

So, here we are at the end of another tumultuous year in a world that will probably never be the same again. September 11th was a catastrophe in every sense of the word for the Americans and so for the world. It destroyed the naïve innocence of the average American who had never imagined that anything this horrific could happen inside their borders. That said it is quite remarkable that there has been so little violent reaction to the events. Muslims are still able to attend and worship at their mosques and there has been a gradual return to the “new normal”. It has been an amazing lesson in patriotism and we feel even more connected to our new home.

We have all had a really good year again although with the typical amount of change that we seem to attract and, I guess, enjoy?!

Lauren is in her 2nd year at High School. Although she does not like the new campus at all (her first High School year was at a smaller separate campus) she is doing very well. She is taking some subjects with a college credit at the same time as High School so will get a head-start when she leaves High School. She has not followed Ryan in the theatre with as much enthusiasm, and due to her repeated protests I think Cheryl and I have now got it that “she is not Ryan!!”. She is devoted to her dancing with the Christian dance group and dances every day and often at weekends on outreaches. It is a great group of youngsters and we are very pleased that she has that as a primary extra-curricular activity. She qualifies to get her driving license next year so she will probably take over Ryan’s car and I’ll get him a slightly bigger (but not more powerful!) one to accommodate his enormous frame.

Ryan finished his first college year in May with a superb rebound from the first semester and so retained his scholarship. This was a very good thing as he was going to have to fund the missing money himself if he didn’t get it. He tells us that his first semester this year is going well and he starts finals next week so we will see when the results come in. He has got into the swing of things at college and now rarely comes home at weekends (his break up with his girlfriend during summer probably has something to do with that as well). He seems to spend a lot of time on the computer and so no serious romances as far as we know. During summer he decided to re-build his computer to the latest motherboard and processor – of course, by the time he finished it had cost more than a new computer and was instantly eclipsed by the latest and greatest. Over Thanksgiving weekend he had a “LAN” party at home and we had 12 youngsters all with their own computers which played havoc with the power system. As they play computer games through the night the house was littered with bodies next morning – some using the rugs as their blanket!

Cheryl has survived the layoffs at Continental after the 9/11 shake-out in the industry. In March she was offered the position of relief secretary of the reservations section she worked in. She took it as it meant regular hours and an increase. Of course, they were really impressed with her and she got the permanent position in October. She is secretary to the 2 reservations Directors and loves the work. The downside is that she can’t go part-time which was the original idea. So although we can fly anywhere at almost no cost she doesn’t get any time off. We did get across to London for a weekend in July for our great-nieces christening. The primary reason for going was that Cheryl’s brother was there and, since we have no plans for a return trip to South Africa, it was a rare opportunity to see them. We also went up to Atlanta in September to see old

friends from Durban. Yesterday we flew to San Antonio to have lunch with Ryan as it is his 19th birthday today. In March Cheryl celebrated a milestone birthday and we had a great party for her here at the house. A mix of ex-South Africans and Americans from many different pieces of our lives and a good time was had by all.

I have had a quieter year than the last few although there seemed to be chaos all around. We laid off most of our management team in June and then wobbled around for a few months while we decided what to do. A new director from our UK operation takes over in January and we will see what he does. Although I had a slow sales year I will still end it as top performer for the 4th year running. Next year I may take a closer look at some of the offers that are on the table but would prefer to stay with the familiar if possible.

In a couple of weeks we have our neighbors from Durban arriving for a short visit. They arrive in New York on 26th December and I will fly up and meet them. Cheryl will then come up on 27th and we will spend a couple of days there. Then off to DisneyWorld in Florida, a road trip around Texas and then overnight jaunts to Memphis (to see Elvis' Graceland!) and Las Vegas. They are only here for 3 weeks so we are packing in as much as we can.