

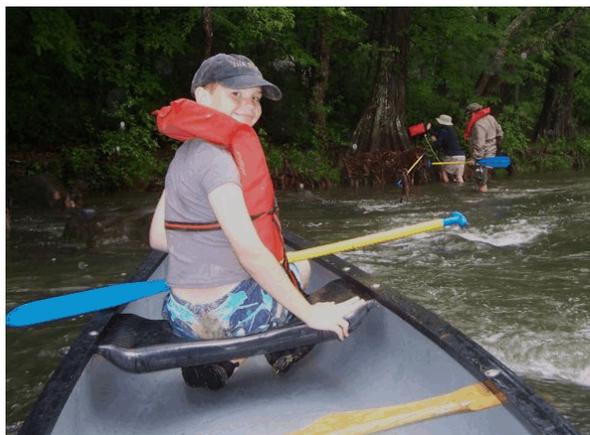
Mike and Jane's Annual Report

December 25, 2006

Well, 2006 has been quite the roller coaster. Christmas 2005 was fairly quiet, or as quiet as it could be with Mike's mother, great uncle, and great aunt inhabiting our house with us. Mike's mother's new house was still not quite ready for occupancy, so she spent some time with us and Mike's sisters. So we do not have any scintillating holiday travel adventures to relate, nor will we this year, so we will have to figure out something else to rattle on about.

With Maggie turning thirteen and Dave turning eleven, naturally we are spending more and more time following them around to their various activities. Anyone who knows Jane knows she has a tough time saying "no," which is of course how she wound up marrying Mike. It is also how she wound up the den mother for Dave's Cub scout group, and she spent a good part of the first quarter of the year figuring out ways to keep a bunch of rowdy eleven year olds entertained. Fortunately, just as she was running out of ideas, Dave and his buddies crossed over to Boy Scouts and Mike had to take over wearing a silly uniform and going to meetings.

Speaking of Scouts, Mike has discovered that Troop 728 goes camping in three different weather conditions, those being Too Hot, Too Cold, and Too Wet. They started out in the latter mode, going canoeing in Oklahoma in conditions where they really could not tell where the atmosphere ended and the river started. Later Mike got to spend a week in Summer Camp with Dave out at Camp Sid Richardson where they both managed to avoid getting bitten by black widow spiders or keeling over from heatstroke. But only just barely. Mixed in there has been Aviation Camp at Carswell Air Force Base, Shotgun Camp at a nearby shooting range, snorkeling camp at Lake Murray, Planning Camp, and Campy Camp, which involved a lot of bright colors and feather boas. Well, maybe not the last one, but Mike has sure been getting a lot of mileage out of his tent.



Canoeing in Oklahoma. No, we did not run into the bank right after I took this picture...

Besides all the Scout camping, in the summer there was Robotics, Space Camp, Advanced Computer Game programming. But the best part of all was when both Dave and Maggie went to The Pines summer camp for the same week, leaving Jane and Mike trying to figure out what to do with all their free time.

Dave has been steadily improving on guitar, and wants everyone to know that he picked up *Smoke On the Water* all by himself. His favorite music is whatever is loud, fast, and generally antisocial, though oddly enough he does a pretty passable *American Pie*. Despite all the AC/DC, Jet, Ted Nugent, and the like, he has not yet acquired any notable tattoos or piercings. That we know of.

We did get in a little bit of traveling. For Spring Break we decided to head towards the nearest seashore. This being Texas, that would be Galveston, which is not exactly Waikiki, or even Coney Island, when you get right down to it. Still, it was nice to get out of town, visit NASA in Houston, and enjoy some pretty fresh seafood. Although Mike will never quite figure out why the Daily Special featured in a restaurant situated on a dock in the Gulf of Mexico was... Alaskan salmon.

In further travel news, Mike, Maggie, and Dave flew out to San Diego to join Jane for a few days at Interstate Batteries' semi-annual convention, which was kind of fun. We visited the famous San Diego Zoo, which was pretty nifty, although the whole panda experience leaves one wondering exactly what all the fuss is about. Mike's favorite activity was touring the frigate used in *Master and Commander* (the *Surprise*)* and a Russian submarine. We also visited Legoland and got to play dress-up at the convention's big party, which had a pirate theme, probably to compensate for the fact that the only actual "pirates" who ever came within a thousand miles of San Diego are people downloading Britney Spears songs off of Kazaa.

* Mike read all twenty books in that series. Twice. He now talks like he thinks he's Cap'n Crunch or something.



Maggie gets a strike at Dave's birthday party

Also, Jane, Maggie, and Dave traveled up to Wisconsin to visit relatives in early July (Mike stayed behind, as he had just come back from Summer Camp), getting their annual fix of swimming, tubing, and boating on real lakes in Wisconsin. (Although Texas has a lot of lakes, only one – that’s right, *one* – is a real lake. The others are all artificial reservoirs.) They were so happy to see Jane’s family, Waupaca, and even got the chance to attend Milwaukee’s *Summerfest*.

Being in fifth grade in the Spring, Dave got to play baseball for his school (St. Paul the Apostle) for the first time, and did pretty well. For Fall soccer, Dave wound up on a club side, since St. Paul, as a thoroughly Texan school, thinks the only sport that exists from August to December is **football**. And maybe a little rodeo. Mike served as Assistant Coach of the “Texas Thunder,” which was composed of kids drawn from four separate suburbs and seven different schools, but they got along quite well and played in a big “Tournament of Champions” in early December.

Maggie continued with softball in the Spring (Mike again serving as Assistant Coach – after two years of being Grand Knight for the local K of C, he does not want to be in charge of *anything*), and, under the theory that it might be her last opportunity, actually joined the cheerleading squad in the Fall. They actually outnumbered the football team, spent more time at practice, and could probably take them two falls out of three in a WWF match. The squad trained and practiced feverishly for the cheerleading tournament held in December, meriting a third place finish in their age group. Which would have been a lot more encouraging if there were more than three teams competing in that division...



Dave at Legoland



Maggie (far right) at the Cheerleading Championships

In other activities, Maggie has done pretty well in three speech tournaments (which her Aunt Betsy has gotten the St. Paul students involved in), and Dave hopes to follow in her footsteps there as soon as she is safely off to high school. Which is coming up next year, all too soon. We are proud to say that Maggie, in her Girl Scout Troop, earned her Silver Award last year too. It took nearly two years of activities to accomplish. Maggie also went through the rite of Confirmation this Fall, meaning she has made a decision to remain in the Catholic faith and she is now considered an adult in the church. So she will have to do the fish on Fridays in Lent thing with the rest of us, but at least now knows the secret handshake.

As we mentioned at the beginning, 2006 has been quite the roller coaster. Lately we’re afraid we’ve been seeing a bit of the down side. Mike’s Mom spent 2006 in and out of the hospital for various health problems, and we finally lost her at the end of October. While we are relieved for her that she is no longer suffering, we miss her very much. She was part of our life most every day, and to be honest, the reality is still sinking in for us. If you would like to see a little more about the services, please check <http://maryann.koenecke.us>.

In other news, Jane was diagnosed with breast cancer in October. She has had a couple of surgeries, and in mid-December she will begin chemotherapy for a number of months, to be followed by radiation. So, we’re getting ready for the challenges ahead, but remain very positive that everything is going to work out fine. If you’d like to check in on how things are going for her, more details and updates are on this part of our Web site: <http://jane.koenecke.us>.

Through this tough news, we have been reminded of how blessed we are with absolutely, positively wonderful family and friends. Everyone’s thoughtfulness has amazed us. We are so thankful for all of you in our lives, and we look forward to getting back on the upswing of this roller coaster very soon.



Merry Christmas, me hearties!

Mike, Jane, Maggie & Dave