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10th December 2011

The time has come to put fingers to keyboard (it seems so long ago that we put pen to paper) and start on our annual report in anticipation of Christmas in little more than two weeks time. So far in our part of Ontario, there has been very little snow, and what we have had has mostly melted again.

It is hard to believe that twelve months ago, we were still on Botsford Street, surrounded by cartons and preparing to move house. As covered by my last epistle in February, the move went well (January 10th) and by spring, we had the townhouse organized mostly to our liking. In common with many others who move house, there remains a collection of cartons in the basement which are largely un-opened. Although we are renting, I invested quite a bit of time (and some money) in fixing things in the townhouse which either weren't working properly, or which were broken. For me, it's easier just to get on with it rather than bother the landlord, who probably wouldn't have done anything anyway. The small pictures at the top of the page are the view from our driveway (left) and what little you can see of our house behind the Crabapple Tree as it looked last May (right).

We continue with our usual activities, [Trinity Church](#), Mary's Book Group and Bible Study Group, York Symphony and Theatre Aurora, which all keeps us busy enough. I am still webverger and parish photographer at Trinity, a time consuming occupation and we are still both in the choir. Richard recently sang in Rheinberger's *Star of Bethlehem* with the Trinity Festival Chorus and York Chamber Ensemble, which was a lot of fun – it's a sadly neglected work these days.

We have not been on any short trips this year, but had our usual six weeks at the cottage in New Brunswick. While Ontario basked in sunny (and sometimes overly hot) weather, we suffered the wettest & coldest summer down East that we can remember. There were some good days, fortunately such as when we took a jaunt to Halifax/Dartmouth and Kingston in Nova Scotia. We stayed one day with Ron & Ann Porter and another with Mary's cousin Louisa and her family. Mary has known Ann for most of her life. There are some pictures of this trip at <http://richib.com/novascotia.html>. While at the cottage, we were in discussions with our friends Harry & Nicola Collins about selling the cottage to them, and this will probably be set in motion early in 2012. The 1500Km journey each way does not get any easier with our increasing age, and many of the people we used to enjoy visiting in New Brunswick are sadly no longer with us. Although it makes a reasonably inexpensive vacation, the ever-increasing taxes and ground rent on the cottage are expenses we don't need and the place really needs to have quite a bit of money spent on maintenance & upgrading. Harry & Nicola live just up the lane from the cottage, so they can easily carry out work on it, whereas our only option would be to pay someone, or spend the whole of our vacation on painting etc. and I find I don't have the stamina I had 20 years ago for manual labour. However, on that topic, our health has been reasonably good this year, although Mary had some minor problems in October/November which were sorted out by a little day-surgery late in November. Otherwise, we soldier on through our seventies.

Janet and Ian continue on their busy lives, still living in Oshawa. Ian's business seems to keep him quite busy, although the appeal of heaving and humping 250lb doors and windows around is diminishing. Janet continues at Sony and commutes by car into Toronto most days. In common with many these days, her Blackberry is on 24/7 and she does manage to work from home some days, especially if Grace & Emily have things like doctor's visits. Our family gatherings are usually at Dave & Nicole's in Aurora, as Dave's ongoing back & neck problems do not lend themselves to his having to spend an hour in the car driving to Oshawa. Last weekend, we celebrated Grace's fifth birthday here.



A recent photo of Emily (right).
The other picture was taken at Grace's birthday party, which was only the second time that the family has gathered in our house. It is quite difficult to kid-proof our place with two open stairwells, and although Grace is fine on stairs, Emily needs another year or two before she can be trusted.

Grace is in Senior Kindergarten, and when not in school, they have an excellent daycare lady in Oshawa. Grace is also now into Highland Dance, which she loves, and at which she is apparently quite good according to her world-class instructor who lives fairly close to Oshawa.



Dave and Nicole have had a very eventful year, unfortunately largely for the wrong reasons. Their most cheery news is that Nicole is expecting their first child in February 2012 (gender unknown, by choice). At a painting party (all the family) on his back deck last June, Nicole had driven to one of the local supermarkets to pick up some dessert for dinner, when a highly-incompetent woman managed to smash into three parked cars at considerable speed, causing extensive damage – one of which was Dave's car. The only thing for which to be thankful was that no-one was near any of the parked cars at the time, or we dread to imagine what could have occurred. Anyway, for one reason and another, it was two months before Dave's car was repaired.

Also, last spring, they engaged an apparently competent contractor to install an extra bedroom and bathroom in the unfinished part of their basement. This work was supposed to start in July/August, but they kept getting put off until late October. After three weeks during which some progress was made, the contractor disappeared from sight, and is now under investigation by police for fraud and is being sued by at least one defrauded client. All of this involved them in meetings with a lawyer, and various other aggravations. Just this week, they have found another chap to complete the project, and it looks as though the work will start moving forward again, although not in time for Christmas. Despite that, I think we will be having our family Christmas party at their place, as with Dave's continuing health problems, he doesn't want to drive to Oshawa. All this stress really doesn't help the situation, and his myriad of health professionals don't seem to be any closer to getting at the root cause of his difficulties and finding a permanent fix.

So, we all soldier on. To you and yours, we wish a very merry Christmas, and a happy & prosperous New Year.
Richard & Mary