

Christmas 2008

Greetings and felicitations from Carl, Carolyn, and Teresa Wenning of Normal, Illinois!

Dear Family and Friends,

On the very day that we sent out our 2007 Christmas letter we found out that Carolyn's mother, Rita, had unexpectedly passed away. We had visited with her over Thanksgiving, and three days later she died alone at home, possibly from a heart attack, stroke, or maybe even a fall. She was discovered somewhat later after she failed to respond to our phone calls and messages. Our Christmas season was quite somber as a result. There were no outdoor lights, and our Christmas tree went unlit. We just couldn't get into the spirit of the season. Things are better now that we have learned to live with this tragic loss. The only thing to console us was the fact that Rita had lived a long, relatively healthy life and was 86 years old. Carolyn was grateful to have had her family, friends, father, and sister and nephew (both from Washington State) help in this difficult time.

Carolyn spent the first half of the year dealing with the difficulties of being executor of Rita's estate, especially trying to sell the house in a declining market. (The house still has not sold.) On March 8th Carolyn broke her ankle from falling down the steps at her mother's house while preparing it for sale. She had to stay at home and returned to work at Wal-Mart pharmacy two months later – on May 6th. She still feels the pain of the fracture and her leg continues to swell each day standing on her feet as she does for eight hours while at work.

Not all things have been bad for Carolyn this year. From August 30th through September 2nd Carolyn and Carl traveled to Baltimore, MD, for a well-deserved 4-day weekend. They had a great time visiting the National Aquarium, seeing von Hagens' incredibly amazing *Body World* display at the Maryland Science Center, touring the *USS Constellation* (the Navy's last wooden-hulled battle ship), visiting Fort McHenry (near where the national anthem was written in 1814), dining in Little Italy, and staying at the supposedly haunted Admiral Fell Inn. (Sorry, no ghosts!) They traveled to Baltimore after Carl went there during January for a physics teachers' conference.

During September, Carolyn visited the very impressive National Shrine of St. Therese in Chicago with Rebecca and Chrystian, and visited with them over the remainder of the weekend. During October, Carolyn helped her father, Tony, move into a retirement center. Carolyn, also, had the chance to meet up with her cousin, Ruth, from New York while she was in Chicago cleaning out her mother's house since she passed away in July.

Carl traveled to Chile for a second time within 12 months from February 7th - 13th, but did not do so for work; this was another well-deserved vacation. He, along with his friend Duane Yockey, traveled there to get in some southern sky watching. Carl and Duane stayed in the home of friends Claudio & Selma Perez at El Ingenio (in the Andes Mountains east of Santiago) and in an "astronomical" hotel (*Apuwara* – "wise man of the stars") in Combarbalá (in the foothills of the Andes in northern Chile). They observed from Combarbalá's *Observatorio Cruz del Sur*, and were the first official observers at this new facility. While observing from El Ingenio, they both earned the Astronomical League's coveted Southern Sky Binocular Observing Award by completing 50 required observations. While at the observatory, they completed nearly all the observations required for the Southern Sky Telescope Award, and managed to complete the observing program upon returning home.

Carl served as a consultant for the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy during February 20th-22nd when he performed a program review of the science department. Carl taught three workshops and delivered an invited address at the University of Missouri (Columbia) on June 10th. Shortly thereafter he took off on another vacation (yes, this guy takes lots of road trips) to Alabama and Texas where he visited with friends, and saw an automated telescope at Tarleton State University outside of Stephenville, TX. Over the October 10th-11th weekend, Carl hosted a joint meeting of Illinois physics and chemistry teachers on the campus of ISU. Some 130 were in attendance, and the event included 12 workshops, 5 major addresses, and nearly 25 shorter talks. On November 5th and 6th Carl



hosted representatives of the National Task Force on Physics Teacher Education also at ISU. Even in retirement, his work seems never ending.

Carl officially retired from ISU on May 30th after nearly 30 years. The Physics Department held a very memorable retirement party in his honor at the Challenger Learning Center in Bloomington on June 7th. Carl continues to work part time at ISU teaching one class and assisting his replacement, Ken Wester, who came in from the Mississippi School of Mathematics and Science. Just before he retired, Carl was honored with the CAS *Dean's Award for Outstanding Teaching* during an awards ceremony on April 15th; the award included a \$3,000 honorarium. Carl gave three invited conference presentations in Baltimore during January, and two additional invited presentations in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, during July.

Teresa was selected by the Bloomington-Normal Sister Cities Committee to represent our fair towns on a two-week trip to Владимир, Россия (Vladimir, Russia). She departed for Russia on June 18th and returned on July 2nd. During her stay, she made two good friends (Tatyana and Lilia), visited historic St. Petersburg, the capital city Moscow, and the quaint village of Suzdal. Tatyana and Lilia are now living close by in the Twin Cities, and attending high school this year as part of an exchange program. Teresa visited with Rebecca and Chrystian from October 11-12. Teresa and Rebecca took a walking food tour of Chicago, painted pottery, and saw the *Blue Man Group*. Teresa is now enrolled as a senior at University High School in Normal. She received a letter of admission to Illinois State University on November 8th. She is undecided about her major. Teresa continues to work as a server at Bob Evans Restaurant.



During late December 2007 – shortly after last year's Christmas letter – Rebecca won a writing competition and was sent by East Peoria Community High School on an all-expenses-paid trip to a conference in Atlanta, GA, in late January. During the spring, Rebecca decided to move on to a new teaching assignment, departing her first job at East Peoria. Rebecca and Chrystian moved to Crystal Lake, IL, on August 1st. She now teaches Physics and Physical Science at Cary-Grove High School northwest of Chicago. Chrystian now works for UBS (Union Bank of Switzerland) in downtown Chicago as a software developer.

This year was a great one for playing catch up with family and friends. Carolyn, Carl, Rebecca, Chrystian, Teresa, and her boyfriend Cody traveled to Ohio for a May 25th celebration of Agnes's (Carl's mother) 80th birthday. Carl's immediate family, as well as Rebecca and Chrystian, chipped in to purchase her a framed *Divine Mercy* image for a birthday gift. We were elated to see in attendance sister-in-law Shirley Kissel and nephews Daniel and Matthew Wenning (an IPA Pro-Am weight lifting champ), the wife and children of Carl's brother David who passed away in 1993. The family hasn't seen them for many years, and everyone was just absolutely delighted to be able to play catch up once again.

Carl, Carolyn, and Teresa were able to visit Ohio again for Thanksgiving. Besides having a wonderful time seeing an uncle and two aunts, many nieces and nephews, a brother and sisters, and in-laws; they also had a chance to visit with three nephews – two sons and a daughter of Carl's sister Janice who passed away in 1990 – for the first time in nearly two decades. Andy, Jenny, and Scott, as well as their significant others (Traci, Tom, and Mindy respectively) were a pleasure to behold. We had been expecting only Andy and Traci to visit, but the others were able to come along. We all enjoyed visiting with one another for about four hours on the Friday after Thanksgiving. We spent a considerable amount of time talking about Janice who died from cancer when the children were all quite young (5 to 13 years old).

Carolyn and Carl also had a chance to play catch up with Elena Peteru, a friend from Samoa who attended ISU with Carolyn. We lost track of Elena after she returned to Samoa in 1982. A chance update in the ISU Alumni Association magazine put them on track to finding Elena. We have been able to send e-mails back and forth and hope to visit with her for a "Polynesian holiday" in the not too distant future.

Our family now has five cats, two males and three females. Carolyn calls herself their mother. Pac Man was added to our household on March 7th. All the cats, Catarina, Phyllis, Mystique, Romeo (a.k.a. the Gray Rat), and Pac Man (a.k.a. Manny) are great family companions and are well loved. Well, that's about it for another year!

Merry Christmas and *Happy New Year* from our family to yours! ☺

Carl (cwenning@ilstu.edu)

Carolyn (carolynw77@hotmail.com)

Teresa (poisongirl3250@gmail.com)