



Merry Christmas from the Deans



After we wished for a happy new year last January, day by day that wish unfolded in many ways. We moved into our new home on January 5th, 2019, with unknown adventures ahead, new relationships in store. Even now, in December, this year still seems ‘new.’ This will be the first Christmas we’ve spent here in the house.

We were in the camper last Christmas, going back and forth to Crossett, preparing for the move, and the holiday seemed strange. We were saying goodbye, leaving a big part of our life behind. There were no decorations, and our new home was pretty bare. But we were embarking on a discovery, excited to be closer to Dan and Jane



Marie and Bethany, as well as Larry and Kim and Marsha and Bruce. Tonya was closer, and there were cheap flights from Memphis to Hannah and Mark in Florida. But still, Mom’s passing last summer was a quiet sadness in our hearts. With all those mixed feelings, the move seemed odd, though not difficult. We were so grateful for help loading up, and when we arrived here, help unloading. The U-Haul had been packed tight! But once we were in we

began the ‘settling’ that we longed for.

We began the ‘address change’ effort, which was a crazy process, attempting to get bills scheduled with our new bank. Throughout the late winter and early spring we searched for new grocery stores, doctors, dentists, optometrists, hairdressers. But most important was finding God’s lead to a new church, where we could be used and be ministered to. God had already



begun that process when our Crossett pastors Scott and Alan were impressed by someone they met at a conference, and Scott sent me the name of their church—Walnut Street Baptist. We visited twice, and immediately knew that we belonged there, where we saw genuine love and felt authentic faith. We are now connected, being served, and serving there with fellow believers.

Dan and Jane and Bethany are just twenty minutes away in Paragould, and we see them several times per week. Jane Marie’s big Poppa, Mr. Beck, passed away in February, and at the celebration of his life Dan and Bethany shared inspiring memories of his love and faith. Dan is still enjoying his work at the hospital, and Jane Marie works for a geriatric residence system in public relations, her forte` for sure. **Bethany** is dancing, quiz-bowling, playing the violin, learning volleyball, and loving horse-riding lessons. This fifth-grader’s heart will be forever connected to horses, and she’s saving money to buy her own ranch one day. They have enjoyed a few vacations, including beach time and more recently New York. They saw the Rockettes, a theatrical Frozen on Broadway, historic Ellis Island, and the Twin Towers memorial.



Damon and Becky were able to fly to St. Pete Beach in September to see **Hannah and Mark**. This was a great break for us, where we spent hours walking the beach, biking the sidewalks and enjoying small restaurants on the main stretch, enjoying playing games with Mark and Hannah. We toured the Salvadore Dali museum as well. Mark and Hannah both still enjoy their work, and Mark turns 40 this year! They celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary in September. And to top their year off, Auburn beat Alabama last week in the Iron Bowl. War Eagle!



Tonya made an important career leap early in the year, moving to an executive director position with her organization in Kansas City, Missouri. She also has started a pet photography business in KC, and does such wonderful work with it. Damon went to pet-sit for her when she attended a conference in St. Louis earlier this year and he turned the week into a writing retreat. Tonya made a quick trip here once to consider taking home a kitten from a litter Marsha and Bruce had. She declined the cat—but we still enjoyed her visit. She and Hannah recently flew in also for a night, before driving to Mississippi to visit their great aunt Maudie.



Becky has been able to expand her ventures beyond Jonesboro this year. Besides our trip to Florida, and numerous trips back to Crossett to check on friends, and a sister's weekend at Lake Greeson, she was able to recently fly to Wisconsin with sister Dorothy and niece Gretchen, to visit her Aunt Pat and Uncle Jim. The snowy wonderland was a quite a climate change for her, with



temps in single digits most mornings. Her camping adventures were more sparse than previous years. We spent a cold week at Lake Sardis last March (to use a state park credit that was going to expire). We had to cancel a trip to Lake Catherine, discovering too late our site was too small for our fifth wheel. But in October we camped in northwest Arkansas, exploring the Buffalo River area, and viewing elk. It was a relaxing vacation in new territory.



Damon is continuing to write, mainly for an educational publisher, enjoying the research and targeted skills in each assignment—as well as the additional income! It's rewarding to get Bethany to read his passages and critique them. He enjoys discovering new restaurants in our new home, and some cultural venues as well. We attended a dinner theatre nearby with our Sunday School class. Monthly bluegrass concerts in nearby Paragould are always fun. Damon is closer to Larry, with more fishing and hunting opportunities with his brother just over an hour away. Last month Damon shot a nice 10-point, first deer in over twenty years. He hopes to get in some kayak floats on the nearby Spring and Eleven-Point rivers when things warm up in 2020, as well as another re-enactment keel-boat trip next spring break.



We are much closer to the Buzzard Roost, Marsha and Bruce's wilderness home, where we recently had a fantastic family reunion. It was a 'cousin palooza' with nearly 50 of us there, representing families from each of Mom's siblings, all gone before us now. We loved our time together.



Damon and Becky most recently visited Branson over the Thanksgiving holiday, and we spent time with good friends Richard and Becky Rhodes, as well as David and Gail Tohlen. We saw a few shows and one day visited the Nature Museum and Aquarium at Bass Pro in Springfield. The trip was amazing.



We send out this letter with hopes that you are blessed with new adventures. Life does offer a lot of change. Accepting each day as new is a sometimes a challenge, especially when that often



involves leaving the safe and familiar, losing those we love, and learning something unfamiliar. Don't be content with wishes—but turn every wish into a prayer. The secret, we know, is to face all that newness with faith, being aware of God's presence with us and learning dependence on His direction. Even when answers are not so clear, you can be assured that God is with you, even when we might miss a step, stumble, and fall. Trust Him in this new year, knowing that He is always near, just one prayer away.



*"See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated **"God is with us."** – Matthew 1:23*

Love you all, come to visit!

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