



Seasons Greetings to All Our Friends and Family,

2008 was more a year for finishing old projects than starting new endeavors. Kim and I did take a major adventure mid year, but first about our family.

Snoopy the beagle, the dog with highest seniority is still kicking around. The typical beagle lives between twelve and fourteen years and Snoopy is at thirteen years plus. Aging is taking its toll, for the last year he has been losing muscle mass in his rear legs. This summer he still could walk the mile around the block no problem, but when it comes to hiking, he would now hang back with the humans rather than running ahead with Lacey and Bentley.

Snoopy did give us quite the scare in October. One day he became very wobbly with almost no control of his back legs. I thought it was almost his time and that age had weakened his legs to the point that they could no longer support him. But besides not being able to pass a field sobriety test he still had bright eyes and all his other systems seemed fine. We took him to see doc and the best guess was that he had slipped a disc. The diagnosis was confirmed during a quick check of his vertebrae when he yelped indicating we had found the very sensitive spot. Six weeks of limited mobility was ordered, no stairs, no jumping off of furniture, no long walks and no roughhousing with Bentley. Snoopy had to be crated for his own good. He does not like to be held so every potty trip became a new challenge. He also found ways to get onto the furniture only to jump off at the slightest hint that there might be food in the kitchen. After six weeks of recovery he was not much worse for the wear, but we both agree he is on borrowed time and now only goes on solo walks to the near end of the street.

Lacey the beagle at nine years is still the boss of the clan. Even at her age the vet says she is in the best shape of all the beagles that they see. She still runs about four miles once a week with Kim, just on grass and dirt roads, no more sidewalks or hard surfaces.

Birchhurst Bentley continues to thrive. After two years with us he is a much improved dog. He definitely is not like his great uncle Asta. Asta was polite, calm and a thinker, Bentley is all go. Fox Terriers are exercise dependent. Every morning before work Bentley either walks to the far end of the street or chases a tennis ball in the yard, sometimes both. Most evenings Bentley gets a walk as well. Bentley loves to run around the yard for the sake of moving like the wind. Stuffed toys must be eviscerated. Squeaky toys must be chewed until they squeak no more.

Bentley has developed a peaceful side. He likes to sit on our laps while we are at the computer. He sleeps on the hope chest at the foot of our bed (Lacey sleeps plastered to Kim. Snoopy takes up too much bed and sleeps in his Nuzzle Nest at the side of the bed). You can see a difference in Bentley's eyes, when he first came to us he had a distant look and didn't really make eye contact. Now you can look into his eyes and he smiles. If you acknowledge his presence he wags his tail very fast. Somehow "wag, Wag, WAG" has become one of his tricks. Bentley has learned he is loved at his forever home. We love his obsessive/compulsive behavior. He makes us smile.

In February we went to Martha's Vineyard for the 20 mile race. We stayed at the same hotel in Falmouth that we have for three years now. I didn't finish the race for the second straight year. Last year I was injured and we left the island before the starting gun. This year I got through 15 miles before I got very light headed. The EMTs asked if I had lost consciousness, not that I was aware of it however I didn't let them know



that I had a gap in my memory. Some nice people in a pickup truck gave me a ride back to the finish. While I was racing Kim was at the Black Dog tent sale buying among other things a new jacket. When I got dropped off at the finish I couldn't find Kim because I was looking for her gray wind beaker and not her new pink fleece.

I wouldn't have mentioned the Vineyard trip if it wasn't that I was back on Cape Cod a couple of weeks later. I bought my 4th 1987 Merkur XR4Ti in March. Back in January an out of state driver in a rental car changed lanes into me while talking on his cell phone and tried to blame me. I was able to replace the steering rack he bent and drive the car the next day, but it no longer felt "right" to drive.

Soon afterwards I saw a gray Merkur on EBay. My aunt while talking to Kim summed it up best, "I can't believe Todd bought another Merkur. I can't believe you let him buy another Merkur." I was buying from the second owner, Rita, the original owner had had the car less than a year. The interior was in excellent condition and the paint was almost perfect. The car needed a new battery, but I was confident I could start the car and drive her home. It only took about fifteen minutes to diagnosis a bad fuel pump relay and the car sparked to life. I warmed the car up so that my scan tool could talk to the car's EEC-IV computer. While waiting I pumped the tires and did a better inspection. Even though the car was not driven in the winter, there was a lot of underbody rust. The car had been undercoated and stones had chipped the undercoating. Water had gotten onto the steel and started to rust the steel. The undercoat doesn't stick to rust and puddles of water remain trapped between the undercoating and the steel. Cape Cod is surrounded by salt water. Rita wasn't aware of the rust. It wasn't worth hurting Rita's feelings to let her know her little boy wasn't in as advertised condition. It finally became the time in my life for me to learn how to repair sheet metal. There were no serious codes on the car's computer so I took her out for a ride. The brakes felt spongy, but I was sure I could make the drive home with Kim following in the Saturn. We signed the papers and left.

About five miles into our drive on route 6 is a rest plaza. Kim loves that route 6 continues west until it becomes Dodge St in Omaha. We had a quick lunch and got ready to push home. The parking lot at the plaza has a gentle slope and there were two large puddles oozing out from under the new car, one puddle from the differential and one from the either the front transmission seal or the rear engine seal. The poor car really needed TLC, and I was the person to do it. I called Rita and asked if I could leave the car in her driveway for a week. The next weekend I made my third trip of the year to Cape Cod with a pickup and a car carrier. I hauled the Merkur back to my waiting garage.



Slowly the new Merkur is getting rehabilitated but it will only see limited use, there are new cars in both Kim and my future. This spring I'll be getting a Jetta Sportwagen TDI, diesel, and Kim wants a Mini Cooper Clubman.

We took two weeks for the Great Adventure for 2008. I had hiked the Rockies twice as High Pointing adventures picking up South Dakota, North Dakota, Utah and Nebraska in 2002. 2004 saw Colorado and Kansas. Both trips I failed to summit in Montana and Idaho. I wanted Kim to see the best of the Rockies: Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Montana and South Dakota. Kim puts constraints on my travels. Kim wants hotel rooms every other night on average, no more than eight hours a day driving and at least one restaurant a day. Still I was able to come up with a plan that was plausible. Kim has put the adventure on her website www.KimBrown.net. I won't be as detailed here.

I left late on Saturday afternoon with a goal of spending Sunday night at my father-in-law in the Kansas City metro. Making the goal meant driving 1100 miles on Sunday. I picked Kim up at the airport in Denver on Monday afternoon and we spent the night in Leadville. In nine hours time Kim went from 150 feet of elevation to sleeping at over 10,000 feet. We hiked Mt Elbert, on Tuesday morning getting to over 14,000 feet. We were sucking wind on the way up, but the summit is breathtaking. We bought a high definition camcorder before the trip. The pictures





were so sharp people got sick from looking at the 3,000 foot drop off. We spent Tuesday night in Salt Lake City.

Wednesday we drove into Wyoming to Hike King's Peak in Utah. That summit involves an overnight hike. In 2002 I had bought a two-man tent and full pack. Before this trip we bought Kim a full pack. Kim loves carbon fiber so she got \$100 walking sticks. I went to Wal-Mart and bought a set of aluminum walking sticks for \$15 and mine have built in compasses.

That night we camped in the Henry's Fork Basin surrounded by red cliff faces. Again incredible scenery surrounded us. The next morning with an escort from two moose

we headed to the summit. Kim chose not to do the final scramble to the summit, but waited while I took Asta's ashes to the top. We then took a very bold shortcut down a 1300 foot scree slope known as The Chute. For fear of Kim locking up I wanted to turn back after five minutes. That was the most, for lack of a better word, vulnerable place I have ever been, and I've camped out alone on Froze to Death Plateau in Montana. The Chute has no shelter, no place to rest and no hope of a rescue if something goes wrong. I wouldn't mind trying it again solo, but Kim and I will never do it together again.

We pressed on to Borah Peak in Idaho. We drove through very desolate land, a hot desert at elevation. Friday night was fairly quiet as we camped out, but the parking lot at Borah Peak is the most happening spot in Idaho at 5:30 on a Saturday morning. There were at least 50 people there. Kim made it to tree line and then waited while I pressed on. I made it further than I had before, but you can hear the fear and the dejection on the video as I realize I cannot make it over Chicken Out Ridge. I will try again someday, but not until I have taken the Rock Climbing class that Kim gave to me as a gift.



Montana. We had to get to the Black Hills on Sunday night; Kim's dad was waiting for us.

Harney Peak in South Dakota is a nice hike and it is higher than any peak east of the Mississippi. The Black Hills are much less intense than the other peaks we attempted. They are a tranquil place to visit, but for us they would never be a final destination of an adventure of ours. It was good for Kim to spend some time with her dad.

Tuesday night we spent in Omaha. Wednesday morning I put Kim on a plane back to Hartford and I was driving back. I got the car and all of our gear home on Thursday afternoon.

Friday was the work day for the Raft Race and Saturday was the Raft Race. Not my best planning, but it was the only way to make everything fit. There was a lot of rain in the Connecticut River Valley during our vacation. So on a bright Friday afternoon we drove the Millennium Buzzard down to the finish line and were told not to bother offloading because the race was cancelled. We looked into the river and sure enough the normally placid Connecticut River had a healthy current and a lot of unhealthy debris floating downstream. The gears in my head and Steve Layden's head both turn at the same speed and we agreed to put in Saturday morning early at the Rocky Hill Ferry and to make our way downriver passing the starting line at 10:00 and then proceeding to the finish line where the post race party was still planned. Steve said it was the best raft race he ever had. The best quote of the day was "We won, and finished last." Next year makes thirty years of the Millennium Buzzard; we hope to build a new flying deck for the occasion.



Rain haunted us in September when we went on our annual pilgrimage to Katahdin, the highest point in Maine and the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail. We got to our campsite in good weather, but Hurricane Hanna rained on us overnight. The next morning was humid, but no rain. It was a gray hike on the way up. Again the HD camcorder got wonderful footage of the day including clouds forming on one side of the Hunt Spur. The tablelands were fogged in so we spent little time at the summit. The winds picked up from 15 to 25 mph as we left the plateau. The wind kept increasing from 35 to 45 on the descent down the Hunt Spur. By the time we left the Monkey Bars there was a sustained gust in the 60 to 70 mph range. Kim has come a long way in the three years from the flatlands of Nebraska and what scared her about the Hunt Spur before doesn't bother her at all now; however we both greatly appreciated the protection of tree line.

November saw our last trip for the year. For six years in a row Kim has run the Living History Farm Race in Des Moines. We took the train to Chicago and rented a car to drive to Des Moines. We spent the night in a hotel on the Farm grounds and then ran the race. The race runs through instructional farm fields and then into the woods. There are seven creek crossings in near freezing water. I hate to say how much we paid for the opportunity to do the race, but it was worth it. This is Kim's longest streak at a race and we both want her to keep going. My streaks are up to 32 years in a row at the Thanksgiving Manchester Road Race and 14 Boston Marathons.

We keep working on our addition. We have bought new furniture, our first high definition TV and our latest acquisition is a wood burning stove. There is a picture of the stove on Kim's website. I'm still learning how to regulate the temperature and it is frequently 78 to 80 degrees in the great room. Kim loves the stove. We are doing our part to reduce importing foreign oil.

Even with so many things going on in our lives we still want to take the time to wish friends and family good fortune for 2009.

Best Wishes
Todd and Kim

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