

This was not our best year! Of course, there are many who have had far worse years so we do count our blessings but it was not a very good year. Let's start with the bad stuff and then we can focus on all the good things.

In February we learned that Flo, Cheryl's sister in law, was gravely ill on Johannesburg. So ill that Cheryl and Lauren hopped on a flight and went across for a week. That had its own share of drama for us as they had to buy a \$2,000 ticket to get back owing to the possibility of being stranded at the stopover in Dakar!! Worse was that while they were there I was laid off from RWD so the \$2,000 bill was even less welcome. I was out of work for 3 months and then joined a telesales company. That was not a good fit and I left there in September and was out of work again for another 2 months. I have since joined a company selling the Microsoft Dynamics ERP system. This is the work that I did for over 20 years before getting into the training and support world and so far I am loving it – it is great selling a market leader like Microsoft. However, the time out of work and continuing losses at GameForce meant that I had to sacrifice much of our retirement money and so we will again be starting over with that build-up and I will just have to work another 10 years. That was the bad stuff and, as I said, many people have it far worse than we do so we look forward to a better 2008. On to cheerier things...

Flo has made a startling recovery and is apparently feeling better than she has for years. Cheryl has had another stellar year at Continental and has recently had her second promotion and raise this year. During the year she went across to Athens and to Mumbai (Bombay) to handle the recruiting for the new stations over there and she has recently finished with the new Heathrow station recruiting – although that sadly did not require a visit! She has been told that her focus will be on international recruiting and with Continentals plans to expand their European and Middle East destinations she can expect several more trips in 2008. She works very hard and rarely has a day off when she is not hooked up on her laptop chasing e-mails etc. But she seems to be enjoying it and gets rave reviews from her colleagues.

Ryan has had a very good year. He moved into an apartment with his long time buddy, Chris, in March and seems to enjoy his independence. They have a very nice 3-bedroomed townhouse in a complex a few minutes from us. He started the year working for a start-up technology company that was developing a game tournament system. The pay was not great but he worked from home and enjoyed the work. Around mid-year the company made it clear that they were having financial problems and eventually had to stop paying people. Fortunately Ryan had started looking around and got a job at a local game development company. Same pay but working from an office close to downtown. Within two weeks they had increased his pay as he did a great job for them and he seems to have become their primary debugger. He has been working on the development of the Rock Band video game and had many long hours as they got close to development milestones. The product has just been handed over and he got a sizeable bonus for his efforts. Also a couple of months ago the start-up company contacted him to see if he could do some contract work for them. They offered him an outrageously high hourly rate and so he has been putting in some hours for them. He and Meredith are still an item but no signs of the relationship formalizing yet – although of course we will probably be the last to find out! A few months ago he suggested we should have a family dinner once a week so we try and do that – they are great fun!

Lauren continues with her charmed life. She is still at college staggering towards graduation at what seems to be a slower and slower pace. Right now it looks as though she will graduate December next year. Although it is taking forever, she is still maintaining her high grades with apparently not a lot of effort. She continues with her job at Continental where she is still scanning documents. She is very involved with the church and is now on a track to become an assistant pastor in 2008. She runs a youth group for them and we regularly have around 40 or so kids descend on the house for the meetings. She went to Guatemala on a mission trip in July with her church group and then attended a big conference down in Orlando last month. She does not have a serious love interest but mixes with the group from church a lot. She turned 21 in August so there was much merriment.

Aside from my layoffs and seemingly perpetual job hunting it has been a very busy year for me. I had to go back in as President of the Lions Club as there was just not anyone else available. I had also agreed to take on a District position before I knew that I would be President so it has not been easy. I have continued with my work for the local community association running events in the local Town Center Park and have succeeded in making a profit for the association for the first time in many years. That is good as we are aiming to put up an amphitheatre of some sort in the future. It is fun being involved with the local community. As I mentioned earlier GameForce has continued to run at a loss and Ryan has essentially cut his involvement in the business due to his work commitments. In July I told the landlord that unless we had a very good summer season we would be closing the doors in September. We ended up negotiating a new space for the business half the size and down on street level and moved in September. It has made a huge difference and this month we should make a reasonable profit for the first time. If this continues it will be a big relief and means that I can focus on the next phase which is to open more centers and so capitalize on the learning curve. In addition to all that one of our friends is opening a wine bar in our old premises and so I have been very involved working with her on the preparations for that. I worked up the initial business plan and have been working on the design with her. We plan to open in late January next year and hope that it will be a huge success – there is no late night up-market venue in our suburb and we plan to offer music as well.

Other highlights for the year were:

- ♣ Finalization of our US citizenship in March. We were particularly honored to be mentioned in the congressional record (equivalent of UK Hansard) by our congressman. You can see that here <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?r110:E19MR7-0038>:
- ♣ Through the wizardry of the internet we were able to make contact with one of our bridesmaids and groomsmen who we had lost contact with 30 years ago. They had plans for a reunion dinner in UK and so we hopped over there for a quick weekend in October. Great fun and lots of reminiscing.
- ♣ I was awarded a Jack Wiech Fellowship award by Lions – it's the highest honor Texas Lions can bestow.