

Seasons Greetings to All Our Friends and Family,

The picture on our card this year is taken in the living room in the old part of our house in front of the wedding quilt. At our wedding everyone signed a fabric block instead of a guest book. Kim then sewed the blocks into a quilt top. In February the quilt was done and now it hangs where we see it every day.

2009 was a year for efficiencies and economizing, doing more with less was the order of business. 2009 was also a year for fine-tuning annual events and updating people's expectations, amazing how quickly views can get dated. Kim and I made an unanticipated adventure back to the Rockies mid year, but first about our family.

Snoopy the beagle at 14 is the most senior dog. He is like a cross between the Energizer Bunny and a Timex watch. In 2007 he was slowing down and we thought it was his last Christmas. In 2008 he slipped a disk in his back. We didn't think he would walk the mile around our block again. We thought it would be his last Christmas. This spring he was back going around the block. This summer he got too hot and tired to walk around the block. We thought the end was near. Once it got cool again he was trying to run with Lacey and Bentley. He had a stroke in November. He was wobbly. His eyes were darted around. We didn't think he would walk around the block again. He is back doing the mile around the block. We think this may be his last Christmas. We have been wrong before. I think the Grim Reaper has a soft spot for beagles.

Lacey the beagle at ten years is slowing down ever so slightly. She still runs with Kim, but not as far or as often. Kim bought a baby jogger/bike trailer for Lacey. Kim's thought was Lacey could still go out and see the world even if she rode rather than ran. The problem is Lacey likes to be in the lead. She barks when she isn't in front. By definition the trailer is behind the bicycle so Lacey barks. As far as we can tell Lacey doesn't get hoarse. And if Lacey stops barking while in the trailer it means she is gnawing on the safety straps to attempt her freedom.

Birchhurst Bentley has been with us three years now. He loves any toy that squeaks. The squeaky toys lifespan can be measured in hours. He also likes going for rides in the car. He'll stand on the console and when we go around corners we'll say "Brace" and he'll put a paw on one of our shoulders to keep from falling over.

Bentley had a great adventure in October. He got out of the yard at 5:00 one morning. I heard his tags rattling in the neighbor's backyard. By the time I got to the source of the sound, I heard him one more yard over barking. When I got there I smelled skunk, but saw no sign of life. A steep hill and fence block the way to the next yard. While walking up that driveway I heard a splash. Neither Bentley nor I knew about the Koi pond. I was wearing a headlight and could see his little white nose sticking above the lilies. He seemed in trouble. So still in my pajamas and sneakers I stepped into the water. It was almost knee deep, for two steps. The third step and I was in to my shoulders. I got Bentley out and he was shaking. I didn't know fox terriers could get scared. There should be a fence around the pond, but how do you tell your neighbors that you know they have a pond in there backyard and it is deeper than a child's head, except by telling them you and your dog have been in it.

During the winter I finally buckled down and did all the work to get Rita, my new 1987 Merkur XR4Ti. I set her up the way I like. I replaced stock rubber bushings with polyurethane, better mounts, different transmission, new shocks and struts. The more time I spent under the car the more rust I found and by March I realized it was beyond my ability to fix. I've been driving the car, but the next owner will be a junkyard. I've got my eyes open for one more Merkur and the only requirement is a rust free body.

Because of Rita I finally realized it was time to leave the world of 1987 cars as daily drivers. I wanted to buy a Jetta Sportwagen TDI with a manual transmission and a gray interior. Almost all the Jettas come with an anthracite interior. Someone tried to tell me anthracite was dark gray and I replied, "Anthracite is a type of coal, ever hear of black as coal?" It became apparent to me that I would need to order the car. I had no problem leaving a deposit and waiting. It took three dealerships but I finally found a salesman that was willing to take my money for a new car. I ordered in March and was expecting an August or September delivery date. The German planner for wagons underestimated the demand and VW had no way to ramp up production. Also the diesel engine is worth \$2,000 more in Europe so there was little financial reason to make my car. I was pleasantly surprised with a June delivery. I don't love the Jetta the way I do my Merkurs, but getting 43 mpg with diesel does make me smile.



As well as economizing on the car we bought a new boiler for the house. A lot has changed since our 1948 Fitzgibbon had been installed. Our new Buderus boiler is less than half the size and half the oil usage.



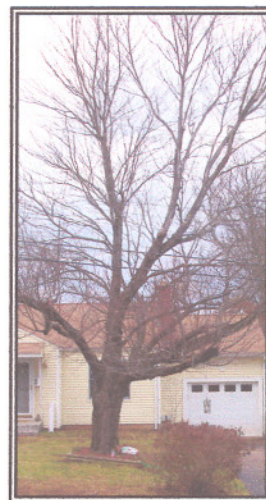
Of course we don't know how much oil we really are saving because we are heating with wood. Last winter the bulk of our heat came from the new wood stove. With Christmas fast approaching the heat has not turned on yet in our house and the temperature in the great room is about 75°.



Finishing the addition continues to take time. All the major pieces have been done for over a year, but we finally got the custom glass enclosure around the shower in the master bathroom, installed built in cabinets in the old dining room and put in a new wooden front door. I also discovered the subcontractor that insulated the addition skimped and put R11 above the new basement and below the great room. I replaced that with R30. I've also been sealing and painting the concrete in both halves of the basement. The joys of being a homeowner.

I finally took down the maple tree in the front yard. It had been topped and had a nasty split from 35 years ago during an ice storm. It was a lot of work, but it also was a lot of firewood. A Valley Forge Elm will eventually be placed where the maple had been. An Aspen finally replaced the dogwood that Asta killed years ago. Three times I had tried to bring an Aspen home from the Rockies and three times I had killed the tree. I finally paid to have an Aspen shipped to me. I named it Aspen the Small Tree in Asta the Small Dog's honor.

Turning 45 lead me to an ambitious race schedule for one last time. I race in a trail race circuit, The Grand Tree, and in the USATF-NE Mountain Circuit if you do all six you earn the title Mountain Goat and I wanted to race the New England road circuit to earn a new Iron Runner jacket. I might have been able to do it, but I badly sprained my ankle at the Savoy 22 mile trail race. It is two 11-mile loops and in the first three miles I rolled my right ankle, the good ankle, a couple of times before I sprained it at about 3.5 miles. Eventually I got up and started walking forward along the course. I finished the first loop. I didn't take the time to let my ankle heal and by the following Friday I was on crutches for a week. It took four months to heal to the point where it doesn't hurt to lift weights. That is longer than it took my left ankle to heal when I broke it 25 years ago.



I did get in lots of races. Kim and I went down to Washington DC for the Cherry Blossom ten miler in April. The cherry trees were in bloom for the race. I had a slow day and just missed out on an age group award. I was faster at a harder ten miler in February and through ten miles at a half marathon in March.

Among other races June brought the Cranmore Hill Challenge where I somehow finished third in my age group. The race was the 2009 USA Mountain Running Championship and I got a really neat National Championship bronze medal for my effort.

Among all the races I ran my three favorites yet again, my 15th Boston marathon in April, my 12th Mount Washington Road Race in June and my 33rd Manchester Road Race on Thanksgiving Day. After two DNF's (Did Not Finish) in a row I finished the Martha's Vineyard 20 miler in February. It was close though, I had to stop three times for intestinal discomfort. A woman at the finish was amazed with my finishing kick. She didn't see the clock and I finished in 2:09:59. It was an ego thing not to go over two hours ten minutes.

After we had a miscommunication Kim ran the Seven Sisters Trail Race, possible the hardest race in New England. I said she could never run the race, meaning she hiked parts of the course and hated it and wouldn't sign up, but it was taken as she couldn't finish the race because of the difficulty. The course is an out and back so you pass everyone once going the other way. As I was running back I kept waiting to hear the swearing as Kim went by in the other direction. Instead she was beaming and said how much she loves the race. The race has at least 3800 feet of elevation change over 12 miles. So much for the girl from Nebraska that didn't like hills, now she loves the tough hill courses.

Kim had a few incidents at races this spring. At Seven Sisters she slipped and fell into a thistle bush. Sheilding the collarbone she broke three years ago she did a twist and needed help getting out of the bush. Then at Soapstone she hyperextended her knee at 11 miles but trotted in the last three miles. Everything went well at Mount Greylock as she got the hang of the longer harder trail races.



Then Kim injured her foot this summer. For her it was a series of little things, running shoes that were too tight, dress shoes with a little too much heel, the need for orthotics and her trainer having her work on her balance by doing squats and lunges on her toes. Her injury got in the way of some summer hikes.

The weekend before Thanksgiving Kim flew out to Des Moines for the Living History Farm Race. It is her longest streak at seven years in a row. She enjoyed the unusually warm weather this year.

We did get in some good hikes. My running buddy Craig and I did Mt Marcy in New York as soon as the snow was gone. Then we took Bentley and hiked Mt Mansfield in Vermont just before the snow returned. Kim and I took my former co-worker Sandy up to Baxter State Park for the annual pilgrimage up Katahdin. We had gotten a little complacent; going above tree line should not be taken lightly. A cold rain started on the summit, Sandy had some medical problems. I was very worried about getting down. In the end the only casualty was a five-year-old digital camera. Next year we'll show a bit more respect for the mountain.



We went back to Kearney, Nebraska for Kim's high school reunion. It was her first reunion and she didn't know what to expect. She made me come along. Since I don't fly we turned the reunion into an excuse for a week's vacation. We packed the car and I left Wednesday after work and Thursday afternoon my father in law and I picked Kim up at the airport in Kansas City. In Kearney we visited with Kim's sister, Kathy, and had dinner with her friend Cara. We went to a Friday night mixer and then the Saturday dinner for the reunion. After the reunion we drove west on I-80 and got Panorama Point, Nebraska's high point then south on Colorado 385 and got Mount Sunflower in Kansas. We kept going south into Oklahoma and picked up Black Mesa in Oklahoma. Then we went west into New Mexico and Wheeler Peak outside of Taos. Finally we headed north to Leadville, CO and the top of the Rockies.



There are trip reports at http://kimbrown.net/high_pointing.html and click on the smiley face to see what Kim wrote. Black Mesa outside of Kenton, OK has too much life to be a desert, but it was brutal. By 9:00 it was over 90 degrees with no shade and the harshest sunlight either of us had ever seen. Kim's foot started hurting on the hike. She let me pick up Wheeler Peak

on my own while she went sightseeing in Taos. I hiked Mt Massive in Colorado while Kim explored Leadville. Mt Massive is 19 feet lower than it neighbor Mt Elbert the highest point in Colorado. And in exchange for letting me hike Massive we went white water rafting on the headwaters of the Arkansas River. Kim loved the rafting and I learned that being the strongest paddler means you ride up front and get splashed with cold water that not too long ago had been snow.



We also drove to the top of Mount Evans, the highest road in the United States. Just below the top is Summit Lake. Kim loves Alpine lakes and at 12,830 feet Summit Lake fits the bill.

Rafting on the Arkansas is not the same as the Connecticut River Raft Race. This year the raft race went well. There was a lot of rain the week before the race like last year, but this year the race was not canceled. Last year there was a lot of debris, this year the river was clear of flotsam and jetsam. Both years we've had grand days of it.



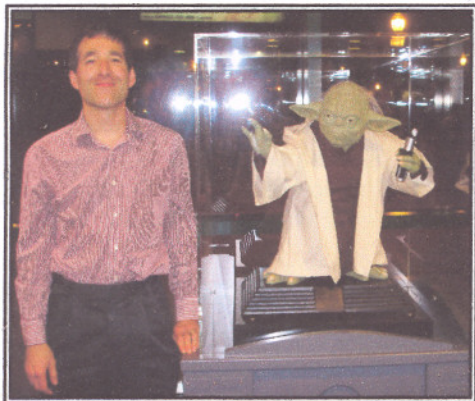
Steve, Martin and I built a new flying deck. It was great to add an upper level to the Millenium Buzzard again after almost a ten year absence. We also realized we had an image problem. Our group started as destitute high school students building rafts that were marginally safe and by no means comfortable. As time went on we built bigger, safer crafts, but in our minds we were still destitute high school students out to race cheaply. Our girlfriends and wives couldn't imagine how we could enjoy sitting on a chicken wire deck (they were cheap and didn't hold any waves) and thinking Doritos and Chips Ahoy with cheap beer could be a feast. Our significant others stopped coming and pressured a number of husbands not to go any more.

Meanwhile we've gotten older and like a few creature comforts like plywood decks and plastic lawn furniture for seats. We also bring a tent for the finish along with a grill and real food. After ten years of ending at isolated Dart Island the course has changed so we can leave cars at the finish to send a crew back to our house to get the post race party started while we disassemble and load the trailers.

Oh and we won again, but not without some controversy. In the last race we were the only racing raft and there is supposed to be a ten minute stagger on the start, that way the slower rafts can see the faster rafts go by in all their glory. For the second year we launched from Rocky Hill. We were underway at 8:00 and were at the start by 9:30. The race is supposed to start at 10:00 but it is usually closer to 10:30. It was well past 11:00 when the first cannon went off; the days of starting with a dynamite blast are long gone. We had been away from bathrooms for over three hours so I gave the command to just go and was surprised to hear a second cannon fire three minutes later. We didn't know that there was another racing boat. It wasn't until after the awards that anyone realized the stagger wasn't taken into account in the timing and the race really was a virtual tie. So we are having a grudge match in 2010 for bragging rights. I hope to put Triceratops in the water; she can blow away just about anything on the river. The Buzzard and the Little Willie can fight for second.

In an attempt to add culture to our lives we've been going to the Bushnell Auditorium for events. We saw Jersey Boys, the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Season. I love their music.

We've been going to the Connecticut Forum www.ctforum.org. It is a panel discussion. The latest Forum we went to was all about food. One panelist was Alice Waters; she is the originator of the philosophy that you should only cook with fresh, seasonal ingredients that are produced locally and sustainably. Another panelist was Anthony Bourdain who has a TV show where he travels the world and eats bizarre local dishes. And we went for Duff Goldman, The Ace of Cakes, he has a TV show on the Food Network and it chronicles his business, Charm City Cakes and the custom cakes they make. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duff_Goldman



Poor Alice Waters, she was quiet and reserved on stage with loud Anthony and brash Duff. Duff was the same fun loving person as he is on TV, at one point he was pelting Alice with green grapes from a stage display.

We also went to see a live orchestra performance. That was Star Wars: The Concert, a traveling show with a full orchestra playing the film scores. It was impressive to hear the music live. They also had quite the display of props and costumes.

So it was another year full of planned and unexpected adventures. Next year we are hoping to go back to the Smokies and see one of the last Space Shuttle launches in one vacation. We hope to spend a week hiking between huts in the White Mountains on another trip. But who really knows what the future holds? There never really seems to be enough time to do everything and to keep up with friends.

Best to all,
Todd and Kim
Bentley, Lacey and Snoopy
www.ToddBrown.com
www.KimBrown.net

