



Greetings to one and all!

We hope that this letter finds you well and ready to put all of those New Year's resolutions into practice! Our year has been one of changes and challenges as we continue with the world's longest remodel and as God "remodels" our hearts and minds to be more like Him.

The most notable thing that happened this year was Katrina's marriage to Matt Thomas on September 20th. It was a joyous occasion celebrated with friends and family and we are so proud of the happy couple! Katrina graduated from Oregon State University this year with a double-major in Interior Design and Housing Studies AND a minor in Art History! She now has a great job at Imagine Graphics in Eugene. Matt has been working with the Oregon Department of Forestry since his graduation last year and has just received a permanent position.



As you can see by the picture, Madison (12) has grown quite a bit this year and has recently become interested in sign language and in creative writing. She continues to be involved in music and drama at church and with other organizations such as the Pacific Youth Choir. This summer, she had the privilege of attending the Pacific International Children's Choir Festival in Eugene. The festival was attended by nine choirs from across the United States, including Hawaii and was a great experience for her. She was also able to attend three camps this summer and wanted to become a camp counselor every time!

Mark turned 11 this past October and has continued his love for drawing as well as being involved with Madison in the kids' choir at church. He played the part of Nick, a shepherd boy, in the Christmas program this year and had quite a few lines and a solo. He got a Spy Kit for Christmas and has been having lots of fun sharing it with his friend Michael. Mark and Michael also love to do science experiments and recently created something that appeared to be breathing ...

Mary is five now and is doing quite well with her reading. She is almost finished with the second set of books in the Hooked on Phonics series that we have been using. She and Sarah took ballet classes early in the year and Mary was absolutely adorable in the spring dance recital (Sarah's class was too young to be in the recital)! She's learning a little piano from Madison and took a tap dance class this fall with Sarah and their friend Amy.

Sarah will be four in February 2009 and is getting cuter every day! She still has her trademark "sense of fun" and enjoys attending preschool two mornings a week. There are only six kids in her class so she gets plenty of attention and is learning a lot. It's been amazing watching her grow this year, a particularly formative one as she has made the transition from baby to little girl. Her favorite activity lately is to dress up in her blue Cinderella dress with her "glass" slippers and her crown.

David Jr will be 16-months old on 1/3/09 and still amazes us all every day. He's walking everywhere, telling "stories", climbing up on the dining room table and getting into things (like the toilet!). We're so blessed by him and his sweet, happy disposition in every circumstance (unless he's bonked his head or has to take a nap!).

You might have noticed that there hasn't been mention of school (except for Sarah) so far. This is because we started homeschooling this fall. We started thinking and praying about it in the spring and Laurie did a LOT of research to prepare. While this has resulted in some challenges, we still feel that it's the best thing for our family at this point. We are enjoying the flexibility, the ability to have "life skills" days and the additional time that it gives us with the kids. Family relationships are closer as a result, which is one of the benefits that we were looking for. We've been able to get involved with other homeschooling families and are learning a lot from them.

A few months ago, we started attending Household of Faith Community Church, which is quite a departure from the traditional church in that families stay together during the service (i.e. no Sunday School). It's been helpful for us to attend a church where most families are large and are homeschooling. While we enjoyed some things about our previous church (which we still have some connections to), we always felt a little out of place with the size of our family. HOFCC may not be our "forever" church, but it is definitely meeting a need at the moment. The kids are learning the discipline of sitting (and even listening!) during the two-hour service and we all enjoy the shared meal that follows!

Many things were accomplished on the "house-front" this year including a wood-burning insert (replacing the gas insert that was in the fireplace), new windows upstairs, a second driveway entrance (making it circular now) and drainage improvements that



have *greatly* dried out the property. The wood stove came in handy in December as we experienced over a foot of snow, temperatures in the teens and twenties and a loss of power for almost three days from the 23rd to the 26th! The last time that Portland received that much snow was sometime in the 1960s so we don't expect to see this too often. Nonetheless, we're still preparing for as much snow (or more) in January-February when it traditionally comes! And after it all melts, hopefully we will see the completion of the first phase of the remodel!

Laurie has been more-than-occupied with homeschooling this year and is doing a *wonderful* job! The kids have done unit studies about the Vikings, Christopher Columbus, pirates and the Pilgrims, to name a few. The library is a popular destination and we constantly have about 80 books (or more) checked out, along with educational videos and books-on-CD. Part of the kids' education includes "life skills" days where they learn about things like cooking and gardening. Our garden produced some beans, peas and pumpkins in addition to the blueberries, apples and pears that were already there. Plans are already underway for next year's garden, which will be bigger. We've dried and saved some tomato, bean and pumpkin seeds so we have a good start on it already.

Dave is still working for Calence (nine years now), though the company was acquired by Insight this year. The Calence name is being dropped in 2009, which is a little sad for those of us who have been there for quite some time. A reduction-in-force occurred in early December and hopefully will be the only one needed to "right-size" us. Despite this, the company and, in particular, the Management Services division that I am in, remains strong and may actually increase business as other companies look for help to manage their server and network infrastructures.

This letter is only able to capture the essence of our year – it's truly amazing how much more there is to tell but we'll go with what we've got so far! We are blessed in so many ways and look forward to what God has in store for us in 2009. We are thankful beyond words for our family and friends and hope to get to California and Arizona sometime this year to visit!

May God richly bless you in the coming year!!

By the way – <http://www.ecklesfamily.org/> and <http://memorial.ecklesfamily.org/> have both received a few updates if you're interested!