

Dear All

Merry Christmas everybody! Over the years we have received family Christmas newsletters from other people, and it always left us with mixed emotions, because on the one hand it's great to catch up, but on the other one would have preferred a personal note. Well, with the kids keeping us busy, it's hard enough to find time to exchange an occasional personal note between Frank and Nicola, so the newsletter seems to be the best we can manage until the kids will be out of the house one distant and much anticipated day!

For those of you we haven't been in touch with for a really long time, we adopted Malachi (9) and Mariah (8) in February 2006. They are biological siblings here from Ohio, so after a New Zealander, a German, and a dog from Australia, we have finally added a couple of true Americans to our family! The sweet looks of the kids in the pictures are somewhat deceiving, since the two are certainly a handful to handle. Getting their difficult behaviors under control initially was one of the toughest challenges we had ever taken on, and neither of us could imagine having to go through that period again. At this stage, while not all is smooth sailing quite yet, things have certainly taken a decisive turn for the better, and we feel we have things under control. Both kids are very smart, love school, and are doing very well in it, which are all things that help! Malachi is an engineer at heart who loves building things and taking things apart - mostly the latter, actually! Mariah is a born actor who enjoys role playing. She will audition for a play by the Kent Stage in the new year. Keep fingers crossed for us that she will get a part!

In summer this year we had a wonderful holiday at Outer Banks, North Carolina. We hadn't seen the sea in a long time, so especially Nicola who grew up by the coast, was getting pretty desperate to see water different from our local river (where our dog Jody swims every day in summer!), or dirty old Lake Erie in Cleveland. We rented a house not directly on the Atlantic coast, but on a sound with a small, sandy beach at the bottom of the property - and it was like paradise! The kids (and Jody) could swim, canoe, fish from a private dock, and built sandcastles, while Mum and Dad sat up on a raised deck overlooking the beach with a cool drink and a book! Actually, the water was warmer than Frank likes to take his baths, so even Nicola could occasionally go in the water!

Nicola's job is going very well. She submitted for tenure in September, which should be a mere formality given her achievements, and all faculty should give her a vote of approval. The research is going well - for those of you interested in chemistry, Nicola's research group has recently discovered that vitamin B₁₂ protects cells from oxidative stress. It's a nice project - a combination of cell biology and mechanistic chemistry.

Nicola hadn't done much mechanistic chemistry for quite a while, so she's enjoying it! For those of you who haven't seen it, Nicola's research group has a nice web site at: <http://dept.kent.edu/chemistry/Faculty/Research/Brasch/index.aspx>. It was designed by Frank and three fellow students as part of a Kent State University web design class in the days before the kids, when he still had time!

Frank is still doing the stay-at-home dad thing, and hasn't felt bored for a split second! When time permits, he enjoys an old-new hobby - fish keeping - which he started when he was ten years old, but took a break from when he moved away from German until we settled down in Ohio. Frank has always been interested in cichlids, and as it turns out, NE Ohio is a hotbed for cichlid breeders with a very active fish club scene. This makes the harsh Ohio winters a lot more bearable for Frank, who is on the board of the Ohio Cichlid Association (OCA)- as photographer, combining aquaristic with one of his other hobbies. In Fall, the OCA runs the second largest cichlid convention in the USA, and probably world-wide, with around 300 people attending, international speakers, a fantastic fish show and a huge auction. For details and pictures of our Lake Tanganyika fish tank with 300 gallons (1140 liters) of water in it, please visit Frank's web site at: www.fmueller.com. Frank still can't believe that Nicola let him set up that thing in the living room!

This will be only our second Christmas with the kids, and last year especially Malachi was extremely concerned that there would be enough presents!. With the flood of stuff that he got from us, and that was arriving from family overseas, even he had to admit in the end that he had never seen that many presents in one pile in his life! We believe this year he will be much more relaxed in anticipation of the event.

Also, for Christmas this year we are very fortunate to have Frank's Dad with us, who arrived at the end of November and will stay his customary six weeks. It also looks like a couple of old friends (Casey and Melissa) will join us for the Christmas break as well, which should be lots of fun! In general we all, and especially the kids, greatly enjoy visitors, and our house is extremely well equipped with guest rooms. So please consider this to be an invitation to visit us often and stay long!

Have a wonderful Christmas and a happy new year!

Best wishes

Nicola, Frank, Mariah, Malachi & Jody