

Christmas 2007 — Our 25th Holiday Letter!

We have placed the complete archive of these letters online. www.richardhess.com/family/ Richard is pleased that all of these files survived and were still readable. He tries hard to maintain robust storage systems for his business and our family data. We even have one storage system at our neighbour's to provide an off-site copy. Information about this and many other things related to Richard's work can be found in his blog. www.richardhess.com/notes/

Michael, in Grade 7, is enjoying music again this year. He continues to play the flute in the school band and sings in the Trinity Anglican Church Youth Choir. Other church activities include Youth Group on Friday evenings and server (acolyte) duties some Sundays. He is planning on starting private flute lessons in January.

Robert, in Grade 8, is really doing well on the tenor saxophone. In the Spring, he auditioned for a place in the York Region School District School Board Enrichment Band camp and was accepted. He was even the first chair tenor saxophone! He enjoyed a week away from home and school in June at a lovely spot on Lake Simcoe (north of Aurora). Robert plays in the school band, and also sings in the Trinity Youth Choir and attends Youth Group. This fall, he and his sax joined the Trinity Orchestra—and he is the youngest member. He also gave his first sax solo with piano accompaniment this November at one of Trinity's Youth Choir fundraisers.

Mary Beth continues to be busy chauffeuring the boys, getting them to events on-time, and keeping up with everyday life! She also helps Richard as much as she can with his business. She volunteers occasionally at school, church, Sharon Temple (where her brother is director/curator), and the Aurora Historical Society.

Richard's business continues to do well and keep him occupied. The current big project is digitizing over 600 hours of lectures by prominent 20th century theologian, Bernard Lonergan. These will eventually be available to all on the University of Toronto's T-Space repository. He has become more involved with sound reinforcement and recording at Trinity Church. He had a mini-adventure in early May, traveling to Milwaukee for the annual ARSC conference by car and high-speed catamaran! He left his car in Michigan and took the ferry across Lake Michigan to Milwaukee. We hope to do that with the boys sometime. It was fun!

Our big event of 2007 was driving to Alaska and back. This was the boy's first trip to Alaska, and Mary Beth's and Richard's fourth! We left on July 3rd and returned on August 14th. Our 1994 Suburban took the 10,600 miles (17,000 km) in stride and didn't give us any problems. All four of us remained healthy and had a *wonderful* time. All lodging and excursions were booked before we left home, and we kept to our timetable. We saw so much—animals, beautiful scenery, glaciers, good weather—and to prove it, each of the boys took about 3,000 digital pictures. You may also find our route map and a few more of Richard's photos online. www.pbases.com/r1hess/ Keep clicking on the bear walking towards you in the stream.



Waskesiu Lake moments before the wind storm

Our travels started by heading through Wawa, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, The Pas, and Waskesiu Lake. We stayed two nights in Winnipeg to spend much of one day at the Aviation Museum. The boys had a brief swim in Waskesiu Lake when a very strong wind suddenly came along and everyone ran for shelter. We stayed two nights in Edmonton so we could visit the Telus World of Science and the famous West Edmonton Mall. The boys had a blast at the water park.

We continued on to Dawson Creek (the official start of the Alaska Highway), Fort Nelson, Watson Lake (home of the famous "Signpost Forest"), Whitehorse, and Dawson City. We enjoyed the SS *Klondike* in Whitehorse and spent two nights in Dawson City so we could get the feel of and tour this historic town.



Yukon-Alaska border on Top of the World Highway

On Day 15 of the trip, we entered Alaska, and spent the night in Chitina, the town at the west portal of the McCarthy Road which leads to Kennicott. After traversing the washboard road for 2.5 hours, we walked across the new footbridge and took the van to the Kennicott Glacier Lodge in time for lunch. We then took a guided tour through the decaying abandoned mill—all 14 stories of it! The next day we drove out the same washboard road and headed to Valdez for another two-night stay.

One of the high points of the trip was the all-day cruise with Stan Stephens Charters. Captain Stan himself was at the helm. We saw otters, sea lions, humpback whales, and two glaciers. We left Valdez by water on board the MV *Aurora* of the Alaska Marine Highway.



Moose on the McCarthy–Kennicott Road



Alaskan Brown Bear and Salmon, Hyder



Prince William Sound, MV *Aurora*, Humpback Whale



Icefields Parkway between Jasper and Lake Louise

We arrived in Whittier where you can now drive through the old railroad tunnel. The tunnel time shares road and rail traffic in both directions.

We spent two nights in Anchorage and three nights in Fairbanks. The museum at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks is still enchanting. The half-day tour on the sternwheeler riverboat *Discovery* was very well done, including introductions to various parts of Alaskan life: sled dogs, bush planes, fish wheels, and native cultures. The El Dorado Gold Mine allowed hands-on gold panning and was also fun, if a bit too touristy.

On Day 24, we started our drive home through the Yukon, staying at Burwash Landing, Carcross, Northern Beaver Post, and Stewart, B.C. We stayed two nights in Carcross, making a day-trip to Skagway, Alaska, where we discovered the amazing fact that each year over 800,000 cruise ship passengers visit this town of about 2,000!

We stayed three nights in Stewart and visited Hyder, Alaska, on two days where we saw several brown bears feeding on salmon in the aptly named Fish Creek. There is a huge elevated wood viewing platform where we spent hours waiting for the bears to appear. The bears were looking for salmon—and found it. We also saw black bears in the local garbage dump, sadly.

From Stewart, we drove to Vanderhoof, B.C., where we spent two nights with relatives John and Myrna Bailey. Their hospitality was incredible and the boys got a taste of farm life, a horse-drawn wagon, and an ATV. Tete Jaune Lodge was our next stop.

The following day, we had lunch at the Jasper Park Lodge and spent the night at the Icefield Chalet. We took the snowcoach tour directly out onto the Athabasca Glacier. The next morning, we drove down the Icefields Parkway and into Calgary, visiting the Glenbow Museum for several enjoyable hours. We spent two nights with Lynn and Jim and again had a marvelous time. We even went to their lakeside cabin, which was most relaxing.

After spending a night in Regina, we headed for Carman, Manitoba, where we had a great time with Bob McIntyre who had hosted the McIntyre family reunion in 2002. The boys got to see another farm and even much bigger farm equipment. We then headed to Fort Francis driving through the gorgeous Lake-of-the-Woods area. The next day we visited Atikokan and Old Fort William in Thunder Bay, spending the night in Nipigon. We took the northern route from Nipigon to Cochrane, stopping for lunch in Long Lac. This once-in-a-lifetime trip ended on Day 44 with lunch in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, and a lovely evening drive through the Muskoka region.

We hope that this note finds you all well. May the blessings and joy of this season extend to you all and all whom you love. Please continue to pray for peace on earth.

With all our love,

Mary Beth, Richard, Robert, and Michael Hess