

## James' of the North Christmas News 2009

Another year has flown by. We have added some new family adventures, passed some milestones and in the end, have a lot to be thankful for. I started this year's Xmas newsletter writing on Remembrance Day but as usual, it's early December now and I'm still working on it. So please enjoy our year in review!

Winter 2008/Spring 2009 was very cold. Since it was our first winter back after our trip, the cold weather took some getting used to and we were very much home bodies! We didn't do much snowmobiling, although we did go out to our cabin for one weekend in late March. It was perfect weather, and a great night in our rustic little home away from home. In March we also celebrated a big 10th anniversary of us living in our house. Alex and Luke were both in figure skating and took part in the skating carnival, "Wicked". They both did a fantastic job, and it was a great performance. In late March, Luke got an opportunity to participate in a "Junior Trapper" winter camp through the school, where he spent 4 days learning about trapping and bush survival skills. At the same time, Alex got an opportunity to go up to Yellowknife for 6 days and participate in a Francophone Forum, where she met Francophone kids from as far away as Inuvik and Iqaluit. The end of March also marked Rick's last regular shift at the BHP Diamond Mine, no more 2 in, 2 out. Although he is no longer at the mines, he is still working for Ollerhead & Associates doing other survey and drafting jobs as needed. (more on that later in the newsletter)

In April, Alex celebrated her 15th birthday, she was so excited to learn that she can now borrow Mom's shoes, and is just millimetres from being taller than Mom too. (Now, in December, she has well passed that milestone, sadly...). Our big activity in May was the Canadian Cancer's Relay for Life, which is 12 hour relay that is run from 7 PM to 7 AM. Our family teamed up with 4 other families who live on our block, Partridge Avenue. Thus we called ourselves "The Partridge Family" and ran in support of our neighbour, who had just been diagnosed with breast cancer. I am happy to report that our team raised over \$7,750.00 and in total, the town of Fort Smith with a population of only 2600, raised over \$153,000.00. Our neighbor is also doing well, as she just completed her treatments and is back home last week.

June, as always, was extremely busy. We started with the family travelling once again to Hay River to take part in the

annual Track & Field NWT Territorials. Alex was very happy with her 10th place finish in the 100M as in the past her best showing was middle of the pack of 60 or so participants. On the other hand, Rick was very sad as his NWT Record for the Masters Shotput was beaten. Looks like he'll actually have to do some actual training next year if he'd like to get the record back. Luke socialized and competed and garnered his best ever running results. We also held the 1st Annual "Mercury Chef" competition for Luke's 12th and Rick's 42nd joint birthday party. The "Mercury Chef" is an adaption of television's "Iron Chef" competition; the teams of 2 were made up of family and friends. We even had a team submission via four videos from Australia. The birthday boys then judged the submissions based on the creative use of the secret ingredient, which was "peas". There were some very innovative submissions, but it was Team Ann and Joanne that edged out their competition. Some day Rick plans to compile the videos to YOU TUBE, (right after he starts working on our 1 year RTW trip video editing). The kid's school year ended very well, Luke completed Grade 5 on the honour roll, and Alex completed Grade 9 with the top marks for her grade.

For our family vacation this year, we decided to be adventurous and travelled to the Yukon. The Yukon had been the only province/territory that Rick and the kid's hadn't visited, so now we can say that we've seen all of Canada. Our biggest adventure of our trip was actually in Alaska, and BC, where we hiked approximately 63km in 3 nights/4 days over the famous Chilkoot Trail. The Chilkoot is the original trail that was used during the Klondike Gold Rush. We hiked the trail with Rick's old SJSA teacher, Paul Nordahl, now living in Whitehorse, and his 13 year old son, Ti. It was a fantastic trip; great weather, beautiful scenery, and worth every blister! To complete the circle we travelled to Dawson City to check out what was at the end of the road for the Klondikers. We also timed our visit to coincide with the weekend of the Annual Dawson City Music Festival. I really can not say enough about how much we enjoyed the music festival, it was a weekend of really great tunes from a variety of types of bands in a fun family atmosphere. We highly recommend both experiences. We were even captured in a Tourism Canada promotional video! (link at [weblog.jamesworld.ca](http://weblog.jamesworld.ca)) The only thing we missed out on was taking a sign to Watson lake for the famous SIGNPOST FOREST. Others traveling up be forewarned to look into that. *Rick's extra note:* Officially, when we lived in Taloyoak

(Spence Bay) it was still part of the NWT. We moved to Fort Smith just a few months before Nunavut came into being. Since Rick spent a couple weeks in High Lake, Nunavut (beside Bathurst Inlet on the central Canadian Arctic Ocean this Summer, he is officially the ONLY member of our family to have been to all thirteen provinces and Territories.

After nearly a month's holidays, Rick returned to Fort Smith for just a few days before Ollerhead sent him to "High Lake" which was a mining exploration camp in the middle of Nunavut's tundra.

Unfortunately, this meant that he missed Patti Stobbe's visit. For those that don't know Patti, she lives in Calgary, but we had originally met her on our travel's last year, at a hotel in India. During her visit, Fort Smith was hosting the 2nd Annual Paddlefest, so we all had a great time watching the whitewater kayaking competitions, (link at [weblog.jamesworld.ca](http://weblog.jamesworld.ca)) as well as hiking around a few of the Wood Buffalo National Park trails. The kid's and I had a great visit with her. Rick was only home for a few days mid-August before he was off to work in the small community of Whati, (about 165km NW of Yellowknife) surveying a river for a proposed hydroelectric project. Luckily he was back home late August as Grandma Denise and Grandpa Paul came to visit for a few days. We also took them out for a couple of hikes and weenie roasts in the Park, it was another great visit. Plus Paul got Rick going on actual deck construction, (after Rick spent all the previous time on old wood removal and landscaping).

As usual, the summer flew by too fast and the kids were back to school, Alex started in Grade 10, officially in High School now, and Luke started his last year at the elementary school. Rick also did a little back to school in September where he was down in Edmonton for two weeks, attending NAIT, taking some AutoCad courses to refresh his computer drafting skills. In between all of Rick's comings and goings we (well mostly just him), he has been working on replacing our backyard deck. Rick is trying to incorporate a few innovative ideas, so you will all just need to come and visit to see them when the deck gets done by this coming July. It's 3/4 done now but he has to wait for the Spring to finish.

October was a busy month as Rick was in Yellowknife for a few weeks, learning another new program and drafting up a project. I was also fairly busy as I had decided to run for town councillor in our municipal elections. There were 17 candidates for 8 positions, and I am

happy to report that on October 19th, I was elected. Late October I also celebrated the 10 year anniversary in my current position, as a Business Development Officer, and was experiencing a little cabin fever, with the opportunity for 3 new potential job assignments. So in early November I decided that I would request a one year secondment to work as the Director of Finance for Wood Buffalo National Park, unfortunately I am sad to report that my request was denied, by my Deputy Minister. So, for now I'm staying put.

We have all been fairly busy this fall. Alex has been busy researching exchange programs and is looking at applying through the Rotary Club in Yellowknife to do a 1 year international exchange for her Grade 12 year. She is no longer officially figure skating, although she is now assisting the figure skating coach twice a week with the younger kids. Again last week, she was in Yellowknife with the Francophone Association participating in various Francophone media workshops. She had a great time as she got to meet up with many of the same kids she met in March, and she really enjoyed the stop motion photography workshop. Luke has been keeping busy as well, as he is still figure skating, working with his former Grade 4 teacher to write a book about our year travelling and volunteering at the Public Library after school 2 days a week. This on top of being involved with the school's extracurricular activities such as Choir, Jigging and the Redit Club, which works on story writing. October marked the beginning of my (Claudette's) hockey season. Our first tournament was in mid November in High Level; it was tons of fun. We also hosted our hockey tourney, and I'm happy to say our team was 3rd out of 5. I'm still recuperating after the 6 games. We have also been in the planning stages of renovating our kitchen, so Rick is just getting ready to rip out the flooring as the new dining room cabinets will be going just after New Year's, and the rest should be ready a few weeks after that. Wahoo!

To say the least, we are looking forward to the holiday season, as we are planning a few surprises. Our vacation for next year is that we are planning to visit Washington, DC for our summer holidays. And as always, I would like to end this newsletter by saying we would love you all to come and visit!

**Love the James' of the North**

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