

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

December 2011

This has been another very eventful year for our family. It culminated with the birth of our first grandchild. Isabelle Kate Lillian Keane was born on December 23 in Hamilton's St. Joseph's hospital. Marie was able to fly down a week early, to help with the preparation of enough meals to tide Christine and Adam over through the month of January at least. She was also present as a labour coach, so saw Isabelle being born. It was very special, and we then got to spend an entire week with her at home, including her first Christmas.

But I'm getting ahead of things! On the exchange front, we continued to host Levke Kluge until the end of January. When she left us, we welcomed two boys – Jan Seiffert from Germany (Jan-July) and Brad Robinson from Australia (Jan to Dec).

Doug's parents both were ill at the end of January, and he spent a couple of days full time at the hospital while they were recovering. The positive result of the week was that Isabel was reassessed by the chief of dementia for Eastern Ontario, and was declared to NOT have Alzheimer's, which she had been told she had in 2006. Her whole outlook on life has changed. She and Dad turned 90 and 85 respectively this year. They have spent time in respite care for our holidays, and over Christmas are in Windsor Park Manor.

We did our usual skiing holiday in February, taking both boys and all our kids and their partners up to our timeshare in Mont-Tremblant. We had a wonderfully relaxing week, and Marie discovered her hip was totally back to normal. In March break, we did a road trip with the two boys down to Boston. We stayed in a hotel right along the river looking across at Marie's father's Alma Mater of MIT. We enjoyed the warmer weather, the sights and sounds (TD Gardens, Fenway Park, the Boston Symphony Hall, etc.) and even took in the sea-side for a delicious meal of lobster with all the fixings. We had a snow-storm for the drive back through Pennsylvania, which wasn't too bad but was not entirely expected.

In May, Jan went on a band trip to New York City and Brad joined the STS crowd for the Toronto trip. So Marie and Doug once again journeyed to Grimsby to visit with Adam and Christine (now 29). It was at this point that they told us they were expecting their first child for December. We were thrilled, as you can imagine!

Shortly after that, Stéphane completed his training to become a croupier at the Casino du Lac Leamy across the river from Ottawa. He deals Blackjack, and loves the interaction with people. He doesn't work regular hours, as he is still too new to have a regular team and shift, but hopes to soon have a permanent team and regular hours. He has logged almost 900 hours in 6 months, which is much better pay than his previous valet job. He continues to work on his distance learning ... encouraged by his fiancée, Christine Filion who has just graduated from the university of Edinburgh, Scotland with a Master's Degree in Equine Science, acquired through distance learning .

In June, Julie (now 26) graduated again from Ottawa U with her education degree. She returned to work at the Translation Bureau while she searched for a job. She fully expected to find no more than a temporary job, or one for long-term substitution so was pleased when she was offered a full-time position teaching Grade 1 in a Waldorf-oriented school in the Ottawa French Public School Board. She has found the class to be a challenge, starting with a very trying student for the first 7 weeks of the year, who ultimately needed to be placed in an individual learning environment. Things are now falling into place ... slowly. Julie moved out of the family home in July and is happily sharing a townhouse in the West end of Ottawa with her boyfriend, Scott Broschell, a computer programmer.

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In mid-August, Marie and Doug returned to teach at the South-West Ontario Suzuki Institute in Waterloo. We had missed the last couple of years due to Marie's hip, but were welcomed back by the faculty and students. We didn't have to worry about Brad for the summer, as he had a job working as a junior counsellor at a children's summer camp west of Ottawa.

The very next week we boarded a plane for Ireland. We spent a day in Dublin, then drove (yes, rented a car and took to the roads) across to Galway where we spent the next four days. We then returned to Dublin for a night before boarding the *Azamara Journey* for a 10 night cruise, with stops in Holyhead, Wales; Cork, Ireland; 2 nights in Bordeaux, France; Bilbao, Vigo and Gijon, Spain; and finally two days in Lisbon, Portugal. We finished the vacation with 3 days in Madrid, Spain, visiting with Ceci and her family, who welcomed us warmly and were excellent hosts and tour guides! We also met up with past host student Natalie Scott and her sister Katie from New Zealand. The whole vacation was incredible, with amazing sights, wonderful people, and memorable events everywhere. We'll try to post the photo album to our website. It's already on my Facebook page, but I know you aren't all connected in that way.

When we returned home, Brad had returned from camp, and had been joined by Stefano Perucca from Italy. Stéphane and his Christine had looked after them while we were away. Stefano will be with us until next July.

Doug was finally confirmed in his job this year. After years of doing the job on a temporary basis, with titles that meant nothing compared to the work expected, he was appointed as the regional Manager, Marine and Transportation Engineering. The last federal budget also delivered his way, giving his team almost \$150 Million worth of projects to oversee over the next five years.

Marie has fully recovered from her hip surgery. She continues to exercise and swim, and her studio is now running at full capacity. She is hopping and jumping better than many of the mothers in her programme ... so is delighted with her shiny new hip!

Doug and Marie continue to sing in the Chœur classique de l'Outaouais choir and play in the Ottawa Chamber Orchestra together. The Chœur has a new director this fall, and her new approach to music had us both singing in small groups for the Christmas concert – including Doug singing with the Tenor 1s and Bass 2s!

Our Australian student Brad left us on December 20th. In the new year, we will be hosting both an STS trainee, Sindy Basdevant from France for January, and another exchange student, Verena Gaida from Austria from January until July.

Our next big family event will be the wedding of Stéphane and Christine on March 3. They will be married in the Panorama Room at the National Arts Centre, overlooking the Rideau Canal and the new convention centre, and will have friends from as far away as Austria joining in the festivities. We also look forward to next August when Doug's nephew Ryan and his fiancée Raïsa Mirza will be married in Newfoundland.

We wish you health and happiness in 2012. Together with the hosting of students, our home is always open to visitors from far or near. We'd love for you to come and visit!

Marie and Doug