seems to have died peacefully. You can see Sydney (at left) in a happier moment in his favorite spot, Anne’s lap, which he is sharing with Minima in Anne’s left arm and Daphne on Anne’s knee. Allegra would never be caught in such a compromising position!

Tom and Anne did get to Maine for two glorious weeks in late July. Anne flew but Tom drove so he could visit his sister MaryBeth and her family in Durham, his friend Robert Giovenco in Richmond, his niece Christina in Baltimore, his brother Eddie on the Jersey shore, his sister Toni in New Brunswick, his friend Richard Michalowski and his family in Verona, and his Aunt Doris in Edgewater. Quite a progress! Our time in Maine was much quieter than last year, with no wedding to plan, and it was nice to spend time with Anne’s parents, to soak in the lake and to walk along the coast, as you can see Anne doing at right at one of our favorite spots, Martin’s Point in Friendship.



Somehow all three of our kids managed to visit Anne’s Aunt Bernie and George in San Francisco this year. Richard did so on his way home from Japan in April. He sure had his timing right. NOVA, the company he worked for in Japan, suddenly went bankrupt this fall. Richard has clearly decided on the law as his vocation and has spent much of this summer and fall interning for a law firm in Monmouth. He has taken the LSAT’s and is now applying to law schools for next fall. Don’t try to argue even the smallest point with him!

Marie and her husband Kyle Bond (right) are now happily settled in their own home in Wauconda, Illinois, not far from the vet practice where Marie is employed. Four cats and two dogs keep them busy, and gardening is another favorite hobby.



Julia and her husband Víctor Martínez (below) are living in Champaign, Illinois, and working along on their doctoral dissertations with the help of two red bone coonhounds. They hope to finish by May of 2009. Julia was awarded a grant which sent her to study Victorian England in London this summer. Víctor met her there and they spent hours in the British Museum and traveled up to Hadrian’s Wall. They also spent some time with our friends Viv and Chris in Reading, and met their new grandson William.



Gardenwise, we had a very poor spring marked by an ill-timed frost which killed all the fruit blossoms and even the forsythia and lilac! But the summer garden made up for it with a good yield of tomatoes, peppers, zucchini and cucumbers. A bad windstorm brought down the beans, but spared the rest.

Our happy bubble was burst, however, in mid-September when Tom suddenly found himself in intensive care for five days in a Peoria hospital with a massive blood clot in the artery in his left leg. He was home barely a week before he developed exactly the same symptoms in the same leg and had a repeat performance around Columbus Day. He seemed to be recuperating nicely until mid-November when he developed a large (and painful!) hematoma in his thigh (same leg of course), probably caused by the blood thinners he was taking to prevent clotting. That sent him into the hospital on Anne’s birthday where he lingered well past Thanksgiving Day. The doctors now seem to have a handle on his medication and he hopes to be on the mend as he moves into the new year and a well-timed sabbatical from the college. *Dulce Domum* is our motto for the time being.

So, let’s all look toward a Merry Christmas and a Happy MMVIII!