

## CHRISTMAS 2008

**T**he best parts of Christmas are celebrating the original Christmas story, and spending time with family, and we've been able to do that. Brian, our oldest, and his wife Mika arrived from Japan on Monday night and joined us for the Christmas Eve service. We're hoping Drew and Candess, and Sara and Ryan, will be here on New Year's Eve. Drew and Candess are in the middle of moving. Drew has re-enlisted in the Army and Fort Stewart, Georgia, is his new post. Sara has started night school, training to become a massage therapist.

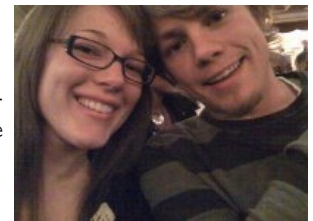


We're looking forward to saying good-bye to 2008. This was one of our most challenging years, although like each year it had both highs and lows. It started with the snowiest winter on record, as Madison set a new season snowfall record, 101 inches.



I was able to jump ahead on spring a little bit with a visit to Israel, our seventh Book & the Spade Holyland Tour (for my radio program). In Jerusalem, near the end of the tour, Anne called to tell me that my brother Ben had died. I made it back for the funeral with about an hour to spare. Ben had ALS, Lou Gehrig's Disease. We are saddened at his passing, and miss him. Yet we rejoice that his suffering was not prolonged, and look forward to seeing him whole in eternity.

Just a few days after the funeral more bad news. Anne fell on the ice at a neighbor's house and shattered her elbow. The physical pain from this mishap has been a challenge. Her recovery has been slow but steady. But she has been able to continue her job as a nanny to a family in Middleton, which she's had for over a year now.



Another huge challenge in June when heavy rains arrived and the saturated ground couldn't take any more. Our basement flooding and sewer backup were relatively minor by comparison with what many people had to deal with but still a headache.

Last summer Sam and I managed a few days of camping at Wyalusing State Park near Prairie du Chien, renewing a tradition that had waned in the last couple years. Sam is still in the Boy Scouts. Sam also enjoyed participating in the performances of The Princess and the Pea with Playtime Productions. Then, entering high school this fall, he joined the Monona Grove Show Choir. He was also recently invited to audition for the Wisconsin School Music Association State Honors Choir. He continues to play the piano and we are especially enjoying the arrangements of Christmas music he's been playing the last few weeks.



One highlight was coordinating Barefoot Sunday at Mad City Church last June. We collected almost 1,000 pairs of shoes, which went to Soles for Souls for distribution to needy people around the world. I'm still at InterVarsity, handling media relations and editing our website, [www.intervarsity.org](http://www.intervarsity.org). I was assigned to go to Harvard in November to report on an InterVarsity campus mission featuring Anglican bishop N.T. Wright, which was another major highlight of the year for me.

Although some things we plan don't work out the way we expect, we have experienced God's grace and His goodness through it all. We have much to be thankful for. Life is always throwing new wrinkles at us. Some we handle better than others. As of this year most (but not all) of the family has joined Facebook, the social networking website. We're staying in touch in new ways. I've added some of our Facebook photos to this letter. Maybe we'll see YOU on Facebook. Well, the snow has let up for today, I've got to go out and shovel some more. We're already ahead of last year's pace.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**