

[disclaimer: I never did post this letter when I said I would. For any of you who actually checked our website after January, my sincere apologies. But I spent too much time on it to not post it at all. It is, after all, a record of the 2005 year, and without it, Phil and I won't remember a thing!]

Dear Friends and Family,

January 2006 - late again!

We've had a pretty full year, it seems. For a second year straight we have remained fairly healthy, thank the Lord, and when we've gone up to Lancaster to see Harold & Jody & family at Christmas, no major catastrophes have occurred! (Phil did have a stomach bug at Thanksgiving, which I got the following week, but other than that no problems!)

>> OVEN TROUBLE, COOKIE BAKING, EXCUSES EXCUSES <<

I didn't mention in last year's letter that our oven - a double wall unit oven - went kaput in early December (2004) after I had baked just a few batches of double ginger cookies. The new oven was delivered but sat on the back porch waiting to be installed, as it was a smidge (ie, maybe an eighth of an inch) bigger than the old oven so it didn't fit. Once installed, thanks in part to the diligent work of John Hays, who spent some unexpected hours at our house a few days before Christmas filing down the sides (he had nothing better to do - snowstorms in Ohio temporarily stranded him with us), the new oven continued to be problematic in not heating to the required temp and beeping that the oven was preheated when it was at least 50 degrees short. I do a fair bit of baking for church, so it was a frustrating year for me trying to compensate for the temperature problems and never quite knowing if what I was baking was going to come out right or not. (Can you say "Aaaagh!") Finally, last month, seeing as the warranty was soon to expire, Phil called Sears and they sent someone out who re-calibrated the oven and it has been working fine ever since. As to the preheat beeping way too early, that's a problem the manufacturer has chosen not to fix. I tell you, they just do not make appliances like they used to.

I mention this now to explain, in part, why I did not get Christmas cards sent out this year (the larger part is of course that I am just a big procrastinator). Our teacher friend Carmen called to ask

for my butter cookie recipe and I volunteered to make them for her 3rd-grade class because I figured she really didn't have the time and I did. The oven having been recently fixed, I started baking and kept on going pretty much through the last half of December. It was part of my plan to simplify the Christmas season. Rather than stress about getting presents for our friends here, we would give them plates of cookies. I was trying really hard not to get caught up in the hustle-bustle of the season, which meant staying out of stores (I did most of my shopping online); we didn't get a tree, and I didn't bother with Christmas decorations. The house may have been sparsely decorated, but we had a lot of cookies! (The mouse only got a couple of them.) Oh, yeah, and we bought all our friends a camel.

Of course the other part of my keeping-things-simple plan was that I would actually have time to send cards out before Christmas or at least before the price of stamps went up. I failed to meet either deadline. The price of stamps went up, and I was stuck with lots of 37-cent stamps. Undaunted, I will try again next year. Maybe I can bake cookies AND write notes in Christmas cards. (Though if I were you, I wouldn't hold my breath.)

>> FIRST HALF OF 2005 <<

Thinking back to the beginning of last year, it's all kind of fuzzy. For instance, apparently my sister Lynne and her family (of the infamous Quakertown Gang) came down in February to see the new cheetah cubs at the National Zoo. I don't really remember that, except there are pictures dated February 2005 to prove it, so I guess it really did happen. It was also last February that I tried my hand at teaching piano. Last spring I had two students, both



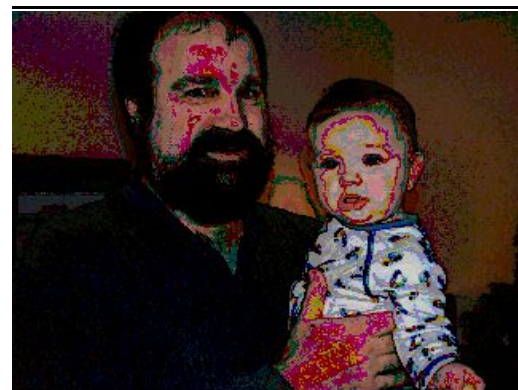
2nd-graders; just one started back in the fall (Angela, the one in the middle of the zoo picture). I had several conversations with my mom, a former music teacher, who has given piano lessons for years and teaches my nieces Grace and Kelsey, to get some tips on what I should be doing, but mostly I am learning by trial and error and getting tips from a few of our parent friends whose children have REAL piano teachers. It has been interesting. And I was tutoring a 3rd-grade student named Brandon whose mother (LaToya) and aunts (Dionne and April) grew up in the Neighborhood Learning Center years before. This was my first time tutoring a boy, and he proved to be more challenging than my previous students. (Or maybe it's just that I'm used to girls.) I haven't been involved with the Learning Center or tutoring this past academic year, but Phil stepped up to the plate and agreed to serve on the NLC board and they made him treasurer. And he's doing a great job!

CHURCH NEWS: Sometime last spring our church, Peace Fellowship, started meeting in a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) building not too far from the rec center where we had been meeting. Though the space is smaller, it's a lot easier to hear things now that the sound isn't bouncing all over a huge gym. Being pianist for the praise team continues to challenge me, which is a good thing, though sometimes I wish we could just sing along to a CD. I do not really enjoy playing in keys with 5 or 6 flats. Phil has been working hard on getting a good sound system in place.

JOB NEWS: Backtracking just a bit, it was last budget season (January) that Phil found out about a job opening with the Senate that he applied for on the recommendation of the outgoing guy, who Phil knew. In a way, he kind of mentally "checked out" of budget season, thinking this would be his last - before he even got called for an interview! One of the bigger plusses was that it would be closer to home (we're just seven walkable blocks from the Capitol) and it was work that he felt quite confident he could do. It would require being at the Capitol whenever the Senate was in session, which is sometimes late into the night, but that didn't phase him. Of course his boss at OMB did not want him to go; nevertheless Phil went through budget season making sure all his responsibilities were passed off to others. Everybody at his office thought it was a done deal - before he even had an interview! Well, he

did finally get an interview, and a second interview - he was clearly the outgoing guy's choice - and he was getting quite psyched about it, but then he heard by email (on Good Friday) that the job had been given to someone in-house. We knew of that possibility, but what a major bummer when it happened. Since then he has had to renegotiate what he does at OMB and try to find projects that interest him. He's great at what he does, and everybody at his office thinks the world of him and they're glad he didn't get the Senate job, but it made him realize he didn't really want to be at OMB forever.

FAMILY NEWS: In June a new nephew joined the Lancaster (PA) Wengers - Daniel Paul, pictured here with Uncle Phil. He joins Hannah (3½), Samuel Oak (7), Ben (14, and now as tall as Phil), Megan (18 in March), and Kelsey, who is in her 2nd year of a sign language major at Tennessee Temple University. Yes, Daniel makes SIX! We were a pretty lousy aunt and uncle this time around - we didn't get up to see him as we had done shortly after Hannah was born, and when we DID see him, at the Wenger Camp-out in July, we didn't take any pictures!



CAR NEWS: It was at that time I think we were a little pre-occupied with buying a new car. Phil was researching the matter thoroughly, and, although I didn't really want to give up our Subaru Outback, I went along on a few trips to test drive or just sit in a car. The top criteria was finding something that Phil would feel comfortable driving on a long trip. For a short time he had his mind set on a Toyota Highlander (our next-door neighbors have one) but when we test-drove it, he couldn't get comfortable. We sat in a Honda Pilot (not comfortable enough) and a Jeep Cherokee with Italian leather seats (THAT was comfortable!); the 2005 Outback had less head room than our older

model. I wanted to try a Hyundai Santa Fe (mostly because I thought it was the closest in looks to the Outback) but when we finally sat in one, again, not enough head room for Phil. The car dealer guy suggested we try the Tucson, which, although it looked like a stunted Santa Fe, actually had more head room and Phil was comfortable in it. And it was available in a very nice shade of dark blue (my main criteria). That's what we wound up buying. Our very first NEW car! Having never owned a new car, we didn't know that for the first 1,000 miles you're supposed to keep your speed at 55 mph and vary your speed, or something like that. No problem, we were going to Ohio for my family get-together (normally takes about 6 hours), and we would just drive through winding and wonderful West Virginia. After 8-9 hours in the car, WE WERE STILL IN WEST VIRGINIA and had at least 2 more hours of driving to go in Ohio!! Thank goodness we don't have to do that again.

TRAVEL NEWS: After Ohio we headed (slowly) out to Chicago to meet up with Amy Johnson and the girls and Wanda at the Hays' house. John and Pam were staying in downtown Chicago for a couple days as a belated 20th anniversary present. Our role was to provide back-up for Amy and Wanda, who were watching the Hays children (minus Caroline and Alex, away at camp), which entailed shuttling them to play practice (Amanda), dance lessons (Amanda), American Girl performances (Greta), the pool (everybody), and the skate park (Caleb). The second night there, SOMEONE BROKE INTO OUR NEW CAR! I will spare you the details of this little comedy/drama except to say that the only thing the guy ran off with was Phil's rollerblades in his nice leather rollerblade bag, and it



put a quick end to our job as back-up shuttle service. John and Pam got home the next day, whereupon John and Phil spent some time crafting two temporary window replacements out of cardboard, and Phil spent the next couple days trying to find a place that could fix it before we drove back to DC. Ah, what an adventure. In spite of that, we really did have a great time

in Chicago. We saw Greta in her dual role as Kaya and Nellie in the American Girl play "Circle of Friends" (we had seen her previously when she played the part of Samantha). We took the Hays family to see "Mad Hot Ballroom," which is a delightful movie that we highly recommend. (Our friend Lisa Policano worked at one of the schools featured in the movie.) And we no longer had to worry about the new car getting its first dent. But we DIDN'T get to see John dance...

A few weeks after this adventure, we drove up to Cambridge, Ontario, for a couple days to see Phil's family - Dona and Rob were visiting from Dryden. We took the long way home, via Michigan, where we spent the night with

the Michigan Wengers (you guys are GREAT!), then drove the rest of the way to Chicago so we could catch the opening night of "Fiddler on the Roof" starring John (as Avram the Bookseller), Caroline, Amanda and Caleb Hays. We wouldn't have had to go to all that trouble if

John had just let us go to a rehearsal when we were there the first time so we could see him dance.

>> HOME IMPROVEMENT SAGA CONTINUES <<

Toward the close of last year's letter, I mentioned the Number One rule of home improvement: Projects always take longer than you think they will. The Number Two rule for surviving home repair: Keep focused on the long-term goal, not the short-term MAJOR inconvenience.

This year our home improvement odyssey began in June with the installation of Central Air Conditioning. (Actually, it began sometime before that when Les created access to attic space with a door in the



The Hays Family, opening night

hallway ceiling and a pull-down ladder.) Hans Smucker, from Bird-in-Hand, PA (ever been to the Bird-in-Hand Family Restaurant? That's his family's!), was our last houseguest before the guest bedroom was filled with stuff from other parts of the house. The A.C. work was majorly intrusive and required a lot of cutting of holes in ceilings and floors. It also meant I had to get up early each morning so I could use the bathroom before the men came. I think I blocked out some of that ordeal from my mind, because I remember spending a few of those days hanging out at Kim & Amy's where I could use the bathroom when the need arose, but it's fuzzy what I did with the dog. Either I left him shut up in the master bedroom or took him with me to the Johnsons' house. I don't remember! (Factor in some sleep deprivation.)

When the work was done - one of the lead workmen said he dropped over 20 pounds while installing the A.C. unit on the roof - it made a tremendous difference in beating the stifling heat of our D.C. summer. Then we had a break for a couple months. Or rather, I had a break from men invading my house. Phil had lots of work to do in the basement to prepare for the new heating system.

During September's storm season, we had several leaks in the bedroom that we'd never had before (an unfortunate after-effect of the A.C. installation) and leaks in the small bathroom. A corner of the bathroom ceiling has fallen at least three times since we moved into this house. Now the walls were blistering terribly and plaster was falling again - we determined that it was time to get a new roof. By the time we decided on a roofer, they had to wait till the end of the rainy season to begin work - that was November.

Next step was getting the basement ready for major pipework and a new heating system. Phil had been working on getting the back part of the basement cleared out to make room for The Manifold. (I learned a new definition for manifold: noun, a pipe with one inlet and several outlets or with one outlet and several inlets, for connecting with other pipes.) He had to take out several sections of shelves, which was okay with me because they weren't storing anything I cared about. But we did have to move around a lot of things that I did care about so the workmen could put in new pipes. The manifold was delivered just before Halloween.

I remember this because after walking up and down East Capitol Street with friends and children on Halloween night, Kim Johnson came over and we struggled to get the manifold into the house and down the basement.

There was a time in November when there were guys in the basement installing the heater and guys working on the roof tearing off the old, putting on the new. There were also guys working on repairing and painting the front windows, upstairs and down, inside and out, but I don't think all three groups of workmen were there at the same time. I just know that by the weekend of our anniversary in mid-November, Phil was away on a church men's retreat and I was home with no heat, no lights upstairs (the fuse had blown yet again, but of course this time, with Phil gone, I couldn't get it back on!), heavy curtains laying on the bed while the paint dried on the windows, and a mouse in the kitchen. That's what I remember about our 17th anniversary weekend.

Finally in December we had heat - for about a week. Then something unfortunate happened that shut the system off and we again had no heat. I tried to be grateful for those couple days of warmth, but after two miserable days with no heat and NO HOT WATER, I was at my breaking point. I couldn't get anything done - even baking required that I wash my hands often, and that doesn't work when the water is freezing. And Phil seemed to be dragging his feet on getting the problem fixed, figuring it could wait till the end of the week. After a major meltdown Tuesday afternoon (me), Phil borrowed some heaters from his co-worker Steve to heat the living and dining rooms, which of course didn't solve the problem but gave me some temporary relief from being cold. Our friend Cindy Malvicini from the Philippines was going to be passing



The Manifold

through D.C. at the end of that week, so I worked to get the guest bedroom cleared out enough for occupancy (that room being the depository for Much Stuff from other parts of the house). We got three wire shelving units from Costco, set two up in the basement and one in the guest bedroom, and piled up what boxes and stuff we could fit on them to get them out of the way. But, understandably, the heater breakdown compelled Cindy to stay with friends in the suburbs.

>> BACK TO WHERE I STARTED ... <<

After all that stress, it's no wonder I enjoyed simply baking cookies after we got the heat problem fixed! It was therapeutic!

We ended the year with a lot of displaced stuff in our house. Every time we clean up one area for work to be done, we move the stuff to another part of the house. And nothing ever seems to get back to its original place. I exaggerate only slightly. Our (my) plans for 2006: to get a handle on all this stuff!

In the interest of wrapping this up, I'm going to forego having Phil read it through for comments, corrections, changes, etc. (I tried not to slander him too much), and I'm going to forego the time-consuming task of editing it down to two pages. I apologize for not including any pictures or news about Rushmore - he's still the same neurotic dog he was last year, just a year older.

We did get down to the Sculpture Garden Ice Rink at least once with the Johnsons and our friend Joy, so I will close with this picture of us having fun in the city we love.

Wishing you all the Peace of Christ, and God's rich blessings!

Gail & Phil

2005 Summary:

Gail teaches piano and tutors

Our church changes buildings

Phil is looking to change jobs

New Lancaster PA nephew - Daniel Paul Wenger

New car - Hyundai Tucson

Chicago adventure part 1 (new car break-in)

Ontario trip, Chicago adventure part 2

(aka John Hays dances in Fiddler on the Roof)

Central Air installed

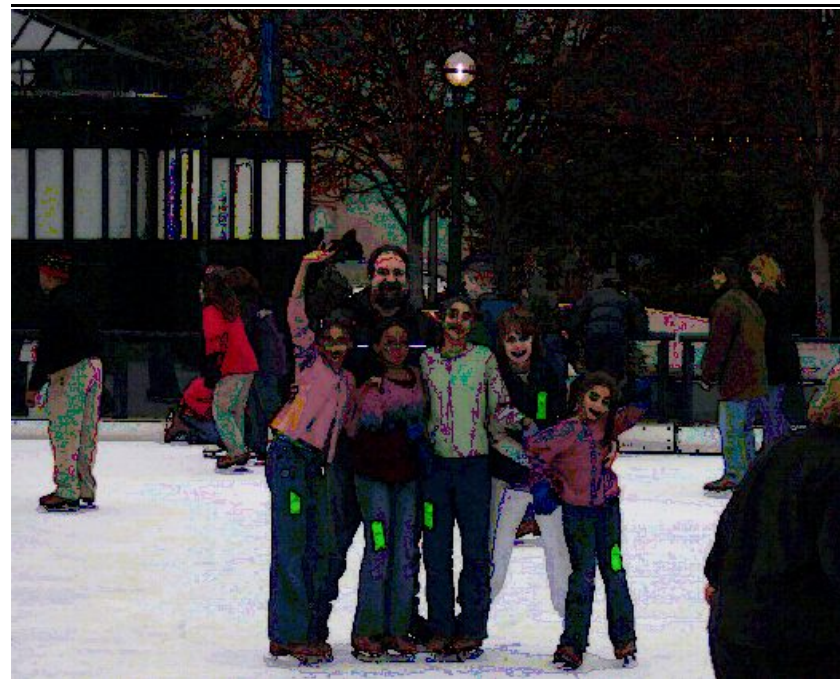
New heating system installed

New roof installed

New heating system breaks

Gail bakes lots of cookies

What a year!



On the ice - Olivia, Phil, Joy, Erica, Gail, and Angela