



Merry Christmas from the DEANS 2018

It has been, needless to say, quite a year for us and our family. It seems every Christmas letter highlights a lot of change for all of us. This year is no different. Change, it seems, has a way of being cumulative.

Early in January we had planned a family get together at Marsha and Bruce's new home, the Buzzard Roost, east of Memphis. The long weekend allowed flights for Mark and Hannah and Tonya. Dan & Jane & Bethany would come by on their way to Washington D.C. We hauled the camper up, through rain and dropping temperatures. It became obvious that a freezing rain, followed by six inches of snow, would thwart our plans. Nonetheless, Becky and I enjoyed quite a cozy time in the snowy woods with Marsha and Bruce.



But, with the help of Damon's siblings being with Mom, we were able to get away a few weeks later. A camping trip to Florida in February landed us at Fort DeSoto State Park, just 7 miles from Hannah and Mark. We parked the camper a few yards from a bay and tied the kayaks to the mangroves. Tonya flew in from Kansas City, and we had a great time with the kids eating seafood and enjoying beach walks. Damon caught sea trout and was visited by a manatee in his kayak.



Damon enjoyed more adventure in March, as his reenactment group embarked on an 80-mile keelboat trip down the White River. On a beautiful spring blue-bird day, a crew of 15 with their pioneer gear rowed down-river. About 4 pm that afternoon the keelboat rammed a snag. The log pierced the hull and the keelboat whirled in the current and began to sink. The current slammed it broadside into a rootball

and threw all 15 souls into the cold river. God be praised, all survived, though scattered downstream for half a mile or more. The experience was definitely authentic, and historical.



We had begun the year planning a new home in Jonesboro. Plans were selected, a contractor found, and we dove into the process. We had already decided to move Mom north with us, anticipating a move to skilled nursing, as we had seen her health declining. Damon and his siblings found a nursing home near Larry, where Mom's grandson Weston and his fiancé worked, just an hour from Jonesboro, and closer to sister Marsha, too. They all hoped to see her more often and share in her care.

But, spring brought many changes. We took Bethany, Dan and Jane to

see the Lion King on stage in the Robinson Hall in Little Rock. Then we planned with the rest of the family to make up the failed reunion at Marsha's home on Memorial Day weekend. But Mom fell in May, and we discovered signs of some previous stroke activity. A hospital stay followed, and Larry, Kim, Marsha and Bruce were able to visit frequently. During that stay we decided to move Mom to an intermittent setting, pending transfer to skilled nursing. A day before hospital discharge, we discovered metastatic cancers in her body. At 92, Mom's options were few, and after a month of hospice she departed to her eternal home.



Our desperate prayers had been answered---little pain, a quick journey, family near, and no long drawn-out battle. The love and care of family, our church and work friends, and a healthcare community that loved Mom was so appreciated.



During Mom's care we had cancelled some trips, but we have made up for them since. Bethany performed on stage with her dance class in "Noah," a musical interpretation. (Did you know there were honeybees on the Ark?) Becky enjoyed a sister's weekend at Dorothy's lakeside home. We have frequently hauled the RV to Jonesboro, where we've had time



with Dan & Jane & Bethany, camping at a beautiful local park just half an hour from their new home. The walking trails there were beautiful this fall, colored with fall foliage. Later, back in Crossett, Becky was one of the numerous Matrons of Faith at our church's annual honoring of 'old ladies.' The fun was a great!



We even enjoyed an rare early northeast Arkansas snow. Bethany is a great sledder! Typical to Arkansas weather, we've had spells of temperate short-sleeve fall between blasts of bundle-up wintry cold. It was cold and brisk again during our family trip to Branson, when we



enjoyed Larry and Kim with us the first three days, and Dan and Jane and Bethany and Tonya coming for the rest of the week. The most recent event was a Christmas dance recital, an official beginning to our season celebration.



Since then, we've been back and forth between Jonesboro and Crossett, to care for friends, to pack, to get all this 'change' in order. It's a strange feeling to call both places 'home.' But this time in our life, this year in our life, has brought many changes. Several Christmas letters ago we spoke about the inevitability, the embracing, of change. We still practice that skill.



By God's grace we have a beautiful new home, we have a promising new closeness to family, and we embark on a new adventure. There will be snags, unseen root-balls beneath the waves, but God will be with us in every swirl. That is the wonderful realization of Christmas—Immanuel, which means "God with us." (Matthew 1:23).

Our prayer is that you sense His presence this season, this day, this year. We have had so many loved ones struggling this year with illness, trials, dangers, and anxiety. But we have seen in every moment that God was "with" us, and those around us, whether bringing orphans to forever homes, giving health to newborn babies in distress, and comforting those in grief.



Know this, that God sent His Son to prove that He is with us, He is Lord, and our life is more than this moment, more than this wisp of vapor. Take heart now and hear the angels' voices declare His holy name—Jesus, who will save His people from their sins.

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