

This was a better year! Better than last and better than many. And, in a first, this letter was unprompted by Cheryl – that's got to be a good year!! Its middle of November and we have wonderful early fall weather with temperatures between 50 at night and 75 in the day. Gloriously crisp and comfortably warm. And the yard is going dormant so less time needed to maintain it and more time to enjoy it. Thanksgiving and Christmas will soon be upon us and we will have much to reflect on this year and many, many thanks to offer.

Since I was the cause of so much anguish last year let's get my story first. You may recall I had started with ePartners selling the Microsoft Dynamics ERP software. It has been very successful and I have had two major sales and lots of smaller ones. And I love the job and the people I work with. I work primarily in the Houston area although I recently made a major sale in Louisiana – so very little air travel and lots more time to build solid relationships with prospects. To a large degree, Houston has been insulated from the economic downturn because of the high oil price and the resultant effect on oil and gas field service companies. However the latest crisis and election results are starting to cause some apprehension so we may see more of a slowdown next year. On the social side I am still involved with Lions although, thankfully, not President this year. As the downturn kicks in we see more need for our services and growing difficulty in raising funds. I am also still involved with the Community Association and we have run 4 very successful events this year so a nice balance in our bank account. We have our big Christmas Festival coming up December 6th with the traditional Christmas Tree lighting. Gameforce continues to struggle although the move to new premises has reduced our rent and we have also partnered with a local PC support group who share the rent. We start to close out some of the loans next year so hopefully there is a payback sometime in the future.

Cheryl continues her upward track at Continental and I lose track of the number of promotions she has had and the number of congratulatory e-mails that flow around her at the office. She has done an outstanding job with the intern program and is credited with bringing in some of the brightest talent to the company. Earlier this year she got a promotion which gave her the much sought after SA1 rating for pass riding. This is a really big deal as it means we have a much better shot at getting on flights (and in first class!) She had been tipped off about a potential significant promotion in the next year or so when a senior person retires so will hang in for that and her pension and lifetime flying rights. Recently 2 separate companies head-hunted her with salaries close to double what she earns but of course without the benefits which we really enjoy. But it is certainly good to know that she has marketable skills. She doesn't have a lot of spare time but spends what she has mainly with our wino friends.

Ryan is still doing well at the game development company and recently finished work on Rock Band 2 for the Wii. If any of you play the game and get to the end you will see his picture with the development team – he is the big dude with the goatee! During the hurricane and for several weeks after he was working 14 hour days to get the project completed. He lives in his own apartment about 10 miles from us and seems to be enjoying the independence. He often talks of moving to Austin which is the Texas center for technology. He is still in a relationship with Meredith but no signs of that formalizing yet. Lauren was licensed as a Pastor early this year and continues her outstanding work with the youth group at the church. She just returned from a mission trip to Guatemala where she worked at an orphanage. She plans mission trips to South Africa and Scotland next year. She has taken a semester off college but has just told us that she has applied to go back to the business school to complete her finance degree. She is still working at Continental as that is her only source of funds and spends most of her social time in church related activities.

So the family is generally well and looking forward to the future with a somewhat more optimistic view than last year. Although we are by no means out of the financial black hole caused by GameForce and my job-hopping over the past couple of years we are certainly seeing what looks like a light at the end of the tunnel.

Of course there were a couple of significant events this year. First – the hurricane on September 12th was just a very scary event when it happened and a miserable existence dealing with the aftermath. There are some pics on our website <http://www.theaustinfamily.com> including one that shows the radar map as it went right over our subdivision. The only significant damage we suffered was the van being hit by a falling tree but a really good bodyshop friend got it back on the road for me for next to nothing. Surviving for 13 days without electricity to our home and the whole subdivision for part of that time was very, very trying. The most mundane activities became missions requiring research, logistics and faultless timing – and I'm only talking about trying to buy some water, ice or bread!! Cheryl missed much of it as she was out of town recruiting at universities. Suffice to say I celebrated when the power finally switched back on.

Then, of course, there was the election. As many of you know we are Republicans and so were disappointed by the outcome but not surprised. The present administration acted totally out of character with Republican principles so while the Democrats were able to campaign effectively on not wanting 8 more years of the Bush policies it was very difficult for Republicans to say we did. It became a vote on which change was the better and the electorate decided by 46% to 52% that Democrats were right. It was not a landslide and it should have been and I believe that is because of some concern about just how much change we really want, and also whether Barack Obama has sufficient experience to manage the change. We will soon see how far he will go but there is real concern that his stakeholders (campaign supporters) are already clamoring for payback. Certainly focusing all the tax rising efforts on the wealthy and large corporations will have a devastating lasting effect – I have already heard of one software company that is moving to Ireland to get their 12% tax rate against the 39% anticipated here. The stances taken on the current bailout of the auto industry will be very telling. The unions were big supporters of the Democrat campaign and will likely force the administration to keep the status quo with the auto companies. That means they will continue to build 16-m cars a year even though the market can only sustain 10-m at best. And they will continue to build units that lose them \$1,000 each as they ship them.

It will be very interesting to see how this unfolds next year. We are in uncharted territory for this generation and I will pray that they get it right or at least not so wrong as to be disastrous. The American economy, and individual, is incredibly resilient (I think we learned that from our parents, the Brits) so we will survive and grow again. I have seen nothing yet that suggests we will not remain the dominant force in the free world.