

Christmas 2008

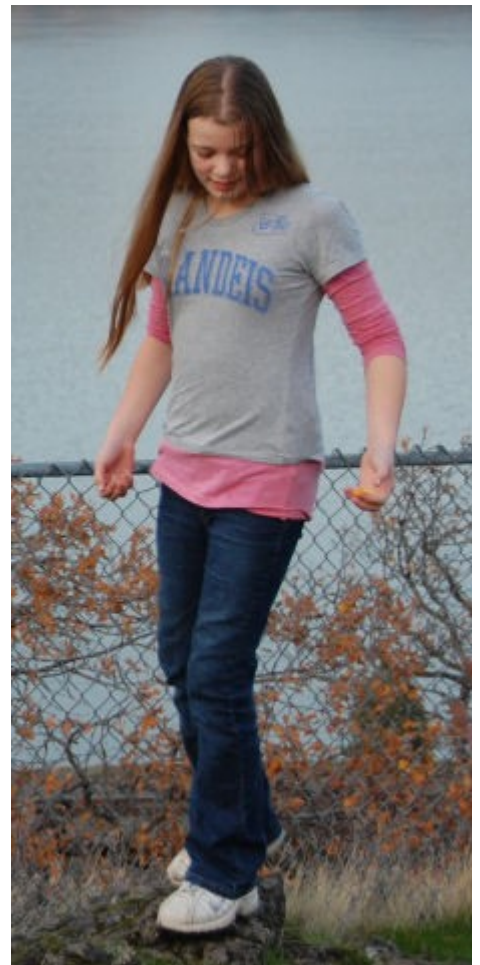
Hello all!

It has been another year full of changes – what's new? I end this year on a note of happiness. Despite struggles, I have been given meaningful gifts this year and have taken the time to appreciate



them. It's been mostly in the form of tighter bonds with friends and family. If you are reading this, then, you must consider yourself part of that group. Thank you so much for being in my life.

In January of 2008, Mark, Tara and I were still living with The Uncles (Jim and Larry) outside of Scappoose, Oregon. They



extended their love and gracious hospitality as long as we needed it. Mark was working out in Hood River and we could finally afford a home of our own, so we looked until we found one. With real estate crashing and the country's economy beginning a significant decline, we found that it was very difficult to get the modest loan we hoped for. After much hoop-jumping, voodoo ceremonies, pledges to donate all future children, etc., they gave us a great rate and loaned us the money to buy our house. We moved in January 31st.

Please go to: <http://people.brandeis.edu/~trulove/House/index.html> where you will find my photo-story of our project house. The neighborhood is very good for our price range, and the house is really wonderful. An incorrigible optimist, I can't help but see the potential here. This old Portland Craftsman home was built in 1925. It sits on a hill, and I like to imagine that it probably sat alone here on the hill for years before the neighboring houses were crammed in next to it.

It is a tired home and needs work on every square inch of it, beginning with a complete replacement of the foundation. We love it though, because it feels like home. Mark set up operation in the basement, first by tearing out all the walls and the ceiling so that it is one giant room. Then, by creating his own workshop down there from which he has been creating the most delicious upgrades to our place. Give us five more years and this place will be a delight.

After finally graduating from school and moving to Portland to be with my daughter again, who had been living with her dad the previous three school years, I took for granted that our separation was over. Dennis informed me one day in January that he had given his notice at work, and that he planned to move back to Eureka and take Tara with him. They would be gone by February. I found the best family law attorney I have EVER dealt with (and sadly, I've dealt with many). Thousands of dollars later, he helped us make it so that Tara will stay in Portland till she graduates. Dennis still wanted to move, so I finally became the custodial parent again, to take effect in the summer, after he moved back to California. At a spring parent-teacher conference a little later, I met with Tara's 5th grade teacher who informed me that Tara had missed 47 assignments and had missed 11 days of school. I clenched my teeth and patiently waited for my turn at parenting.

More bad news came at tax time. I had taken money out of my retirement account to live on and to pay off bills the previous year. I had wisely asked the IRA account holder to withhold the 10% early withdrawal penalty, but completely forgot about the taxes that would be due on the money. I owed thousands to Massachusetts and to the feds, and it took me months to pay it all off.

We still owned the home in Massachusetts, and I gradually realized that I was not going to be getting any more money out of my tenant. Renting out that house turned out to be a nightmare. I had not been able to contact her since December, nor had I received a rent payment in that time. The economic crisis has my family in a state of nearly perpetual financial panic, and I couldn't afford to give her free rent. I had no choice but to fly out East in May to evict her. Considering all that could have gone wrong, the eviction was smooth. She suspected my intent, and had already moved out and was cleaning when I arrived. She made a point of very carefully outlining what she considered to be her occupancy dates, and promised to pay me every penny. Of course, I never heard from her again. It cost about \$2000 to clean and repair the place after she left. In the meantime I found a realtor and got the house listed for sale. A few people looked at it each month for most of the year, while real estate values in the Boston commuting area plummeted.

The May trip was special for me because I was able to visit my Massachusetts friends and Mark's family. I shared an evening with Shawn, an afternoon with Susie and the kids, another evening with Mark Sr. and Corrine in their comfortable home and gracious hospitality. I spent time with Romain who recently told me that he considered me part of his family! Romain took me over to visit Mads and to finally meet his kind, fun, and lovely wife, Kumudu. Then we had a dinner to remember in Cambridge Square. I had a thrilling race to beat the train, and visited 10 minutes with Elisia before the train came. I stayed a night in Rene's gorgeous place in Winchester, and then before my plane lifted off, Romain treated me to a bird's eye view of Boston from the top of the Prudential Center.

Tara remains active in Girl Scouts, and eagerly participates in skating parties, cookie sales, archery lessons, and all the rest. I was able to teach a class so her troop could earn the weather badge. Tara is currently a Junior Girl Scout and will be a Cadet next year. So far, she's been on three Girl Scout campouts this year and all three have poured rain the entire time. It doesn't seem to dampen their spirits though.

When school got out, Tara accompanied her dad down to Eureka, where they joined his longtime girlfriend Cheryl and her daughter Sabine. At the end of July, I drove down there and picked Tara up. It was another wonderful visit with dear friends. I stayed with Margaret and John Campbell and caught up on some of their news. John wasn't feeling well, but was doing better than when I talked to them in December, when John was in emergency care in San Francisco. I was able to visit Margaret's beautiful new UPS store. She told me about the classes that she was just beginning to teach, and her anxieties and excitement about the new job. I spent some time with my bosom friend April, who seems to have tapped into immense joy in life. She shared her pride in her kids, and her alternative community that loves her, and I was able to witness the lovely and helpful young lady her daughter Akacia has become.

Tara and I then visited Wildlife Safari in Winston, Oregon. Instead of a zoo, it's a gigantic park that allows creatures a bit of free range. The flip side is that no one is allowed out of their vehicles! We were able to drive right past herds of wildebeest and zebra, and waited patiently for camels to move out of the way. It was as wonderful as we recalled from a visit 5 years ago. I drove and Tara managed the photos. We ended up with some great close-up shots of giraffes, bears, cheetahs, ostriches, and more.

Mark lost his job in June, and joins the ranks of many employees out of work in America. Not like we were rolling in cash prior to that, but ...um... going down to one income has been a blow. It was nonetheless a gigantic boon when school started. My days are very long, but Mark is home to get Tara off to school each morning, and help her with homework each night. He does laundry and dishes, and spoils us by having dinner ready each night when I arrive home. They have developed a strong relationship that is just between the two of them. She has another adult to trust and be comfortable with, and we have both become better parents when working as a team.

The first weekend of August was the weekend Tara and I had been waiting for! The Fifth annual Faeryworlds Festival in Veneta, Oregon. Much like a renaissance faire, faeryworlds is a place where you become whomever you please and agree to believe in what you see. We donned festive dresses and wings and antennae, and joined many fantastical creatures. Tara is an excellent saver, and had been saving her money for months, specifically for this festival. She came in with \$103 and left without a penny, but with a whole new faery outfit, splendid gauzy wings, and a happy heart.

I attended my twenty-year class reunion in New Meadows, Idaho. I find it difficult to believe that I've been out of high school for twenty years. TWENTY! I was feeling very sorry for myself, and was close to canceling my trip because I felt that I just couldn't afford it. Luckily, a small voice in my head said something like the value of seeing my classmates after twenty years is astronomical compared to the value of the hundred dollars or so in meals and gas it would take to get me over there and back. So I went, and forgot to stress out for a little while, and found that I ADORE my old classmates. And boy are they old! Ha ha. We enjoyed each other immediately, loved each others' families, told stories, made fun, ate lots of food and stayed up too late. A bonus of the trip was that Terri started up a facebook group for the class. Now, we can share photos and make contact with each other whenever we wish to. Believe it or not, this happens almost daily. They unknowingly became my support group for the rest of the summer. A place where I could go amongst many friends (virtually) and laugh and feel loved (for real).

The very next weekend was the Haley reunion in Lebanon, Oregon. Surrounded this time by family, I was again blissfully loved. The reunions always have people I've never met before who are related to me. One notable "new" family member we were excited to meet was Lisa, recently returned

to the states from Italy. Since about 2004, Uncle Darrel has kept many of us connected with his daily email journals. Though bits and bytes do not replace in-person relationships, in my case it has brought me back into a family I had drifted far away from. Tara enjoyed her cousin Aimee so much that we have tried to keep the girls together since then, with visits to their church which is lucky enough to be near our home.

Tara began 6th grade at a school only a few blocks from our new home, which means she is able to walk there. Her teacher this year has a brand new teaching job after prior Americorps experience, and is young, energetic, and loves her kids. Mark and I attended a parent-teacher conference the last week of November, and found out that Tara has all As and Bs, zero missed assignments. Her top subjects are math, with a 98% average, and writing, at 94%. Her teacher says Tara has a sense of self-confidence which she wishes her classmates would emulate, and raved about her volunteerism and helpfulness. We are very proud. Tara joined the volleyball team, and a girls' chess team, and kept busy at both all semester.

We finally sold the Massachusetts house the end of September for a huge loss. I had purchased it in 2004 for \$275 thousand. I sold it in 2008 for \$217 thousand. Ouch. All my savings, not to mention the money I borrowed from relatives to buy the place, totally gone. Mark cleaned out his savings to cover the \$4000 we needed to close. There is always risk in investment, and losing is part of the normal process. We are young and healthy and inspired, and we will recover from it all. Every time Mark gets stressed out, he goes down to the basement and builds something, so there is actually an up side. ☺

October brought the sad news of John Campbell's death. I was glad to hear it directly from my dear friend Margaret, who must have had so many other things to deal with. My heart is with her, and I am deeply honored to have known John and to have known what it is like to be in the presence of a truly great man, a true friend and gentleman. In August, my best friend in the whole wide world, April, lost her mother. I find it difficult to know my role when someone dies, and can only send my love back to them with genuine gratitude for their friendship. I hope it is enough.

Jess's wife Stephanie planned a surprise birthday party for my old high school sweetheart, and I got to see him for the first time in about 16 years. Other old friends showed up, and I made some new ones. It was wonderful to make the trip and to see them and their home. It is so much fun to have them in our lives. Since the Bavarian town of Leavenworth was so close to our route, I took Tara there to see it for the first time and she loved it. I've set aside federal holidays as "Grama days," and use them to visit my Grandma Trulove out in Sandy, which is less than an hour away. We love the visits. She remarks that I somehow compel her to talk much more than she planned to, but I love her stories of her own life and stories of my Grandpa Trulove which have kept him very alive in my life.

Being back on the west side of the country again allows my mother and step-father Jim to visit us here every couple months. Tara loves having her Gramy around, and shares walks with Grandpa, who loves to spoil her, as Grandpas will do. Mom is usually eager to do yardwork for me, and brings her gloves and tools when she comes. They are planning a visit soon, and will be bringing gifts of firewood and a Christmas tree cut from their own land. I wish this kind of family love upon everyone!