Our Growing Clan

By Tommie Gipson

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to my four children:

TJ, Perry, Justinn, and Marc.

Introduction

I began writing this book more than 30 years ago. When I penned the first words, I would have never thought it would be the beginning of a 30 year project, culminating in this book.

My name is Tommie Gipson. I have four sisters and a brother (I also have a half sister and step brother that came years later). My mother and maternal grandfather were big influences in my life. I graduated from Walton Senior High School in the Florida Panhandle in 1976.

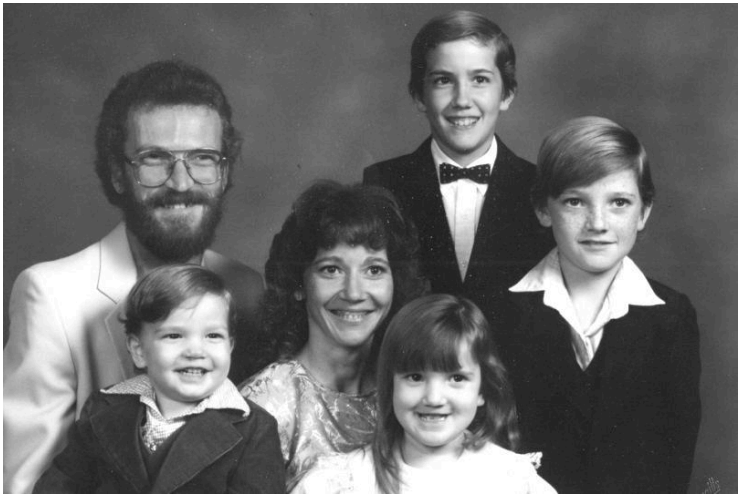
In 1982, I married a beautiful red headed girl named Kathy Reddick.. We built a house in 1985 and raised all four of our children in it. I began working in the engineering department at an electric cooperative in 1987 and retired from the same company 31 years later in 2018.

I started writing the family newsletter in 1992. Rather than handwriting letters to all of the people we stayed in touch with, (this was long before the internet and email became part of our lives), I decided to create a newsletter and mail the family news newsletter to everyone at the same time. It was the easiest way to share the latest about our growing clan.

I was pretty ambitious at the beginning of the project, thinking I would do 3 or 4 newsletters a year. That quickly dropped to just a couple a year. But that too changed to just one a year at Christmas by 1994.

And so an annual Christmas tradition began. Our original mailing list was just over a dozen addresses, but by the time it ended in 2022 it was going out to 75 people.

The photo below was taken in 1988 and shows our growing clan near the time when I started writing the Family News newsletters.



Clan Size: 6
Back Row: Tommie, Timothy (TJ)
Middle Row: Kathy, Perry
Front Row: Marc Thomas, Justinn

Now, after thirty years, I felt like the family newsletters told enough of our story to warrant making them into this

book. Compiling the newsletters into book format meant omitting the original photos that were in the newsletters.

Removing the photos means there are some portions of the text in this book that refer to photos in the original newsletter that are not in this book.

To view the original newsletters in pdf format and see all of the photos, use the link below:

http://hosttg.com/fn/

The family photos that are used in this book are black and white. The color versions of the pictures in this book can be found at the above link.

When writing the family newsletters, I shared the good news from each year and occasionally some bad news. The goal was to put our best foot forward and share the highlights of the year.

At some point it became a Christmas tradition and was expected by many people including our parents and siblings. The Family News newsletter also served as something like a database. It became a way to look things up when our memories were not so good.

The grandchildren are able to see their entire lives in the pictures from past newsletters. Taylor was born in 2002 and by the time the newsletters ended in 2022 she was 20 years old and could see the first two decades of her life in the newsletter photographs.

That was another reason for making the newsletters into a book. I want my kids and my grandchildren to always have a way to remember some of the memories we made over the past 30 years.

When I look at past newsletters I am often taken back in time. I see each of the kids from childhood to graduation. The newsletters remind me of some of the different cars we have owned, pets that enriched our lives, events that helped shape our lives, and reminders of some of the wonderful travels we have enjoyed.

I retired in 2018. Kathy and I had a wonderful year that year, taking a cruise to Mexico, staying at an AirBnB near the Gulf, visiting my sister Tonja in Atlanta, and spending Thanksgiving in Orlando with Kathy's family. Seeing the highlights from that year reminds me of the "many blessings that have been ours."

We were truly blessed! Knowing the wonderful journey we shared, helps me cope with losing Kathy when she was only 62.

We both embraced the phrase ATFAR (All Things For A Reason). Kathy changed our license plate to that in 1999. ATFAR was a beacon of light for us when things got dark.

I hope this book will be a constant reminder to our growing clan, to be thankful for the journey, trust that it

will be okay, and have hope that the future will be just as wonderful as the past or even better.

Tommie Gipson
2023

Chapter 1
(1992)

February 1992

Well we made it through Christmas again. Kids had a blast. Actually we all did.

February 14th will be ten years of wedded bliss for Kathy and I. Would not have missed it for anything. She has even broken me from being a football addict.

I fell in love with her the first time I saw her, I just had a feeling. Since I've finished up the two degrees I've been working on for 4 years, it's her turn. She's going to become an animal care specialist. She has plenty of cats and dogs to practice on too. She does have a way with animals. She got a new car in March of 91. It is a Ford escort wagon. We used it when Kathy and I went to Penn State last summer for my lab. I mentioned this because now that we have a reliable vehicle, we hope to get away this year with the kids and visit. Consider this fair warning.

Eventually we will try and expand this letter to four pages. Hopefully the kids will make their own contributions. Don't hold your breath if you're expecting Kathy to do the same.

We are all doing well. As we sit down to supper each night, I look around the table and notice how much older everyone is getting. I sometimes think maybe I'll sprinkle some of Peter Pan's magic dust on them and keep them from growing anymore. I'll probably be in the dog house just for mentioning it when Kathy sees this. Her favorite day of the year is the first day school starts after the kids' summer vacation.

TJ:
He is 14 now. He will start baseball practice on monday. He is about 2 inches taller than mom. Today he played football with some of the guys I work with. He caught the winning touchdown! Of course he was on my team. He still has a while before he can beat me in basketball. We won't mention who is better at nintendo.

Perry:
Perry is 11 and will turn 12 in may. When Kathy and I were married he was barely walking. It's one of the strangest feelings to look back over 10 years and realize all of the changes we've gone through. Perry has taken after TJ and started a baseball card collection. He is also pretty good with a pencil. He keeps us on our toes at all times.

Justinn:
Daddy's little girl is doing all right with three brothers. She will be nine this year and continues to amaze us. Like Perry she spends a lot of time drawing and creating. Someday she's going to come up with the perfect way to make us rich so that I won't have to go to

work. Needless to say, I encourage her! She has long red hair and a powerful karate chop to scare you with.

Marc:
Our baby is now five and in kindergarten. He's got a way of turning on the charm and saying the cutest things. When we went to our first PTA meeting last year and met his teacher, Kathy got a strange look from some of the other parents. When his teacher saw him she stopped what she was doing and gave Marc a hug. I don't think she did that for the other kids. He keeps us smiling!

Introducing:
The first of what we hope will be a regular newsletter! Our friends and families are too numerous to write to each one on a regular basis, so Kathy and I have decided to send a newsletter with the latest information and let everyone know how we are doing.

As time passes we hope the contents of this letter improve. Until then, remember it's the thought that counts. Everyone is doing well here in DeFuniak. At least from our perspective.

One of our favorite thoughts:
"We play our part here upon the stage without the need to fully understand the final plot. We do not need to know the plot because we know the playwright."

Good bye for now. TG (editor-and-chief)

May 11th 1992

We're back!

Whether you like it or not we are back, most of the responses to the first edition were favorable. So of course that encouraged me to continue. So if you don't like it then it's your own fault for not telling me the truth.

You'll notice that we've already expanded and added two more pages. I did this because each of the kids promised to make a contribution. Now if I could just get Kathy to take time out of her busy schedule! We are all alive and well here in DeFuniak springs. The whole family has gotten excited about the possibility of adding on to the house. We were watching the interest rates drop and decided to try and refinance the house. When we do we are hoping to add on so that each of the kids can have their own bedrooms. We took cereal boxes we have plenty after TJ eats breakfast and made a scaled model of the existing house and also of the new addition we are hoping to add. It was a fun project and gave the kids a chance to visualize what we are talking about. It never hurts to dream.

Our latest family project has been to get a bicycle for each of us. We all had one except for Kathy. We managed to get hers when our neighbor was out burning trash and the fire got out of control. We went over and helped her put it out. She thanked Us by giving Kathy a bicycle she never used. So if you are driving through and notice a line of six bikes it might be us.

If anyone is planning a trip this year let us know where you are going. We would like to see if you would be near our property. Where is our property? Pick any state and you'll have a state that we have property in! We own one square inch of land in each of the 50 states. It was a Christmas gift from my mother. I am compiling a database with facts about the property that I hope to sell to others. We know each county but that's about it.

There is a company that bought one acre in each of the 50 states and split it up into square inches and sold it. They gave us a listing of each county but we need more information. Since there are over 6 million other owners we thought we could gather all of the information we could about our property and create a booklet to sell for a couple of dollars. Our one square inch in Florida is in the county next to us about 40 miles away. We plan to make a trip and plant a flag on our one square inch. You can see it from the interstate when passing through.

TJ age 14, 8th grade:

The following contribution is from TJ Putz. He is solely responsible for its contents. Editor

For about a month I have been putting baseball card information on the computer. So far I got $310 cards ranging from $40 to $65. And of course I got more than that. I finally got the honor roll for the first time this year. Three A's and three B's. I was very surprised, I thought I

was going to get a c or two. On Christmas last year I got a pair of inline roller skates. At first I could hardly stand on them. Now I can ride on them a little bit better. I am on the baseball team, but have not played in a game yet. I think I might be able to play before the season is over. Our record is five wins and five losses. Every once in a while I beat Tommie in basketball.

Editor's note: once in a while should be translated into two times in his whole life!

Perry is supposed to be good at tetherball but I beat him every time I play him.

Perry age 11, 5th grade:

The following contribution is from Perry Fannin. He is solely responsible for its contents. Editor

Editor's note: Perry was reluctant to make a contribution. So at the editors suggestion he consented to the following interview

How tall are you? 4'9 "

What is your favorite color? Blue

What is your favorite sport? Baseball

What do you like about school? Let's skip that one.

What is your favorite TV show? Fresh Prince

If you were allowed to do anything you want, what would you do? Buy more Legos.

If you had three wishes:
1 join a major league team
2 meet Ryan Sandberg
3 three more wishes
4 a Mickey Mantle rookie card
5 have my own truck
6 have a driver's license

Justinn age 8, second grade:

The following contribution is from Justinn Desiree. She is solely responsible for its contents. Editor

My favorite color is purple. My favorite food is cheese.

If I had three wishes that would be?
1 - 1 million pieces of cheese
2 - $1 million dollars
3 - get to swim in our pool again.

I have red eyes and I am 3 ft 10 in and a half feet tall. I am making two books: a red one and a pink one.

Marc Thomas age 5, kindergarten:

The following contribution is from Marc thomas. He had a Little help from his dad. Editor

My name is Marc Thomas Gipson. My brother Perry is bad sometimes. I like school and my teacher. Sometimes we make donuts like today. I am about to lose my first tooth. My favorite toy is a Ninja turtle sword that blows bubbles. Perry is making a guitar. I like to swim in our pool. I sleep on the bottom bed of our bunk beds. I like to go to parks and caves. I like going to the beach. I like every kind of food except vegetables. I like to look at houses with different colors. I can't think of something else, I'll just scratch my chin. That will help me think of something else. I like to drive my dad's truck. I like good dreams but not bad ones.

I've decided to try and put out an addition every 3 months. Can't seem to find the time monthly. Besides, it's difficult to find something newsworthy around here each month.

Our lives are pretty routine with work and school playing a dominant role. But we do manage a picnic every now and then or playing tennis or something.

Hope this will eliminate all of those comments we had about not writing. If you have any ideas for this I'm always open to suggestions.

One of our favorite thoughts: “Sometimes it is better to know what you cannot do than what you can do.”

From our world to your world.

November 29th 1992

From our world to your world

Here's the latest:
So you thought we had given up on our newsletter. Wrong. We've just gotten sidetracked.

There's been a lot going on since our last edition this past may. This will be our third edition for this year which I think is pretty good since I know how the editor likes to procrastinate. But our goal for next year will be an addition every 4 months.

With Christmas so close I could not put this edition off any longer. Hope you enjoy it. If you know of anyone that should be added to our mailing list and is not on it, give us a call.

June - school's out. TJ visits his dad.

July - took the kids to Orlando to visit TJ. Well really we went for a family get-together. We stayed with Teresa and Bill. I wonder if that had anything to do with them moving to Tennessee.

We also left Perry behind to spend a couple of weeks with grandparents. He had a fantastic time but I'm afraid Orlando will never be the same.

Bought a new computer. Our old computer was one of the first ones to come out.

The kids finally got to experience color on their programs. And Dad learned how to use a modem.

We had an airshow here on the 4th. Justinn and Marc got to fly over town in a plane. Mom would not go up with us. Maybe she knew Marc was going to get to fly the plane. We even flew over our house!

August - finally the kids are back in school! Wasn't sure if mom was going to survive the summer. When she says they drive her crazy she means it. For example in one week's time she fell in the pool while cleaning clothes and all. She poured a cup of coffee right in an ashtray that was inches from her cup. She placed a hot pot of coffee on a cupboard shelf with a coffee cups instead of on the burner 3 ft away. She paid the telephone bill to the electric company. It's a good thing I work for the electric company. She locked herself in one of the bathrooms and had to have Perry take off a door knob to get her out.

September - bought a 72 orange VW beetle for me to drive back and forth to work. Should do great on gas mileage but it's tough to squeeze the whole family in it.

October - the kids had a long weekend so I took some time off and we visited my Uncle Dick and Aunt Darlene in North carolina. It was a great trip. Marc had to help Mom down the first day of mountain climbing. The next day we found ourselves on the Blue ridge parkway. If you ever get the chance, check it out! The kids can now

say they have been on the highest point east of the Mississippi - mount Mitchell.

November - One Saturday morning we decided we didn't need the pantry closet in the dining room. TJ had a blast punching holes in the wall with a hammer. It gives us a wider area going to the back door and at least makes it seem like we have more room. Kathy won two first place ribbons in the fair this year. It's the first time she has entered but probably won't be the last. She was able to go with me on a trip to Atlanta a couple of weeks ago. No cooking, cleaning, or kids. We were also next to a three-story mall. It was tough getting her to come home.

TJ:
TJ started high School this year. I took him to orientation the day before school started. Between the two of us we managed to find all of his classes. It was a strange feeling to be back at school for the first time in a long time.

It is also a strange feeling to realize TJ turns 15 in a couple of weeks. That means he can get his learner's permit and drive an automobile! I'm not sure about him, but I don't think we're ready for that grin.

He is taking Spanish this year but let's not ask him how he is doing. Next thing you know he'll be doing something like going out and getting a job or something. I guess they can't stay young forever. But Kathy keeps insisting she is not that old. It only takes one look at the

two of them side by side to know that he's not a little boy anymore.

Perry:
As I mentioned earlier Perry was able to spend a couple of fun packed weeks in Orlando this past summer. He still talks about Universal Studios. Our first day of mountain climbing he and TJ raced ahead and were the first ones to the top. He's the only one who has not been on a plane yet. But at the top of the mountain he got a good idea of what it's like. Oh yes Mom has never been up in a plane, but don't expect to see her in one anytime soon. Perry had a girlfriend up until last week. He behaved so well I might become a Matchmaker for him.

Justinn:
How old are you? 9

What do you like to do most? Draw and make up things like a character when I draw and then use it for my book.

What did you like most about the fair this year? I won third place with my drawing.

What did you think of the mountains? They were fun and quiet and beautiful. I liked the animals.

Any last words? Goodbye and Merry Christmas.

Marc Thomas:
How old are you? 6 years old.

What do you do at school? I learn how to read and play with my friends.

What did you think of the mountains? It was beautiful. It is very high.

What do you like to do most? Play with the little men and the truck. When I get my Christmas toys I'll play with them. And I like to build with legos.

Any last words? Merry Christmas I'll see you soon.

One of our favorite thoughts: “Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.”

I hope you have enjoyed this edition. I also hope everyone has a safe holiday and a Merry Christmas!

One last thought: I hope that everyone realizes that this is our Christmas card to you. Yes I know that's the easy way out, but with it being so close to Christmas and since we have 20 people on our mailing list and all, well I just did not want to be a burden for the postal service.

Chapter 2
(1993)

July 18th, 1993

Here's the latest:
I hope we did not give anyone a heart attack when you got the mail and found our newsletter. I figured most people had given up on seeing an addition this year. It's just that this happened and then that happened and then this happened again. There were many reasons for the time gap between this newsletter and the one last Christmas. What is it they say: better late than never?

I'm sure after you read this you'll see just how much is going on in our lives. And until things slow down like after the kids have all grown and left we will probably send out the newsletter only twice a year. Was that cheering I heard?

March Madness:
I'll begin by turning the clock back to this past march. I still work with the electric company and on Friday March 11th we were warned to be prepared for a freak storm early Saturday morning. When I came home from work at 5:00 that Friday I told Kathy I would probably have to go back if the weather got bad. At 10:00 p.m. I got the call to go into work. At 2:00 a.m. Saturday it hit. Rain sleet and then snow! But it was the wind that kept us working until the following Monday to restore power. I

worked 36 hours. But that did not stop me from sneaking home after the sun came up Saturday morning to record 2 hours of video tape of the snow before going back into work.

When it was all over 8,000 homes had lost power. That is 1/3 of our system. We had two inches of snow on the ground and the wind had reached 70 mph! But the most unusual thing was that it happened in the middle of March!

Backyard Pet:
Around this past April a friend of ours was fishing in the part of the lake behind our house. He saw something swimming in the water and took his small boat closer to investigate. Suddenly he was thrown from his boat by a six and a half foot alligator! He managed to get back in the boat without getting hurt.

The next day after he told us about it, Perry and I took our rowboat out to investigate. I saw two 1-ft babies and that was enough to convince me to head back. She is about 250 ft across the water from our lot so we're not worried. But we have postponed using the boat for a while.

The kids have a tree house near the water. Using the binoculars the gator can be seen laying in the sun each afternoon.

More of the latest:

This past May I attended a seminar in Orlando. I had dinner one evening with Pat, Kathy's mom. She had just had surgery a couple of weeks before and we were talking about how we cope with pain. I have always felt a reluctance to take medication and was telling her about some of my relaxation techniques as well as some of my other strange theories. From what I hear I would have gotten along great with her dad. We had a wonderful

Within an hour of dropping me off at my hotel an unbearable toothache hit me. It lasted the entire night and forced me into a commitment to do something about it when I got home. By the way, my meditations did not work for the pain.

Anyway the next day Kathy had a dental appointment so I tagged along. The dentist sent me to an oral surgeon. On the first visit he cut three teeth out and one of them on the upper jaw left a hole in my sinuses. Once the stitches were out from that visit I had a hole in the other side after he removed a tooth. Overall it took five visits throughout June and early july. I wound up using 60 hours of sick leave from work and I was on medication throughout the whole time!

I think the next time I talk to Pat we will talk about winning the lottery instead of dealing with pain. Maybe I'll get first-hand experience with the lottery!

I know they've had plenty of rain in the midwest, but from April until mid-june we had almost no rain here.

Until we decided to pitch a couple of tents in the backyard and camp out with the kids. We had a great time until about 10:30 p.m. when the rain came. It doused our campfire and kept us from taking a midnight swim.

So we canceled camping and drug pillows and sleeping bags back into the house. We tried it again 2 weeks later. Guess we found a new way to make It rain besides washing the car.

We are still working on adding on to the house. Above is the latest plan we are giving to the bank.

This is what it will look like after we are finished. We hope to start construction in the next couple of months. We figured we had better go ahead and take the plunge. TJ will at least get his own bedroom for a few years. And just think of all of the rooms we will have after the kids are gone!

We have been waiting to do this for so long that we already used up all the space.

TJ:
He made it through his first year of high school. I'll not mention his grades except to say it was not a disaster. Since he is used to high school now I'm certain he will improve. This past March was the first time he enjoyed snow in Defuniak. If you ever come over, remind me to show you the video of his giant snowball. The last time we had snow was in December of '89 and TJ was at his

dad's house in Orlando. Speaking of his dad, Tom and Sylvia moved this past may. Instead of flying to Orlando this summer, TJ flew to South Bend Indiana by way of Nashville. He had to change planes for the first time. But from what I hear it was no problem. Especially since Teresa, Kathy's sister, was kind enough to help out. TJ will miss those Magic games, but I guess he's within driving distance of the Bulls.

Perry:
We are proud to say all four kids advanced to the next grade this year, including perry. He will have a challenge next year because he'll be moving to a new school. He's only got 3 years at the middle school before he too will be in high school. Of course by then TJ will graduate. Are we all getting old or what? The kids are definitely getting bigger. Perry can almost look his mom in the eyes. He got a new baseball glove for his birthday. And on his birthday we had a family softball game over at my mom's just for him. Perry is still into Legos and models. You can tell that by stepping into his bedroom. He always has Legos and models all over the place. He's turning out to be a pretty good artist as well. One of his favorite pastimes is drawing.

Justinn:
This past April Justinn skipped school with the school's permission and went with Dad to work. It was “take your daughter to work day." She got her own photo ID and spent the day working with me. She was interviewed and had her photo in our monthly newsletter at work. This was her first year getting letter grades at school.

Her first 6 weeks in the third grade she made all A's and stayed on the A B Honor roll All year. She also knows when it will snow again. She figures since there are 3 years between each of the kids and then 3 years after Marc it snowed in 89 and then in three more years it snowed, that means it will either snow in the winter of 95 to 96 or we will have another kid. I guess we had better plan on it snowing again. Kathy says there will definitely be no more kids!

Marc:
Marc will start second grade in august. As usual he has had his teacher wrapped around his finger. In fact Justinn's third grade teacher is putting off retiring until after she has Marc in her class. The pool is still over his head, but he can swim as well as most adults. He had his head shaved for the summer. It was his idea. And each time Kathy cut a little she would ask are you sure you want to do this? He is still a fountain of joy with his laughter. Smiling just comes natural for him. He got that from Kathy. His class went to the zoo in May for their field trip. He turned seven this past May. He decided he wanted a pool party. He walks in his sleep. He is also missing several teeth. And he made all S's in school.

One of our favorite thoughts:
“The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none.”

One final thought:
That about wraps it up for this edition. Hope everyone is doing well. Kathy and the kids said to tell you hello. I

hope you feel like this was worth reading. At least I won't have to feel guilty about not writing. TG editor

Chapter 3
(1994)

December 11th, 1994

The Latest:
Yes, you can think of this as your Christmas card. No, we did not give up on our newsletter. Yes, we still have you on our mailing list. Whew, so many questions. I hope I've managed to answer some of them. Now it's time for the latest.

Let's start with Kathy. She had to get glasses this past summer. She started her own business and the glasses are from staring at needlework and computer screens. Her business is a computer consultant. She is working out of the house for now and staying pretty busy. She has been averaging two jobs a week for the past 2 months. Her jobs have been a mixture of troubleshooting and upgrading. When it comes to hardware she has surpassed my abilities and only uses me for problems with software and only then when she has a problem with a specific program she has not learned yet.

This past April Kathy flew for the first time. I had to fly to Colorado Springs and somehow I managed to talk her into flying with me. We took a train to the top of Pikes Peak. It was 70° at the bottom of the mountain and 30° at the top. When we flew out there was 10 inches of

snow on the ground and it was late April! We had a great time, but I don't think Kathy enjoyed flying.

Last March I traded in my VW Beetle for a new bicycle. I've been riding 7 miles a day to and from work since then. As of this week I've logged over 800 miles on it. It only takes about 10 minutes longer each way and I enjoy the slower pace. It has simplified life a little by cutting out gas insurance and maintenance on another vehicle.

We still have our Ford Escort wagon. About 2 months ago we were not sure if we would or not. We thought the insurance company would total it after an accident coming home from church one day. We were driving in the left lane on a four-lane highway and an elderly man in the right hand lane decided to turn left right in front of us. It had been raining and I skated right into the side of his pickup truck. It wasn't a hard impact but it was enough to cause about $1,500 of damages to our car. We had all of the kids with us but nobody was hurt.

Speaking of kids don't you just love my transitions between paragraphs, it's time for kids corner:

TJ:
TJ will be 17 on the 17th. He is a junior in high school and has his class ring to prove it. He will be flying to Indiana on his birthday. Instead of taking the smaller flight through Nashville he will be flying via Charlotte and Pittsburgh. He still has not gotten his driver's license. He doesn't like driving our car because it is a standard shift.

It won't bother Kathy or I if he waits to get his license because it keeps him at home with us. Although there have been a few times when a third driver would have come in handy. Everyone warned us how much trouble teenagers would be. But if the rest of the kids turn out like TJ we won't have any problems. He has a good head on his shoulders and does not seem to follow the norm for teenagers. He tutors a neighbor's 11-year-old girl in math, his favorite subject. He is planning to major in computer science or something involving computers. No, we did not pressure him one way or another. We only have one computer but with all the activity on it we are thinking of giving the kids their own computer.

Perry:
Perry is 14. He is as tall as Kathy. This past summer he was in a basketball league. He surprised me at how well he did. I'm not talking about how well he played. He and TJ are both good players. I am referring to how well he listened to his coach and followed the rules. This past summer he got a taste of work. He has always hated doing dishes at home. But that was his first job doing dishes! Guess the money made the difference. Perry has also turned out to be quite a horse trader. Both last year and this year when he went to buy new tennis shoes we told him he only had so much to spend. Both times it wasn't quite enough for him to buy the status symbol shoes he wanted. But both times he negotiated with the guy in the mall to get what he wanted! He still shows great inventiveness. He built a cycle cart from scraps just laying around. He still draws and loves his legos. He has two shelves in his room lined with models

he has put together. This past summer the whole family went to a water park. Somehow he and TJ talked their mom into going down a slide 50 ft up in the air. It's spiraled down in great circles and Kathy says she'll never do it again.

Justinn:
Justinn is 11. She is in her last year at elementary school. She too continues to be very creative. She came up with what she and Marc would be for Halloween this year, a TV and a remote control. The costumes turned out so well they had their picture in the local paper again. We went downtown trick or treating and they both were interviewed on the local radio. Each 6 weeks her class takes well behaved students roller skating. She has gone twice now and can make it out to the middle of the rink by herself. Guess we haven't taken the kids skating as often as we'd like to. It was just last year we took them to their first movie at a theater. It was so much fun we've been to two more movies since then. She took money she got from Christmas last year and bought a puppy from the humane society. After a couple of weeks it got sick and we had to take Sparky to the vet. He gave him medicines and said the puppy would be okay. But three days later the dog died. We told the vet about it and he felt so bad he called The humane society and let Justinn pick out another dog. He gave the new dog all his shots at no charge. And now bud is a member of our family along with four fish, two cats, two birds, and one other dog. She has written an electronic story and illustrated it on the computer. I hope to place it on America Online and if people like it she will ask them

to send her $5. She also continues to do stories on paper by hand. I hope to scan them into the computer so we can make copies.

Marc:

Marc Thomas is 8. He and Justinn were on the same basketball team this past summer. Kathy was an assistant coach and I have some great video shots of their games. He is in the third grade this year. It is the first year he has gotten letter grades instead of just us or in. He has made the AB Honor roll each 6 weeks! His teacher writes notes on his report card like Marc is a joy to teach. He is a joy just to be around. He continues to be extremely cheerful. I hope he never loses that trait. He loves riding his bike and playing outside. A couple of months ago he got his kite wrapped around the power line coming into our house. TJ and I got it down. I was not about to call down at work and tell them one of my kids wrapped his kite in a power line! The day after Thanksgiving this year our Town had an event called hometown Christmas. They invite crafts people to set up booths and have food and music and make a day of fun shopping downtown. We had a booth this year selling snowflakes Kathy made and our new line of photo candles. We pour our own wax and put a transparent label with a picture or saying on it. Sales were down so Marc took a box of candles, magnets, and bookmarks the kids had made and walked around selling them like a guy selling hot dogs at a baseball game. He would bring back an empty box and a pocket full of money. He would load up and go out again. We split the profits with

the kids and he made the most money. Nobody could resist such a cute face. We put a deck around the pool and he loves running and jumping in. He is a great swimmer and has to be chased out of the pool. If we'd let him he would probably eat and sleep in the pool.

This past July the center of Alberto came right over our house. Although it never made it to a hurricane we were flooded with winds and rain. I missed the 4th of July because I had to work day and night. We lost 12,000 of our 25,000 customers. I took the money I made from overtime and bought a new card for our computer. It allows me to hook up the video camera to the computer and capture video clips or still shots.

I have had a blast with it. We use it to put people's pictures on our homemade candles. The candle has a hollow center so the flame shines through the wall of the candle behind the photo. I also got a program that allows me to take a photograph and make it look like a hand drawing.

One of our favorite thoughts:
“To thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day thou can't not be false to any man." William Shakespeare

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From our world to your world:

We have been on America Online for 2 years now and love it. Should any of you have access to the internet our email address is tomgip@aol.com

I have produced this with Windows Write program it comes with windows so if any of you are interested in an electronic version let me know. TG editor

Chapter 4
(1995)

December 2, 1995

The Latest:
Our last issue was December 11, 1994. We have an entire year to cover in a couple of pages so hang on.

The biggest single event of 1995 is not hurricane Opal. It happened the first week of April. Kathy began working in electronics at Walmart. She is sometimes called the “computer lady” and has been full-time since they moved to a new super center last August. She is the assistant manager in the department.

I call it the biggest event of 1995 because it has meant a big adjustment for our family. Kathy usually works in the evening until 8 o'clock. The kids and I share cooking meals and look forward to her days off. She also works every weekend, so the kids are stuck with me. Justinn calls me a neat freak.

Kathy is working because she wants to and enjoys getting out of the house. Since her working is extra money, we were able to trade our car for a 92 Dodge Caravan in July and we love it. With both TJ and Perry bigger than I am, we needed the extra room. Now the whole family can ride together without being squeezed.

In August we had a brush with hurricane Erin. It came ashore 60 miles west of Pensacola. Some people lost power for two or three days.

Kathy has never liked going to the beach very much. Since she works on weekends, the kids and I have gone to the beach more this year than the past 3 years combined. We went the Saturday before Opal hit and enjoyed the dunes one last time before they vanished in the storm. Below is a photo after Opal hit. About thirty feet of the dunes all along the beach are gone.

We stayed at our house during Opal, and the kids saw the awesome power of 120 mph winds. The eye made landfall around 6 PM, about the time we lost power at our house. TJ, Perry, and I stood at the back door and watched shingles blow from the roof into the pool and the tin from the bike shed wrap around trees in our yard. The damage at our house was minor compared to the rest of our county.

It is the first time in my company's history. Where we had a 100% outage. Not one of the 26,512 meters was spinning when we assembled into survey teams the next day for damage assessment. We brought in 265 extra people. And 60 more trucks. We worked 16 hour days for 10 days. We are still doing some clean up work. The average time without power was 6 days. At our house, we were without power for 3 days. Overall, we feel fortunate. The storm moved quickly and dropped to a category 3. Kathy worked through much of the clean up

and the kids were real champs taking care of things at home.

On the second Saturday in November we had eight tornadoes touched down in our county. One of the Twisters touched down near Walmart. Kathy was working that day but was away from the store delivering a tv. I heard Walmart had been hit and was worried the whole time I was at work. There were several homes damaged by the twisters and another 6,000 people out of power again. We are beginning to think someone is just not living right around here.

We bought a color printer in July and can now do our candles in color. The living room is full of pictures I printed after blowing up snapshots and video images. We've also started making candles out of seashells and coffee cups with color photos on them.

The county has changed our mailing address for the new 911 system. The new address is 1963 Juniper Lake Road.

I am still pedaling my bicycle to work and enjoy it. I've almost got 2000 miles on the speedometer. I enjoy the quiet time it gives me and the money it saves on gas. The kids gave me a bike helmet for Father's Day and I wear it faithfully. I think I embarrassed some of them because all of the school buses go by me each morning.

TJ:
TJ will be 18 this month. He is a senior in high school and I can't call him a kid anymore. He's turned into a handsome young man and we are very proud of him. He plans to attend a 2 year college about 40 miles from here. He is planning a degree in computer sciences. The photo to the left is his senior picture.

Perry:
Perry is 15 and will be going into high school next year. This past summer he had to make up a class at school. With Kathy working and no school bus we wound up buying him a new bike. He rode it to school. We rode together in the mornings. He had to ride about half a mile further than I did. He has shot up this year and is taller than me. In the picture to the left, Kathy is painting Perry's hair green for a pep rally at school. Notice that he has to get on his knees for her to reach his hair.

Justinn:
Justinn is twelve, and in the sixth grade. She is going to the same school as Perry this year. She has to change classes as well as teachers at the new school. She got her first 10 speed bike for her birthday this year. She wants to ride it to school but the jury is still out. The picture to the right is a picture of her on her 1st and last day of elementary school.

Marc Thomas:
Marc Thomas is 9 years old and in the fourth grade. This is his first year at a school without his big sister. He

is handling it just fine. for his birthday. I took him to the discovery zone in Pensacola. I allowed him to invite 5 people. His 5 guests were all girls! Guess that's one way to eliminate the competition. Can you find him in the picture of colored balls?

Merry Christmas 1995, from all of us

Favorite Thought:
“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. let him step to the music which he hears, however, measured or far away.” Henry David Thoreau

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From our world to your world:
Don't forget we've had an address change. If you ever get on the internet, you can email us. Justinn is now a regular on America Online and has her own email, jusgip@aol.com The rest of us are at tomgip@aol.com.

Have a safe holiday, and if you have any complaints about the newsletter, just take them up with the editor.

Chapter 5
(1996)

December 9th, 1996

The Latest:
You know, it is getting close to Christmas because you now have our newsletter. It's hard to believe, but we have been doing this for almost 5 years now. There is a lot to catch up on since last year's edition. So sit back and get ready.

We'll start with our visitors from Orlando. Kathy's mother and grandmother came up for a wonderful visit. While they were here. I made them pose for this photo.

In late January I had a business trip in Orlando and was lucky enough to get tickets to a Magic game. While I was gone, Kathy woke up one morning and found we had two inches of water throughout the house. When I came home the carpet people had already removed the carpet. We lived with bare concrete floors for a month. We had wanted to get new carpet but not like that.

In march we bought a twelve foot by twenty four foot portable building. We wired it for electricity, telephone, and cable. We made two and a half rooms out of it; insulated, sheetrocked, and painted it. We placed it near the back door and built a sixteen foot porch from it to the house. TJ and Perry have been living in it ever since.

The extra room has given each of the kids their own bedroom at last. When the boys move out Kathy and I are going to use it for much needed office space.

Kathy is still working in the electronics department at Walmart. About 6 weeks ago she applied for a computer repair position at a local community college. They interviewed her, but the day after her interview, she decided she would not take the job. It would have meant a 40 mile commute to work. And she decided Walmart could not get along without her <grin>.

Last spring she had a glamor shot done. I scanned it on the computer and printed a two foot by three foot poster which now hangs in our living room. But if you ask me, I think any photo with her in it is a glamor shot.

Kathy still works most weekends. She gets two or three weekends off a year. Justinn, Marc and I fill our time on weekends riding bikes, swimming, roaming the internet, and cleaning house. I still make candles along with creating new computer art.

I still ride my bike to work. and March. It will be 3 years since I started riding. I will hit 3,200 miles this month. I am proud of my $90 Walmart bike. I have not spent any more money on it and it is working fine. I may have to spring for new tires before long, the tread is almost gone.

In July I had my twenty year class reunion. It was one more reminder that I'm getting older, and so are you. It

was fun seeing old classmates and learning what had happened to them. Just didn't seem like it has been twenty years.

The day of my reunion, my grandfather was taken to a hospital in Pensacola. He passed away on July 15th. There is not another single man who has had more influence on my life than granddad. It's been almost 5 months now and I still hear his voice giving advice and loving guidance just as he has done all my life. but the reality of not having him here is hard at times. Like while I am writing this newsletter. It's the first one he will not be reading. Death is just another step in each of our lives. It comes to all living things. I know this and have faith in my beliefs and can be happy for granddad with complete confidence. That's why I mentioned him here. Because this one man gave me a gift worth more than any other gift in the world. Granddad you are missed!

In October I had a meeting in Orange Beach, Alabama between Pensacola and Mobile. The hotel was right on the beach so Kathy took the week off and went with me. I also took some extra time off so we could enjoy some rare time alone. The weather was gorgeous and we had a wonderful time. Who could ask for anything better than watching the sun come up over the water with the most beautiful woman in the world!

Guess that will have to wrap it up for this year. Can't afford to mail more than two pages and i've about filled them up. Our whole family wishes you a Merry Christmas and we hope you are happy. Remember to

drop us a line now and then. That's about it for the latest now onto the kids:

T J:
Last Spring, TJ got a part-time job at Walmart. In May he graduated from high school. Tom Sylvia and family came from the North. Jim Patt and Grandma blue came from the South. and 2 more sets of grandparents came from here along with us and ants and uncles and cousins. He had quite a cheering section since he was the first grandchild to graduate. The day he graduated, he also got his operator's license. He and several classmates celebrated by going on a cruise in June. He spent the rest of the summer working and saving his money for a car and college. He bought a red Ford escort in September. Two days ago, he registered for his second semester at Okaloosa Walton community college, about 40 miles from home. TJ's life has changed dramatically since our last newsletter. It is great to have a third driver in the family and a second car. Sometimes it was hard to run errands on my bike, especially when one of the kids needed a ride from school and Kathy was working <grin>.

Perry:
Perry is almost as tall as TJ. He is in his first year of high school this year and getting pretty anxious about getting his driver's license. He loves having his own room. He has a table set up for working on models and some of the gadgets. He creates like the lego model of a working motor. He listens to country music, which sometimes clashes with t j's music. He also likes to hunt. He hunts

when he goes to his dads on the weekends. Except for not knowing when to keep quiet. Both at home and school, but he is learning. He is becoming a fine young man.

Justinn:
Justinn has been in the middle school seventh grade by herself this year. Yes, there are other kids there. Just not any of her brothers.. She is getting old enough to cook supper for me. Sure is nice after riding the bike 4 miles home from work and her having supper already cooked! She is still very creative. She amazes me sometimes with some of the things they come up with for fun. Last year she and Marc got a karaoke machine for Christmas. She loves to take her own radio shows where she is the d j. She got rollerblades for her birthday this year and is getting pretty good on them. She also likes to make videos with the video camera when I let her. She is getting older but she is still daddy's girl.

Marc:
Marc is in the fifth grade this year. This is his last year at elementary school, and next year he will be going to middle school with Justinn. Last May Marc began wearing glasses. Now half of our family wears glasses, the two oldest and the youngest. He also got rollerblades for his birthday. He has gotten pretty good on them. He can even skate backwards! His school picture was taken before he got glasses. He continues to smile most of the time and keeps everyone else smiling. He loves having his own bedroom. I sometimes

wish he would stay just the way he is but I know he can't. But I do hope he will always stay happy and full of life.

By popular demand:
I have had many people ask about this photo. Many of you have seen it hanging in our house. It is a photo of the mother on the left and her daughter on the right. I admit it has been altered just a bit. Now everyone has a copy of it.

Favorite thought:
“If fifty million people say a stupid thing, it's still a stupid thing." Leroy Jack Syrop

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From our world to your world:
If you ever get on the internet, you can email us. At tommieg@wwia.dfs.net. We finally dropped our America Online account.

Hope this news letter finds you in good health. And We Wish You a Merry Christmas!

Chapter 6
(1997)

December 15th, 1997

Believe it or not, it's that time of year period my annual opportunity to bore you. With the latest events from our lives period there have been a few changes since this time last year. So sit back and hang on, cause here we go.

As we take a little tour of the events of 1997 I will be pointing out some things along the way. Just above, you will find a modern image of the classic - speak, hear, and see no evil. It was made possible by Perry, TJ, and cousin Michael.

In some ways, it seems like little has changed in our lives. The kids get up each morning and head off to school and Kathy. And I had to work period we are stringing Christmas lights this weekend like we do every year period but as I write these words and think back to last christmas, I realized that things have changed quite a bit over the past year period

As an example of how things change, let me point out the serious Kathy on your left at the age of 14 and the grown up fun-loving Kathy at the age of ??. I think her age starts with a 4 or something. I have to be careful here because my turn is coming.

Kathy is now a zone manager at Walmart. She has three departments, hardware, sporting goods, and paint. She now has all of her weekends off and is home before I am each night!

It also only takes one look at the kids. To realize things are still changing. There is just no way I can include TJ when I say kids because he is far from being a kid. Above is a picture of his new truck. I am doing this newsletter in black & white, so I'll have to tell you his truck is a shiny red.

The rest of the kids are still riding bikes. Although Perry has his Driver's license. And this time next year, Justinn should have her learners permit! We loaded all the bikes and went riding on some new trails near the beach. The trails are kind of like a golf course complete with sand traps and water hazards! To the right beginning at the top is Perry, Justinn, and Marc taking their turn riding through the water.

We have found another way to make good use of pedal power. Earlier this year, we bought a five seat paddle boat for the lake. It's a great way to get around the lake without fussing with oars or a motor. And of course, I am still peddling my way to work.

This past October. I retired my old bike after 3 and a 1/2 years, and 4,739 miles! Kathy bought me a new bike, and I'm up to 300 miles on it. Our list of animals has also changed. We are down to one dog named Lucky. To

your left is Justinn and Marc with the new kitten they gave Kathy for Mother's Day.

TJ forgot to shave in this photo on the left. Perry to your right. Was asked to mow the yard or something and is a little perplexed. TJ turns 20 in 2 days, and Perry is now 17!

Justinn is 14 and Marc is eleven. Yes, you can tell Justinn has 3 brothers. She hasn't worn a dress in 5 years, and I don't think you will find a picture of her without a hat on. Marc graduated from elementary school last May. Until this year, we had a child in elementary school for 14 years in a row.

The picture to your left is Marc on graduation day. And beside him is Marc from our trip to the mountains in 1991. Aren't computers neat? I really enjoy experimenting with photos and sketches? Can you tell?

I like to take photos and make sketches out of them. Our house is plastered with pictures, especially of my beautiful wife! Yes, I have to be fair and include one of me.

Looks like it's time to wrap up our brief tour of 1997. I guess it's time for us to peddle our way into 1998. I'm a little late getting this in the mail this year, so if you receive your copy after Christmas, let me wish you a Happy New Year! Hope all is well with your family and remember to smile in 1998!

Favorite Thought:
“He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know."

From our world to your world:
We had to change our internet account last month. And so our email address has changed tomgip@dfsi.net

This is it until next year. Have a wonderful holiday!

Chapter 7
(1998)

December 15th, 1998

Hope 1998 has been a great year for you. This is the ninth edition of our family newsletter (Christmas card). This is also the first year of posting this newsletter to our website. Many of you now have access to the internet. With our mailing list approaching 50 names, we can reduce our costs to print and mail the newsletter by emailing our web address to those with internet access and have internet access. And haven't told us, please email us and let us know the Web address is.

It's time to get a cup of coffee or whatever beverage you prefer and let me catch you up on the latest from nineteen ninety eight

Last January the electric company I work with started a new company. I became the first employee. We are now up to 17 employees and growing strong.

I have my dream job and I am loving it! I spend my entire day writing computer software. I am leasing an office in town. Where I have no interruptions and I'm in heaven. The only downside is I had to give up the bike. The new company makes me drive a Ford Explorer to work. I like the truck well enough but miss the quiet time of riding my bike to work. When I get home from work each night the first thing I do is get on my bike and ride

a mile around the neighborhood. Still, it's just not the same. Kathy's job changed this year. Walmart abandoned the zone managers they created in 97 and went back to department managers. Now, Kathy manages paint and hardware instead of the 3 departments she used to have. She is very happy with the change.

We've had a couple of brushes with hurricanes this year, Earl and George, but both only prove to be minor disruptions in our lives.

This past April I took up golf. I have not played since taking golf in college 20 years ago. TJ and Perry are playing. I figured it would be a good thing for us to do together for years to come. I am really enjoying it. Yes, you could say I've gotten hooked on it. The first photo is my great swing and the second is T J's.

TJ:
TJ turns 21 this month. He transferred out of the Walmart here in DeFuniak and is now working in Crestview 30 miles west. He works all night and when we play golf, he is able to use that as an excuse if I beat him. He still has his truck and is going to the local community college. He likes Mariah Carey, wrestling, playing video games, and the internet.

Perry :
Perry turned 18 this year and began working at Walmart, changing tires and oil in the automotive department. This past May. He saved his money all summer and this

past August bought his first truck. He bought a 76 Ford Ranger XLS. This is his last year of high school (whew)! He enjoys hunting, country music, and Nascar. He has a wonderful sense of humor and we are very proud of him.

Justinn:
Justinn is 15 and began her first year in high school. She still refuses to wear a dress. She still sports a baseball cap, turned backwards and has added earphones to her permanent wardrobe. She is bigger than mom and looking forward to taking driver's ed next semester and getting her license. She drives my golf cart for me now and then. You will find her outside playing basketball at least once each day. She averages about 2 hours a day on the internet.

Marc Thomas:
Marc is now 12. It's hard to think of him as the baby of the family. He always has a smile for everyone. Except when Justinn has been picking on him, he likes driving the golf carts too, and has hit a few golf balls himself. He's in the seventh grade this year and loves Nick at Night.

With half the family working at Walmart (guess where Justinn wants to work) we are seldom together at the same time. It's tough for Kathy and I to arrange time off together. While our family has changed a great deal over the last year and we may not always be together at the same time, we are still a family. I am thankful for our family. About a week ago I managed to get all of us

together and took this family photo. As you can see, we are definitely feeding the kids well.

Blast from the past can you guess who's birthday it is?

Favorite thought:
“Patience, patience, patience is what the sea teaches patience and faith. One should lie empty, open, choiceless as a beach. Waiting for a gift from the sea." Ann Morrow Lindbergh.

From our world to your world:
I still have the old email address from last year. But I do not check that email everyday instead. I am using tomgip@yahoo.com and check it daily. I use the Yahoo email because I can check it from any computer anywhere.

Guess that wraps it up for this year. Thanks for allowing us into your home. And we'd like to wish you a Merry Christmas.

If you are online, you can go to additional pages that were omitted from the printed newsletter.

Chapter 8
(1999)

December 15th, 1999

Well, here it is our last newsletter of the century! We hope you are healthy and happy as we take a quick look at some of the things from our lives in nineteen ninety nine.

This past year has been fun for our whole family. Several years ago on a visit to Orlando we were able to take the kids to Universal Studio. Justinn wanted to go to Disney and I promised her someday we would. Early this year she reminded me she would not be a kid much longer and still had not been to Disney.

We tightened our belts, saved some money, and made plans for a summer vacation. It's amazing that Kathy, TJ, Perry, Tiffany (T J's girlfriend), and I were all able to take the same week off in August. And so for the first time in our lives. Our family spent 7 days, 24 hours a day together. And we had a wonderful time!

This photo will always remind us what will probably be our last vacation with the whole family. If you ever stop by our house for a visit, remind me to pull out the Disney pictures and show you Kathy's face when we rode the rockin 'roller coaster!

This past April we had an addition to our family named Sparky. Kathy has wanted a yorkshire terrier for as long as i've known her. Sparky was her birthday present this year. Recently, Kathy has been thinking about raising yorkies. Sparky has become an expensive dog because we had to put up a new fence in the backyard just for him.

Below is a picture of Kathy getting dressed in her Victorian gown for a local event. She is still working at Walmart and I am still writing computer programs. We both enjoy our jobs most of the time, but we have days when we wish we could open our own internet laundry mat. It's an idea we had where people could get on the internet while they wash clothes. We figure we've got enough kids to help staff it, and we would not even have to pay the minimum wage. Last April I started riding a bike to work again after a year's absence. Sure feels good to be back on 2 wheels. I have ridden over 5,000 miles riding a bike since 1994.

TJ turns 22 this month but he is still Kathy's baby. Even though he is now a handsome, quiet, young man. I still have to be careful when I talk about him or mom gets a little aggressive. Although I outweigh Kathy, I freely admit. I am no match for her in a fist fight.

TJ works at Walmart on the night shift. We do not see him as much since he wakes up around the time we go to bed. He likes the night shift because the pay is better. He enjoys getting on the internet. He has his own computer and phone line in his room.

His girlfriend's name is Tiffany. They have been dating for over a year. TJ brought Tiffany home to meet the family last New Year's Day. Before the night was out, Kathy had pulled out the baby pictures and was proudly showing them to Tiffany.

We had Thanksgiving at our house this year. And Tiffany helped Kathy out in the kitchen. Bet she never realized what she was getting into when she first met TJ.

We are proud of this photo. Perry graduated from high school last year. He worked very hard for his diploma. He, too, is still working at Walmart in the tire and lube department. He is now 19 years old and has become a mature young man with a great sense of humor.

Perry's dad gave him his old truck. Perry bought a car just for the motor and has spent the past 3 months putting it in his new truck. He got it running a couple of weeks ago, and last week he transferred his tag and insurance to the new truck. He surprised me and gave me his first truck so that I could add it to my collection of things from 1976. I always knew he would turn out great! He likes country music, NASCAR, and hunting. He still enjoys playing golf but does not get to play very often because he usually works on the weekends.

He saved his money last year and paid cash for his truck. By February of last year, he could not stand being the only one in the family over 18 without payments. He went out and bought a four wheeler just so he could be

like the rest of us and have a monthly payment. That's him to the right, giving cousin Juliann a ride in our backyard. I like to borrow it when we have family gatherings here at our house. I give people a ride, they will never forget. Just ask my mother. She got her first ride on the four wheeler last spring.

Justinn is now 16 years old. She is in her sophomore year of high school and still sports a cap and headphones. We were very thankful. Both TJ and Perry waited until they were 18 before wanting to get their Driver's license. But there was no holding Justinn back. She has her license and asks to drive every chance she can. She has started working at a Bible camp about 30 miles north of here in Alabama. She spent a total of 4 weeks at camp at different times over the summer. She is averaging one weekend a month attending camp retreats or working at them. The first time she went to camp 4 years ago I was sure we would get a call from her wanting to come home. Instead, it has become her home away from home.

I have not played golf as much this year but when I do. She still enjoys driving the golf cart. She stays on the internet as often as possible, visiting chat rooms and making webpages. She now wants to make a film and make enough money to start her own Christian radio station. I think she should do a Web radio station. The transmitter is much cheaper (an internet connection) and she would have a worldwide audience. We finally got a school picture where she is actually smiling. And

you can see her teeth. She doesn't like it. I think she thinks it goes against her hippie image.

Marc Thomas is now a teenager. He is 13 this year and will start high school next year. Even though he is a teenager, he is still a loving, fun person who is always smiling. He got a set of golf clubs for Christmas last year and he and I played partners against my brother and cousin. We play the best ball in a scramble format. There are many times when we play his ball because he got a better shot than me. If you ever talk to him about golf, I'm sure he'll tell you about a great shot. He made 100 yd from the hole. He still has some work to do on his drives. But if you check back in 5 years, he'll probably be driving it further than Dad. We fixed his bike up with a rack over the back tire and lights just like mine. We let him ride it to school for a couple of months this year. The school is about half. A mile from where I work and we would ride together in the mornings.

I would let him lead and I would follow. I always thought the father was supposed to lead and the child was supposed to follow. Guess I've always done things a little differently. He would ride home alone. And I was on pins and needles until he called me at work to let me know he had made it home. He enjoys riding his bike to school and would do it year round if we would let him. I just don't think he is up to it everyday. Especially this time of year, when some mornings, the temperature can get down in the 20s.

Last January I was reading Walden's pond again as an annual ritual and decided to build a home away from home. I constructed a teepee out of small pines and plastic canvas. It's down near the lake far away from the noise of the house. Last summer we got a new tag. ATFAR Has been a phrase we use when something happens that we may not understand. All things for a reason.

Favorite Thought:
“We haven't the time to take our time." Eugene Ionesco

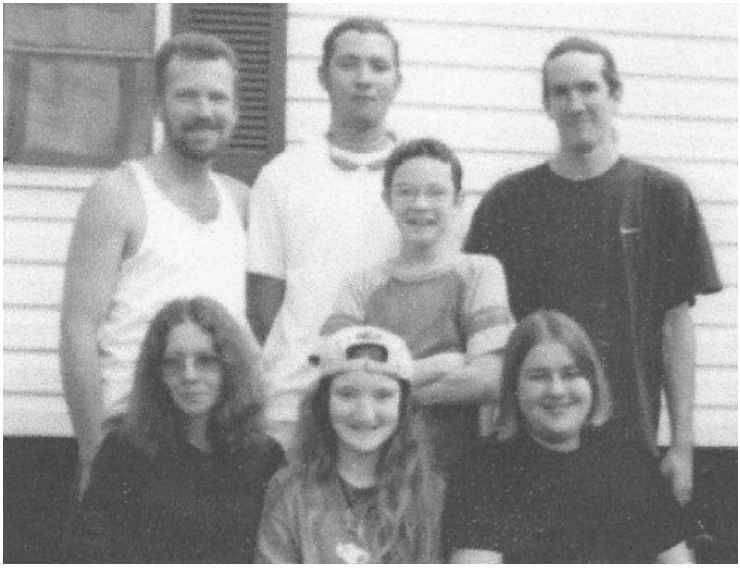
From our world to your world:
You can still reaches at tomgip@yahoo.com or Kathy@atfar.com

This year's newsletter was done as a web page. For those we know who have internet access, we have emailed you our web address. If you have access to the internet, you can view this online at at atfar.com/fn

Guess that wraps it up for this year. Thanks for allowing us into your home. And we'd like to wish you a Merry Christmas!

Chapter 9
(2000)

December 15th, 2000



Clan Size: 7

Merry Christmas! We are celebrating Christmas in the year 2000. Our family has gone through many changes this year. Get a cup of coffee or tea or whatever you want to drink and find a Nice Quiet spot, and I'll try to get You caught up or bore You depending on your point of view.

We've had very little rain this year. The Lake 640 acres is 3 feet below normal. It's not been this low since we moved here in 1985. We've taken the opportunity to dig

out a bigger area for the paddle boat. When the Lake comes back up, we will be able to turn the boat around in the water near our little dock.

In July, we began looking for a new vehicle. Our Van was getting old and we decided it was time for a change. We considered the PT Cruisers before we finally decided on a 2 door blazer. We drove it off a lot at the end of July with only 14 miles on it. It is the first new vehicle Kathy or I have ever owned! Looks like Walmart will be stuck with Kathy a little longer.

Last August, Kathy's father died. It was unexpected and has been very difficult on her entire family. We were fortunate to be able to visit him in June and will always have good memories. This will be the first newsletter that will not be male to Jim. And we just wanted to say we miss him.

I've been riding my bicycle all year. I'm just a normal part of the landscape on highway 83 on weekday mornings and evenings. Adding up all of the years on the bike and I'm getting close to 7000 miles.

Sure feels good riding by all those folks spending extra money at the gas pumps Except for mowing the yard. I don't care how much gas costs.

Remember the black & white photo of mother and daughter from a couple of years ago? Well, here it is again with another photo of Justinn and Kathy. The color

photo was taken when they were each in the 10th grade in high school.

TJ is 23 this year and has had big changes this year. Last January the motor in his red truck quit working. He had to ride his bike to work for several months. He was working the night shift and some mornings we would pass each other when he was riding home from work and I was riding to work. In June, he transferred to the Walmart in Crestview. He moved to Crestview and lives close enough to still ride his bike to work.

On October the tenth, he and Tiffany, his girlfriend of 2 years, were married at the courthouse in Okaloosa County. It was a lovely, quiet ceremony with just a handful of people. To the left is a photo taken just before the ceremony.

TJ and Tiffany pulled up in our yard on Saturday in September with a new truck. He finally got tired of riding his bike everywhere and decided it was time to go into debt. It's a nice truck and he is very proud of it.

Tiffany is in boot camp for the army right now at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. The newlyweds were just getting used to married life. And now they've been separated by the army. Tiffany is a wonderful girl and we are proud to have her as our first daughter-in-law.

Perry is 20 and has gone through many changes this year too. Last March he left Walmart. He spent a few

weeks in Texas and Alabama early this summer, doing electrical work. He made enough money to make a down payment on a new truck. He is still driving the truck in the photo to the left. It was his fourth truck of the year. He's become quite a horse trader.

He is now working at the Goodyear tire store in Freeport. He has been working there for almost 6 months. Freeport is 16 miles away and the drive to work was putting a lot of miles on his truck. In September, Perry moved to Freeport. He and his cousin Jeffrey are sharing a nice trailer just a mile or so away from where he works.

Sure seems strange having both boys gone. We thought Perry would come home often and visit around supper time. He must like the independent life because he has only come by for a visit a few times and never stays to eat. Guess that means he has plenty of food and he'll invite us over for supper soon hint hint.

Not sure what Perry is trying to say to Laura in the photo to the right. Whatever it is she seems more interested in her fingernails.

Justinn is now 17 years old. She is a junior in high school. Since TJ and Perry are gone, she has 2 rooms in the shed all to herself. She is still working at camp Victory. She has also started attending a church in Niceville. They have a big youth program. Justinn went on their youth choir tour last Spring and visited New

Orleans, Biloxi, and Jackson. She had a big part in the play they performed in front of hundreds of people.

Last Spring, she got a button making machine and has stayed very busy. Making over 1,000 campaign buttons. She has made several hundred for the Bush Chaney campaign as well as other local politicians.

We surprised Justinn when she turned 17 this year. Kathy and I had the joy of seeing her face when she got an 85 Ford escort for her birthday. She was very surprised! All she could say was, is this for real?

For the first time in 15 years, the school bus does not have to stop at our house. Because Justinn drives her car to school and Marc rides with her.

Marc Thomas is in his first year of high school! He was only 6 years old when we started this newsletter and has certainly changed a lot since then as you can see by this year's school picture.

Marc earned extra money this past summer by mowing yards and making buttons when Justinn was away at camp. Several times over the summer, he had more money than mom and dad!

He and I sang our first special at church this past summer. He has a good voice and is not bashful. He is also learning to play songs on a recorder flute. Add his drawing skills to his musical abilities and you can tell he has his dad's talent <g>.

He still has a smile on his face most of the time. He enjoys bike riding, golf, reading, and video games. This past summer I took 2 days off work and Marc and I played golf. It was just the 2 of us 2 days in a row. After the second day, I drove my truck, the green Ford Perry gave to me, to a dirt road and swapped places with Marc . He drove for nearly a mile and did a great job!

Here we are at our most recent trip to the beach last Labor Day. Marc lost his head for a little while but found it before we left.

Favorite Thought:
”Happiness is a butterfly which when pursued is always beyond our grasp. But which if you will sit down quietly, may a light upon you.” Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Chapter 10
(2001)

December 15th, 2001

We published our very first family news 10 years ago this February. Now and then, I look back at those first editions and am amazed at how much life can change in 10 years. This year, our nation has had a strong reminder of how quickly things can change in just one day. September 11th will forever be remembered as a day of tragedy but also as a day of unity. Each of our lives have been changed and united with others in some way.

We have had several deaths this year. Including my Uncle Harry, friend and cousin Jeannie, Larry (Perry's father), and most recently, my Grandma Fern. Change is a part of life both good and bad. With that thought, let me share some of the changes and experiences we had in 2001.

In April, Kathy began a new fish pond project. We hand dug a new fish pond 10 times the size of the existing prefabricated pond she had. She connected the new pond to the old one and built a small stream running between them. We've also added a wooden bridge going over the stream. The new pod is surrounded by rocks and has a beautiful waterfall and a small fountain in the middle. There are over a dozen goldfish in the

pond. And they let Kathy pet them when she feeds them.

In June Kathy, Justinn, Marc, and I went to the Bailey family reunion (on my mother's side of the family) in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. On our way up, we made a quick stop at Stone Mountain just outside of Atlanta. A thunderstorm prevented us from going to the top. But the kids saw the huge carving for the first time.

We had a wonderful turnout for the reunion. Our clan had half the rooms in the hotel! There was great food, entertainment and fellowship and everyone had fun!

While we were there, a dozen of us climbed King's mountain. It took about an hour but was well worth it. What a view! Kathy and I took all 4 of our kids up 10 years ago. Marc and Justinn went up again this time. But we did not have to worry about them falling off like we did in 1991.

While much of the family left the reunion and headed back to Florida, we went North. We left North Carolina and spent the night in Washington DC. Kathy and I took the week off and Justinn and Marc scheduled their summer activities to be off for the week. We got up early the next morning and visited many of our nation's memorials. We saw the Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln memorials as well as the White House and US Capital.

We left just after lunch and headed for Gettysburg. We toured the battlefields and museums, and Justinn got an address off of one of the houses in town so that she could give her friends a Gettysburg address. We spent that night in Hershey, Pennsylvania. The next morning, we saw the world's largest chocolate factory before heading up to northern Pennsylvania to visit with a good friend of mine.

Wayne and his family were wonderful. Hosts! They rearranged their own vacation plans to accommodate us. They have a wonderful house on 150 acres. We climbed the big hill in his backyard (we flatlanders call it a mountain) and were overwhelmed by the natural beauty of the area. Justinn and Marc drove a tractor for the first time in their lives. We were given a grand tour of the area and drove a few miles into New York State through some of the Amish communities. We also stopped off at Grand Canyon state park and saw some spectacular views. We had a wonderful time with Wayne Dawn, Ashley, Courtney, and Naomi.

We left Wayne's and headed south. We ended the trip crossing the Great Smoky mountains and then visiting rock city and ruby falls in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I think Kathy and Justinn enjoyed being near the edge.

We visited many mountains on the way home. I offered to stop at the highest lowest point in the United States right here in Walton County, 20 miles north of our house. It's a state park with the highest elevation in Florida 345 feet, making it the lowest highest point of all 50 states.

Our vacation took us through 11 states in 8 days. We were all thankful to see so much of our wonderful country.

Tropical storm Berry paid us a visit on the 1st day of school in August. Needless to say, school was canceled. We experienced sustained hurricane force winds from a direct hit. Chelco, the power company I work for, had over 12000 meters out of power. After experiencing Opal back in ‘95, Berry was nothing more than a minor inconvenience.

In October Kathy, Marc, and I went to Orlando for Patsy (Kathy's sister) and Kevin's wedding. It was a beautiful wedding at a bed and breakfast in Mount Dora. We enjoyed seeing everyone! Bill and Lori were kind enough to share their lovely home with us. For those of you visiting Bill and Lori's house that Saturday night, I want you to know. I've not told your mom a thing.

TJ turns 24 in 2 days. He and Tiffany celebrated their first wedding anniversary on 10/10/01. Tiffany completed boot camp earlier this year, and in June, they moved to Junction City, Kansas. Kathy keeps a close eye on the weather in Kansas (part of tornado alley) and is quick to call her first born if the weather gets rough. It's hard to get used to not seeing them. It seems like they've been gone for much longer than 6 months.

Perry turned 21 last may. He still lives in Freeport about thirty minutes south of our house. We see him and Michelle now and then. It's still hard to imagine both the

older boys are gone. Just 2 years ago, they were still living at home and we saw them every day. It looks like Kathy and I are going to be grandparents. Perry and Michelle are expecting a baby in May or June. Kathy is excited about being a grandmother for the first time! I'm a little more reserved because I think I am too young and I am not used to the idea of being called Grandpa.

Justinn is a senior in high school this year. Last spring she went to Orlando with a youth group from her church. They did a performance in Orlando and found time to spend a day at Universal Studio. She turned 18 last September and is now a registered voter! We bought her a new guitar for her birthday. She is getting very good at playing It. After she turned 18 she worked as temporary help at Walmart for ten weeks. I knew life had changed when I saw my little girl wearing a blue Walmart vest and working as a cashier! She did a couple of radio commercials for one of the local radio stations last spring. Justinn also worked 4 weeks at camp last summer. She played on the softball team last spring. And she also drove through the mountains on our vacation, including driving through a tunnel in the Smoky mountains. She has had a very busy year.

Marc turned 15 this year and is now taller than mom and Justinn. He still thinks he is too short. On his application to be a CIT at camp last summer. They asked him to list any physical problems or handicaps. He wrote none, but I am a very short person.

He earns money making buttons and checker button sets. He enjoys riding his scooter and bicycle and is anxious to get his driver's license. He and I started playing tennis a couple of months ago. Each time we play, he gets closer to winning as many games as me. He has also taken an interest in singing. He sang at Patsy and Kevin's wedding reception and also sings at church and in the high school chorus. He is already better at singing than me and has a wonderful voice!

Favorite Thought:
“An expert is one who knows more and more about less and less. Until he knows absolutely everything about nothing.”

“Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” Chinese proverb

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You can still reach us tomgip@yahoo.com. We would love to get email from you and hear the latest in your lives. This year's newsletter was done as a web page. If you have access to the internet, you can view this online at atfar.com/fn. And if you missed last year, it is still available online.

Thanks for allowing us into your home. And we'd like to wish you a Merry Christmas!

Chapter 11
(2002)

December 15th, 2002

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." I pray that your faith is in Jesus and you are enjoying the abundant life! We hope this year has been a wonderful year filled with joy and plenty of sunshine!

We've been sending out this newsletter instead of Christmas cards for over ten years. It is my one chance to bore you without hearing you complain too much. Our family has had a busy year this year. Kathy and I have had a wonderful time spending our Saturdays working on a Habitat for Humanity house. The new homeowner works at Walmart with Kathy and graduated from high school with me. It is a great project and I can honestly say I've gotten much more out of it than what I put into it!

Last February I began a fascinating journey into the world of genealogy. Learning about my family's past has literally changed my life by being able to appreciate what our ancestors sacrificed and their hard work. My gratitude towards the freedoms and luxuries we enjoy in the United States has deepened as I find more and more information on my grandparents from two hundred years ago. I have found old photographs, letters, and

books about people that I am descended from, and am amazed by them.

On June 18, 2002 Taylor Nicole Fannin was born in Ft Walton Beach, FL! There is a big difference between thinking I'm going to be a grandpa some day and actually being a grandpa! I am still trying to adjust to the idea, but Kathy is right at home being a grandma! She is a natural at it. She is very comfortable with being called grandma even though she has a hard time convincing other people she is old enough to have grandchildren.

Taylor is about to get her first tooth just in time for Christmas. She is also trying very hard to sing with Grandpa when nobody else is watching. I am still writing computer programs and love it. I continue to ride my bike 8 miles every day even though I'm in my 40's and almost as old as Kathy (I'll pay for that comment). Kathy is still at Walmart and driving her Blazer. I cannot talk her into riding a bike with me.

We lost Sparky this past July. He managed to jump the fence in our backyard and was hit by a car. Marc did a great job drawing Sparky. The drawing hangs in our bedroom with his dog tags.

Speaking of Marc... He is our last child in high school. He is 16 and a junior at Walton High School. He is at that age where he makes foolish bets and loses them and his hair. Marc landed a role as one of Joseph's brothers in a musical put on by a local theater group called "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor

Dreamcoat." They performed the play on 4 straight days this past August and did an outstanding job! Someone from our family was there for each performance to make sure he had support in the audience. He was fantastic! Several people from church and work told me he sang well enough to get the lead role.

Marc has had an active year. He made the high school tennis team last spring. He had only been playing tennis for a few months and Dad could usually win when we played. He plans to try out for the tennis team again in 2003 and should not have any trouble making the team. He has improved and now he beats Dad when we play every other week.

Remember when our kids looked like this? Without photos and videos it's sometimes hard to imagine the "good ole days' '. They continue to grow and change before our very eyes. Our baby now has his driver's permit and drives every chance he gets! He has also gone horseback riding, learned to play the guitar, won second place for a drawing in the fair, and has grown six inches! He also sings at church and is the best singer in the family. And of course one of the highlights of this past year was watching our little girl graduate from high school. She continues to be very active working at Camp Victory (a wonderful Christian camp 40 miles north of our house). She has just registered for her second semester at Okaloosa Walton Community College.

Justinn's Christmas present last year was a ticket to Boston for spring break. She flew to Boston and visited her friend Jessy last April. Jesse is going to a Christian college and Justinn spent a week with her on campus. I thought the tickets were a good idea when we got them, but by the time April came I was wondering if I had lost my mind. I did a lot of praying that week.

TJ and Tiffany came all the way from Kansas for Justinn's graduation. She also had friends come from Missouri, Louisiana, south Florida, and Boston. In the photo of her gang only two of the girls attend Walton High School.

The rest came from out of town just to be at Justinn's graduation.We made the down payment on a 98 Toyota for her graduation present. She has driven it to Louisiana by herself this past summer. Justinn is 19, working at Walmart, and going to college. She now has car payments to make and all those miles she puts on her car requires gasoline. She stays so busy that I get tired just thinking about her schedule. Justinn still finds time for church and Camp Victory. She sings solo and is a great guitar player. She is always learning new gospel songs and can sing harmony with Marc. She is also the best artist in the family. She was named art student of the year at Walton last year!

After looking at the photo of the kids on the previous page it's hard to imagine both TJ and Perry married. We are not as big a part of their lives as we once were, but they will always be a big part of our lives. Kathy and I

feel blessed to have such wonderful children and two great daughter-in-laws.

Perry is 22. He and Michelle (our new daughter-in-law) plan to close on a house in January. The house is brand new and about three miles from our house. Starting a family can be exhausting and expensive, but well worth it! When TJ (25 years old!) and Tiffany came home for Justinn's graduation it was the first time we had seen them in a year. They recently celebrated their second wedding anniversary. Tiffany is still in the Army and they are living in Junction City, Kansas. Since a picture speaks a thousand words I guess I've bored you enough for this year.

Merry Christmas!
May God Bless You!

from:
Tommie, Kathy,
Justinn, Marc,
TJ, Tiffany,
Perry, Michelle, &
Taylor Nicole

Remember: ATFAR - All Things For A Reason

Chapter 12
(2003)

December 15th, 2003

Hello to all from Sunny Florida! It's December and that means I take a few moments of your time to bring you up to date on our family. Let me begin by saying our family is very scattered.

Justinn is going to college at Southeastern Louisiana University. Perry, Michelle, and Taylor have moved into their brand new home. TJ is in Kansas while his wife, Tiffany is serving our country near Baghdad, Iraq. Marc is our only child living at home, and at 17 he is not a child any more!

Taylor is now one and a half. She is getting too big for the bucket I used to put her in when she and I would feed the fish in the pond in our backyard. Here is a photo from the beginning of last summer with Taylor in her bucket. Notice the new deck around the pool that Perry bought for his Mom and built last May!

Kathy, Marc, and I celebrated July 4th by leaving the country. We drove into Canada while visiting Niagara Falls on our vacation. Here is some free advice: if you leave the United States make sure you have a photo id so that you can get back in. One of us forgot to bring a driver's license and had a hard time crossing the border. It was touch and go, but we all finally managed to get

back safely. I will not give the name of who forgot their license, but his initials are MG.

We were able to spend the night (on the American side) and see spectacular fireworks and a fantastic color light show. We had a great time including the balloon ride Marc and I took way above the falls. On the way home we were able to spend three days with the Adams family. I highly recommend staying with Wayne and Dawn. The food is great and the price is very cheap (as in free). But a word of warning, if they stop pouring coffee for you that means its time to go. Their pastor is good at giving subtle hints. You had to be there to understand.

TJ – 26 yrs old:
TJ and Tiffany were able to come home for the Bailey Family Reunion here this past June. It was the first time we had seen them in over a year. They have been living in Kansas up until this past August. In August Tiffany, who is in the Army, was sent to Baghdad and TJ is in KS. The photo on the left was taken this past June and the picture on the right was taken when we all went to Disney World four years ago. This past October TJ and Tiffany celebrated their third wedding anniversary (unfortunately they were in different countries). Kathy hung a yellow ribbon in a tree in our front yard. She will leave it there until Tiffany returns home to us. I took this photo of the tree and thought it was special with the light shining on the ribbon.

Perry – 23 yrs old:
Perry, Michelle, and Taylor are enjoying their new house. They are just a few hundred feet from a big lake complete with a nice park that has swimming, a playground, tables, and grills. They are both wonderful parents and they are giving Taylor a great start in life. Perry works in Freeport and is a big Nascar fan. He is pretty good with a guitar and his quick wit and great sense of humor makes him fun to be around. I have to admit I used to have my worries about him, but no more. One thing about Perry that I am very proud of is his choice for a wife! As we have gotten to know Michelle I have seen her show patience and love for her family and know Perry made a great choice. She is a wonderful person and we are truly blessed to have her as part of our family. I cannot imagine a better mother for our granddaughter! Kathy and I (I mostly <g>) love to spoil Taylor. Perry and Michelle give us a lot of freedom (most of the time). But no matter how much I bribe Taylor I cannot get her to stop watching Nascar races. One of the first things they did after moving into the house was to get a pool table for the garage. Perry said he was going to fix it up and sell it for a profit. It sure is taking him a long time to fix it up!

Justinn – 20 yrs old:
Justinn began the year with a good accident. She totaled her car on the way to church last February in an accident that was not her fault. She hit a bridge and spundown the hill near the creek below the bridge. We call it a good accident because God watched over her

and with seatbelts and airbags kept her safe. She finished her first year at our local community college and decided to move to Roseland, Louisiana where she is living and working on a Christian Youth Ranch. She is the first one in our family to attend a four year university and we are very proud of her. She has been playing a guitar for several years and this year she has learned to play the bass guitar. She plays each week with a band at her church. Recently she cut her hair for the first time in her life. She has had her hair trimmed in the past, but never cut, until now. She gave her hair to locks of love which is a program that makes wigs for kids with cancer. I think she looks great with short hair especially knowing that there is some young girl out there somewhere with pretty long red hair. The photo to the right was taken after her haircut with her new friend Gabbie.

Marc – 17 yrs old:
Marc began working last year at a local supermarket. He worked through the summer up until it was time to begin school. He saved his money and bought his first car (photo above). He is driving to school and is enjoying his last year of high school. He will be our fourth child to graduate. It does not matter how many times our kids are seniors it is still hard to get used to the idea. It was just a couple of years ago Marc was always the shortest one in the family. In fact on an application for camp a couple of years ago when they asked for any handicaps he wrote "I'm too short." That's not true any more! He and I play tennis as often as we can and he has learned the secret to beating me by making me run until I give out. Too bad the same strategy does not work for him in

chess. He plans to try out for the tennis team this year and I can vouch for his ability! He continues to sing and spends a lot of time on the phone and computer with his friends. He plans to attend our local community college after high school. I was going through old photos of Marc for his school year book and found these where he is both cowboy and indian!

What a difference 15 years makes!!!
Merry Christmas and may God Bless You!

In case you have not noticed our Granddaughter, Taylor made every page of this year's newsletter. We are very proud of her and plan to continue to spoil her. She celebrated her first birthday this past June.

Email: tomgip@yahoo.com
Online version: www.atfar.com/fn

Chapter 13
(2004)

December 15th, 2004

You are reading the 2004 edition of our Family Newsletter. We hope everything is going well and that you and your family are in good health. Take a few moments to relax and let us share some of the things that have happened in our lives since last year. I will try not to bore you, but just as a precaution do not read this while driving in case it does put you to sleep.

I suppose I must start with the active hurricane season we have had in Florida. We were only impacted by Ivan while many of our extended family felt the fury of three big hurricanes. It was an amazing and unusual year for hurricanes especially for those in central Florida! In March Kathy's grandmother passed away and we went to Orlando for the funeral. Her sister Lori and husband Bill were kind enough to let us stay with them. While it was a sad time it was a chance for her to get to see her Mom and siblings.

We went to a family reunion at my Aunt Lorreta's in June and had a wonderful time. Our clan took over most of a fishing camp on the St Johns River near Astor. The people in the camp went out of their way to make us feel at home and to help cook and feed our big clan. Like the song says 'people on the river are happy to give' and we

are grateful. On the way home we decided to take a detour to St Augustine. Here are a couple of photos of Kathy and Justinn at St Augustine.

In July Kathy and I drove up to northern PA to pick up Marc (see below) and enjoy some wonderful southern hospitality with the Adams family (yes I know it was PA, but they sure made us feel at home). We camped out on their mountain one night and experienced temps in the 40's in July. Our last day we had a big cookout and homemade ice cream. It was a wonderful visit.

On our way home from PA we stopped at Chimney Rock in NC: Kathy is still working at Walmart and enjoying her job much more since she stepped down as a manager. She has been there nine years and she seems happier working there now than at any other time. I think she is still the most beautiful woman on earth, but especially when she smiles a lot. :) She still loves animals and this year she rescued a kitten she named Buddy. She is nearly done with remodeling "her" room where she does her sewing, quilting, and craft projects.

In 1998 I went to work for a subsidiary of the electric coop I have worked for since 1987. I had my dream job writing computer software and loved every minute of it. This past fall I returned to my old job at the coop where I am their Planning Analyst. This year I celebrated 10 years of riding my bike to work. If you add the 8 miles I ride each day it comes out to about 160 miles a month. Do the math for ten years and I should be pushing the 20,000 mile Marc soon. We have had a dog named

Lucky since 1991 and she passed away this year. We have a new dog named Charley. She is about the same size as Bailey (our Yorky) and makes a nice addition to our family. Since getting Charley Kathy and I put both dogs on a leash and take them for a walk in the front yard most nights when the weather permits. Back in 1992 when we began this newsletter we wanted to share some of the things that happened to our children. None of them are children any longer. I will still try to fill you in on their lives, but in addition I have decided to create a section for grandchildren. Since Taylor is our only grandchild she gets the spotlight.

Taylor turned two this past June. She is talking and showing a very creative imagination and she LOVES to dance! I am putting in several photos of her because ... I can. That is my privilege as both proud Grandpa and the editor. :)

TJ:
TJ turns 27 this month and is still living in Kansas. Tiffany is still in the Army. She returned from Iraq a couple of months ago after being there for over a year. She was able to come home for a couple of weeks this past June and she came by for a visit. She was able to tell us what life is like in Ramali, a town west of Baghdad in Iraq. The photo to the left is Tiffany posing with their Syrian interpreter. We are very thankful for her safe return. We get to talk to TJ now and then, but have not seen him in over a year and a half. Since we do not have any new photos I have dipped into the photo archive for the photo to the right.

Perry:
Perry (now 24), Michelle, and Taylor are beginning to get their new house broken in. They have been in their new house for a year and a half. Last Christmas they invited us over for a wonderful Christmas meal prepared by Michelle. They live here in DeFuniak a couple of miles away from our house. Perry is working in Freeport and I think he is still growing. He always has a smile on his face and it is fun to just sit around and listen to him talk. Michelle has her hands full taking care of Taylor (and Perry) each day and she does an excellent job at both I might add. They are carving out their own place in the world and I think Taylor is very lucky to have them for a mom and dad! They enjoy going to a local race track on Friday nights and they will celebrate their wedding anniversary this month. Kathy and I hope they enjoy the family life as much as we have!

Justinn:
Justinn is now 21 and has been in Louisiana for over a year now. She left the ranch where she was living and working last year. She came home last June to have her tonsils removed. Then she moved in with three other girls in an apartment that is a couple of miles from the college (Southeastern Louisiana) she has been attending. During the summer she got a job working at a donut shop (Southern Maid Donuts - the only company Elvis Presley did a commercial for). This past October Kathy, Marc, and I were able to visit her and see where she lived, worked, and went to school. We got to meet all of her roommates and they are all wonderful

Christian girls. We also went to a football game while we were there and had a GREAT time. When she first got her job and I asked her how she was getting back and forth to work she told me one of the first things she bought after going to work was a bike with a basket. She rides it any time she needs a ride to work or class. That's my girl! :)

Marc:
Marc turned 18 this year and has had an active year since last Christmas. In the spring he went with his senior class to New York City where he went to the top of the Empire State Building, saw the Statue of Liberty, a Broadway play, a Mets game, sat in the audience of the Today show, and bought a great rolex watch for a very cheap price <g>. He graduated from high school in May and part of his graduation gift was a plane ticket from Atlanta to Buffalo. It was his first time flying commercially (he was the only one in our family that has never done that). He was met at the airport by the Adams family and stayed with them at their house in northern Pennsylvania for three weeks before Kathy and I drove up and brought him home. Marc began attending Okaloosa Walton College last August. He is living at home and driving 40 miles to the Niceville campus. He surprised us when he applied for and was awarded an academic scholarship in August. He got it because he had good grades in high school and the scholarship is good for any college in FL as long as he keeps his grades up. We are VERY proud of him. He also surprised us last spring when he began writing and singing his own songs. I know I am biased, but they

really are very good! He plays the guitar and some keyboard and is learning to record and combine different tracks by mixing them. He has had the run of the house this past year since he was our only child living at home. He and I have played tennis every weekend this year and sometimes twice a weekend. It seems like I won more than a year ago. He is either getting better (that's my thought) or maybe I am just getting slower. We also enjoy a good chess match a few times each month.

Email: tomgip@yahoo.com
Online version: www.atfar.com/fn

Merry Christmas and may God
Bless You!

Chapter 14
(2005)

December 15th, 2005



Clan Size: 9
(First family photograph with Cory and Taylor)

Merry Christmas from Northwest Florida! I'll begin this year's newsletter with a couple of WONDERFUL announcements. First our granddaughter Taylor will soon have a new baby sister to take care of! Perry and Michelle are expecting their second daughter, Caitlynn Marie to be born in January. Taylor will turn four next June so she is old enough to begin showing little sister the tricks to getting her way with Mom and Dad (Taylor is an expert).

Our second announcement is that Justinn and Cory are expecting their first baby in April of 2006. Their baby is a girl and her name is Angel. So this time next year Kathy and I will be buying Christmas gifts for THREE Granddaughters!!

We had another active year watching hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. We were impacted by Hurricane Dennis in July. Locally we were spared the devastating damage from Katrina to our west. Many people from LA and MS stayed in our area for weeks and months following Katrina. Some have decided to stay permanently. Many churches, civic groups, and businesses continue to send local folks west to help in the ongoing recovery efforts.

Our house turned 20 years old this past September. The live oak tree Perry and I planted on the east side in 1985 is now almost 3 times taller than the house. This house is the only house Marc has ever lived in! For 12 of those 20 years I have ridden a bicycle to work. I will hit the 20,000 mile Marc sometime in 2006. In February I simplified my commute by switching to a single speed bicycle. It looks like something from the 50's complete with chrome fenders. Our current habitat house is only two miles away and so I have been able to ride my bike to habitat every Saturday this year.

Kathy spends much of her time quilting. She has made several beautiful quilts. She has finally joined the cell phone culture. Now she and all of the kids have cell phones. I am still a hold out. I think I get too many calls

without one. :) Kathy still enjoys her job at Walmart. She finished paying for her Blazer this past July so now neither of us have a car (bike) payment.

TJ:
TJ moved back to FL this past summer. He is working at Walmart in Crestview. He has gone over to MS a couple of times to help. He has brought back some photos of some of the damage. It will take years to recover. A couple of months ago TJ traded in his truck for a new Blazer.

Perry:
Perry is changing jobs this month. His old job for the past four years did not have good benefits. With another child on the way he decided to make a move to take a job with good benefits and more pay. He and Michelle continue to live in the house they built almost two years ago. Michelle has a full time job taking care of Taylor and Perry. She will really have her hands full after Caitlynn is born!

Justinn:
Justinn moved back to FL last January and has been taking classes all year. I talked her into riding bikes with me to work on the habitat house last spring. She and Cory are going to Okaloosa Walton College. They are both planning to become teachers. This semester Justinn was able to intern with Mr. Grice, her art teacher from high school. In October they flew to Maine to visit with Cory's dad. Cory is a wonderful young man. He has

a gentle, quiet personality and always has a smile on his face. We are glad to welcome him into our family.

Marc:
Marc is in his second year of college. Last March I got him to help on the roof of the habitat house. I told him the following week we would be nailing shingles on the roof. He got a job at Walmart that week. He is currently working full time and going to college full time which means he does not get a day off. I think he is planning to cut back a little beginning in January. Having a full time job allowed him to buy another car when his Topaz had trouble. He was able to pay cash for it and for a new laptop he bought a couple of months ago. The photo to the left is of him and Jessica on prom night this year.

We've had a house guest much of this year. Last March Justinn and Marc's friend Melanie moved in with us. She is finishing her degree at OW this semester and will be moving to GA to be near her parents. She has been a wonderful house guest and we will miss her.

Quotes:
“One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say.” –Will Durant

“I have often regretted my speech, never my silence.” Publilius Syrus (~100 BC), Maxims

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We wish you a Merry Christmasand pray that 2006 will be a year of good health and blessings!

Chapter 15
(2006)

December 15th, 2006

The year 2006 is nearly over. What a wonderful year it has been for our family. It began with the birth of Perry and Michelle's second daughter Caitlynn Marie Fannin born on 1/14/6. Taylor welcomed her new baby sister with a loving kiss.

Two months later Justinn and Cory celebrated the birth of their first child, Angel Lee Desiree' Kurtz. Angel was born on 3/28/6 in the same hospital as her mother.

Kathy and I now have three precious granddaughters! When TJ and Angela moved back home from Kansas, all four of our children were within 3 miles of our house. We began having a weekly family night. Each Tuesday someone would prepare a meal and choose a game to play.

We played all kinds of games like cranium, catch phrase, pictionary ... as well as traditional games like dominoes, monopoly, and life. Since we had 9 or 10 people playing it was hard to play card games (although we did a time or two). Family night became the highlight of the week. It was always fun to discover what meal was being cooked as well as what game we would be playing.

This fall college schedules and work schedules contributed to not having our family night, but I'm sure each of us will long remember the dozens of nights we were all back in the same house for an evening.

Last May we experienced another milestone. When Marc turned 20 it was the first time we did not have a teenager living in our house since 1990 when TJ turned 13. Kathy and I survived the teenage years (and so did our kids <g>).

Kathy retired from Walmart last July after more than eleven years of dedicated service. She had enough of the rat race and by simplifying our lives we were able to reduce expenses which allowed her to quit. She is enjoying retirement and highly recommends it. In the morning she often works in her small woodworking shop (she has a table saw, router table, band saw, drill press, and several small hand tools) building picnic tables, benches, small tables, lamps, ... It's not unusual to find her doing a wood project in the morning and then spending the afternoon or evening working on the beautiful quilts she creates.

It's amazing how time changes things like going from holding your son to letting him adjust your bow tie. :)

Over a year ago I took up a new pastime - weaving baskets (and so far one hat) from pine straw. Since I stopped watching tv in 2003 I have found I have more time for things like reading, writing letters, and now

weaving pine straw. It takes a little time to weave a basket, but I've learned some of the most valuable things in life take a little time.

Kathy made Justinn's wedding dress when Justinn and Cory exchanged wedding vows at the historic Chautauqua building on the lake in the middle of town.

Kathy and I both spend most of our Saturday's working at Habitat for humanity. We just started the fifth house since we first began volunteering in 2002.

All our kids are doing well. Michelle began working last summer so that means Perry gets to be mom and dad some nights. With all of the adults in the family now working, it may be some time before we can do family night again.

Caitlynn is on the left in the above photo and Angel is on the right. Taylor turned four this year. She loves being the center of attention and with her beautiful long red hair and wonderful imagination she can easily capture people's hearts.

Marc, Justinn, and Cory are still in school and working. We give thanks for the many blessings of 2006, for Marc's “good accident”, for a wonderful time with Kathy's family at Thanksgiving, and for our three precious granddaughters! That wraps up this year's newsletter.

We all wish you a: ***Merry Christmas!***

Quotes:

“Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.” Confucius

“You have succeeded in life when all you really want is only what you really need.” Vernon Howard

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Chapter 16
(2007)

December 15th, 2007



Clan Size: 13
(First family photograph with Angela, Caitlynn, and Angel)

Greetings from the Panhandle of Florida! We published our first newsletter in 1992 ... 15 years ago! A couple of years ago we went from 4 pages to 2 pages. Since this is something like an anniversary edition we are doing 4 pages this year. Marc was 6 years old when we started this and this past year he turned 21. TJ was 15 and he has now reached the ripe old age of 30!!

In some ways the past year has been full, yet as I reflect back I am struck with how quiet and settled life has been. Last May Marc moved out and Kathy and I have been doing the "empty nest" thing for the first time in our lives.

In April Kathy turned 50 and we surprised her with a birthday party at the civic center. Dozens and dozens of friends and family gathered for an evening of celebration. One of her gifts was a special notebook filled with memories and letters and photos about a life filled with love, joy, and rich blessings (thanks to MANY of you who contributed to it!).

Last Valentine's Day Kathy and I celebrated a milestone: 25 WONDERFUL years of marriage. In March I experienced another milestone, I became a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Kathy went with me to a Quaker meeting in NC in late April. After the meeting we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary by spending a week on the Outer Banks of NC and then another week in a hotel by the Atlantic Ocean at Myrtle Beach, SC. We took our time exploring the Outer Banks and were able to visit all four lighthouses. We climbed to the top of the Cape Hatteras LightHouse and camped out in a tent on the beach a couple of miles away. The weather was great and we were treated to several sunrises over the Atlantic Ocean.

This past year I simplified my eating habits. Since I became a vegetarian in 2006 I found myself eating a lot

of simple whole foods, so I began buying organic oats, brown rice, beans, wheat, ... in 6 gallon buckets. It reduces trips to the store. I have a hand mill that I use to grind my own flour and have also begun cooking some meals using a solar cooker.

I bought a new bicycle last May. This is my sixth bike since I began riding in 1994. I have gone from the single speed I have used the past couple of years to a three speed and love it. I have been asked how long I plan to keep riding my bike to work and my answer is simple - as long as I have the health to do it, which I hope will be for many, many more years.

In October we remodeled our bathroom, including replacing the old fiberglass tub/shower with a metal one. Kathy and I continue to spend most of our Saturday's working on Habitat for Humanity houses. We are currently working on the 7th house we have helped build. I'll gladly put in a plug here for habitat - if you ever have the opportunity (even if its just once) to help at habitat, you'll be glad you did.

Kathy is in her second year of retirement. She has a "shop" in our shed where she has a table saw, dill press, router table, band saw, ... and LOTS of hand tools. This past year one of her projects was a new crib for my niece Michelle's new baby (Collin). She still finds time for quilts and other projects too.

TJ and Angela have been living in Crestview for almost a year now. It is closer to both of their jobs. With gas so

expensive, that saves them on gas expenses. TJ is now a department manager. He is in charge of the photo lab at Walmart and is enjoying it. And he has some stories he can tell about some of the photos people bring in. It's hard to believe he is 30 years old. Angela has also had a promotion in her job, so congratulations to both of them. Angela has a second full time job taking care of Amethyst (a cross between a Yorkie & a Sheltie).

Perry and Michelle have been doing some work on their house. They replaced the carpet with a beautiful wood floor this past year. Kathy showed Perry how to install it. She must have taught him well because he helped us when we did my mom's floor with a hallway that had lots of angles and he knew what he was doing. Michelle has her hands full now that she is working and Taylor is going to school. Trying to manage that along with getting Caitlynn to the babysitter and her regular chores, leaves her little time for herself. Taylor turned five this year and is now in school. She called us to tell us her grades when she got her first report card. She made 3 A's and 2 B's. I told her that was much better than her Dad's first report card because he did not even make one A (they used S's and N's when Perry was that age). Caitlynn reminds me of Perry in many ways. She is very adventurous! She has little fear and will go down the slide head first if you don't watch her. She has been walking for almost a year. She is saying dozens of words and is now trying to make her own sentences. Sometimes she is in the back yard when I ride my bike home and I stop and push her in the swing. She calls me Paw Paw.

Last Spring Justinn, Cory, and Angel moved into an apartment near the beach. They both work in that area which means we do not see as much of them as we used to. Cory completed his two year college degree this past year. CONGRATULATIONS Cory!!! I told them they are doing something I have always wanted to do ... live near the beach. They are within easy biking distance of the world's most beautiful beaches. Justinn is working at Starbucks and going to school at Gulf Coast in Panama City. Last September We had a family night at their place. After a fantastic meal prepared by my nephew Korey King (he not only cooked everything from scratch, he also paid for it!). We all went to the beach and Korey took the family photo at the end of this newsletter. Angel will turn two years old in March. She took her first steps on Mother's Day. She is a happy child and loves to sit at the piano with grandpa. Together we play and sing and have a good time. She is very curious about many things and reminds me of Marc because she smiles so much.

Last May Marc moved in with Heath. Panama City is closer to his job at Starbucks, but an hour and a half from our house. Since he moved out we have not seen very much of him. I miss not playing tennis with him. Last month they moved into a bigger place. It is closer to Marc's job and has twice the space as the old place. Although we have not seen it yet, I hear it even has tennis courts. Marc is a supervisor at Starbucks and from what I hear, he has impressed several customers with his skills and big smile. Heath has fit right in with

our family. He sings, plays piano and guitar and also writes his own songs (which are VERY good). Earlier this year we took the tv out of the living room and replaced it with Kathy's piano. When Marc and Heath come over I love to sit and listen to him play ... anything. When Marc was six, it was hard for me to imagine him "grown up." I remember thinking how strange it seemed thinking of him driving or some day growing a beard. Now that he is driving and has grown a beard (sometimes he has one and sometimes he doesn't), it's almost just as hard to think of him as a six year old. That's when lots of photos and videos come in handy. :)
Just imagine ... in 15 more years all three of our granddaughters could be driving!

Favorite Quote:
“A man should look for what is, and not for what he thinks should be.” Albert Einstein

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Merry Christmas Everyone!

Chapter 17
(2008)

December 15th, 2008

We are approaching the end of another year and its time for our newsletter. Here's the latest:

Last February Kathy and I spent a week in Anaheim, California across the street from Disneyland. It was anything but sunny southern California. We only saw sunshine for 2 hours in 5 days and the temperature never got higher than the 50's!

The following month we were able to travel to Orlando (with all of our kids and granddaughters) to surprise Kathy's mom on her birthday. I think she was very surprised. While we were there, some of us went to Sea World and had a blast. In August Kathy and I were able to go to the Bailey Family Reunion in north Alabama. All of our kids and granddaughters were able to go as well. We all had a great time. Kathy and I decided to stay an extra day and enjoy the beautiful park at Guntersville. We are getting used to this empty nest thing.

Kathy's sister Lori, and her husband Bill once again graciously opened their home to us for the second time this year when we went to Orlando for Thanksgiving at her brother David's house and enjoyed LOTS of great food and fellowship.

I also traveled to South Carolina for a week in June, and two weeks in North Carolina at different times. Its good to know we will be at home for the next couple of months.

This past summer I received a kayak for my birthday. We have lived on a 640 acre lake for more than 23 years and I finally found a way to really enjoy being on the lake. I love taking the kayak a couple of miles on the lake and just ... drifting. Its very relaxing and I've only encountered one alligator ... so far.

Kathy and I continue to spend most of our Saturdays building houses with Habitat. We helped put four families in brand new houses in 2008! All the kids and their families are in good health. Taylor is enjoying the First Grade. Her most recent report card had four A's and one B. Great job Taylor!! Kathy is still enjoying retirement and I am still riding my bicycle to work. Some things don't change. :)

Favorite Quote:
“Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.” Marc Twain

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Merry Christmas

Chapter 18
(2009)

December 15th, 2009



Clan Size: 13
(First family photograph with Sammy)

Here's the latest:
Kathy and I celebrated our anniversary in New Orleans this year. I had a work conference downtown by the river. I took a couple of extra days off and we enjoyed seeing the French Quarter, riding a boat to the other side of the Mississippi, and a couple of Maudi Grais parades. On the way home we took an extra day and spent the night in a hotel on the beach at Orange Beach.

The next day we visited Fort Morgan at the mouth of Mobile Bay. Even though the trip was work related, we had a lot of fun! While we were in New Orleans we received calls from each of our kids. Justinn called to let us know she and Cory would be closing on their first home! They closed in March and after a little painting, they were able to move in. They now own a beautiful house and they are less than ten miles driving distance to the beach.

Perry also called us, but his news was not good. Michelle decided she was no longer happy and asked Perry to leave. About two months later Michelle decided it would be best for Perry to take care of the girls. Perry and Michelle are now divorced and Perry has custody of Taylor and Caitlynn. They have a nice home and are living in Choctaw Beach just west of Freeport. He's had a lot of help from Justinn and his new girlfriend Sammy. Caitlynn is in daycare and Taylor is in 2nd grade and they are doing great. Kathy and I are VERY proud of Perry, Taylor, and Caitlynn!

Since Kathy retired three years ago (and yes, she still enjoys being retired - you can tell from the smile she has most days), she is free to travel with me on work related trips. She went with me to a conference in Myrtle Beach, SC for a week in June. On the way up we spent a night in Charleston and spent the next day exploring downtown Charleston. We had a great time, even though the beaches in SC just do not compare to our beaches in north west FL. In August we (and most of

our family) traveled to Taylor Mt outside of Guntersville, AL for the Bailey reunion. Kathy and I spent an extra day to go on some of the nature trails on Taylor Mountain. On the way home we stopped and explored a cave north of Birmingham. What a wonderful way to spend a long weekend. In September Kathy drove to Orlando and joined her sisters for a cruise to the Bahamas. It looks like they had a ... really fun time (I've seen pictures).

We still try to have our family night as often as we can (which is not often enough for me). In May TJ and Angela hosted a family night at their home in Crestview. Angela served up a wonderful meal and we capped off the evening playing phase ten. In July they moved back to Kansas, so if they want to host another family night we've got a lot of traveling to do.

In June, Justinn and Cory hosted our clan and served up a big crayfish cookout with all the fixin's (we vegetarians had delicious grilled black bean burgers I made). It was an evening full of fun and laughter. There are lots of photos on facebook.

In October Marc and Heath hosted a family night at their apartment in Panama City. They fed us well with a delicious potato soup and salad and a coffee cheesecake for dessert. After eating we played video games with their wii. It was my first time playing a video game and I have to admit I liked the tennis and bowling games. Perry had the bowling figured out so well that he could make the ball hug the edge near the gutter and

then spin it into the center of the pins for a strike just like the pros.

Kathy and I are still spending Saturdays building houses for Habitat for Humanity. I continue to ride my bicycle to work each day and go kayaking most weekends. This past summer Kathy and I went kayaking with three other women on a river near Milton. We had a blast! There is something about drifting in a kayak and listening to or playing flute music that is very relaxing. Speaking of flutes, if you have not heard, I have a new hobby - making bamboo flutes. A good friend of mine is helping and we have opened a website called TrueGrassFlutes.com. We have shipped flutes to Alaska, Nebraska, New York, and North Carolina.

That wraps it up for this year. We hope you are healthy and enjoying life.

Favorite Quote:
“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.” Henry David Thoreau

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Merry Christmas!

Chapter 19
(2010)

December 15th, 2010

It's cold in Florida. Can it be December already? It does not seem so long ago when Kathy and I were kayaking on the river and enjoying much warmer temperatures! I miss and love summer time!

Announcements:
Last July Angela and TJ exchanged vows. They were married in Kansas. Kathy and I were not able to go there, but we gladly welcome Angela into our family (it's official now - although she has been a part of our family for 5 years).

On October 8th we welcomed Abigail Eliza Kurtz into our lives. She is beautiful! If you have not seen them - there are LOTS of pictures on facebook.

We are also happy to share - Perry and Sammy are engaged to be married in March of 2011. Sammy has two children (Kacey 5, and Ryan 3) and combined with Taylor & Caitlynn, they will be a miniature version of the Brady Bunch.

Travels:
We spent Valentine's day in Atlanta this year and had over 4 inches of snow. We walked from our hotel

downtown to the Georgia Aquarium and had to be careful because of all of the ice on the sidewalks. Brrrr … give me summer time any time.

In June we stayed a block away from the river in old downtown Savannah and then spent a few days in Myrtle Beach. Our room on the beach was 23 floors up. Doing my morning yoga routine on the balcony while watching the sun rise over the Atlantic was a great way to start my mornings. Coming home we spent a night at Stone Mt outside of Atlanta. We saw the laser show at night and went to the top of the mountain the next day. What a wonderful trip.

This was our last year for the Bailey family reunion at Guntersville State Park in AL. We will miss the annual gathering on top of Taylor Mt, but will remember all the great times we had with a big smile. My mom rode home with us and on the way home we stopped at the highest point in Alabama.

Last month Kathy and I drove to Orlando to spend Thanksgiving with her family. Justinn and her family were also there along with Marc. We had a great time seeing everyone. Ask Marc who won at chess and tennis. We won't mention UNO at Patsy & Kevins.

The Latest:
In March, I took a week off from work and Kathy and I removed all of the old shingles from our 25 year old house and put on new shingles. What a job. Several folks helped us pick up old shingles and haul them to

the dump, but we did all of the roof work by ourselves. I've already told all of the kids in 25 years it's their turn. We will supervise the job from the ground. All of those roofs we have done at habitat helped! We just finished the roof of the 15th habitat house we have worked on since 2002. I guess if I wanted to change jobs I could become a roofer. Don't think that's going to happen.

Kathy is still retired. She and a friend have made dozens of beautiful cakes. She has also made a couple of beautiful quilts this year. She bought a new band saw for her shop, and graciously shares some of her space with me so I can make bamboo flutes (see tgflutes.com). I like to spend time making and playing bamboo flutes, kayaking, – and beating Marc at tennis (some of the time anyway).

I have been riding my bicycle to work for 16 years now. I am approaching the 40,000 mile mark. Last January we saw 14 straight days with morning temps below freezing and most of those days were in the low 20's, one morning it was 16 degrees. I rode every day, but it was cold! Did I mention I love summer? :)

Kathy and I have gone out on a “date” once a month every month this year. On some of those we went to the movies, played goofy golf, or visited a park (I highly recommend snorkeling at St Andrews State Park in Panama City). We like to visit with our grandchildren and often meet them at a park with their parents.

We bought a Wii for each other for our anniversary last February. Kathy and I play bowling and golf nearly every week. Some days she wins and some days I win. That keeps it interesting. :)

You can find this and old newsletters at www.atfar.com/fn

Favorite Quotes:
"To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." William Shakespeare

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Merry Christmas!

Chapter 20
(2011)

December 15th, 2011

As I glance back over last year's newsletter, I am reminded of all of the changes that have taken place since then. It always amazes me how much things can change in one year. Perry and Sammy were married last March. It was a beautiful wedding. All of our children were able to come and that may be the last time we see all the kids in one place for a long time. It was a wonderful and special day.

Yet while some things have changed other things remain the same like - Kathy and I continue to spend most Saturdays building houses for Habitat for Humanity, I am still riding a bicycle 10 miles a day to work, I am still making bamboo flutes, and Kathy continues to enjoy being retired.

Our local Habitat does not build during the summer months, so this year Kathy and I took a boat to Shell Island in Panama City. There are no man-made structures on the island (not even a dock) and it is home to one of the largest bottlenose dolphin populations in the world. Kathy and I went kayaking on the river north of Milton again this year (more than once) which is always a blast. I also took my kayak to Lake Stanley and to Morrison Springs.

In July Sinder, a good friend of mine, and I took our kayaks to Grayton Beach State park and had a wonderful time kayaking in Western Lake and then following the river connecting it to the Gulf of Mexico.

Travels: I had to do a lot of work related, traveling this year. Kathy was able to go with me on 4 of the 5 trips. I always took extra days off to allow us to enjoy seeing some of the sites. In March we were in Orlando and took Jamie and Clayton's advice to see NASA. I am glad we did. I now wish we had taken the kids there on one of our many trips to Orlando. Maybe we can do that with some of our grandchildren. In June we spent a week at Myrtle Beach. Our hotel was right on the beach. I love seeing the Atlantic Ocean, but there is no comparison between their beaches and ours. In October we spent a few days in San Antonio. Our hotel was on the Riverwalk just a couple of blocks away from the Alamo and the Tower of the Americas (which was well worth the price to go to the top). We returned from TX and a week later went to Edmonton Canada. While we were there we spent a day in a huge mall that has the largest indoor wave pool in the world along with a water park, ice skating rink, aquarium, and the largest indoor roller. I expect the mall gets a lot of visitors during the cold winter months there. I had to get a passport and Kathy had to upgrade hers to travel to Canada. What an adventure that was! Now that we have passports, Mexico may be on next year's radar.

Updates: All of our kids and their families are doing well. We had a family night last March days after Perry and Sammy's wedding. We all (well almost all of us) got together and played goofy golf in Destin. Then some of the bigger kids raced go carts while Kathy and I took all six of our grandchildren and did some of the rides in the amusement park. It brought back fond memories of all of the wonderful family nights we used to have.

TJ and Angela are still living in KS. TJ has come off the road and is the department manager in electronics (I'm sure he is a natural at that!). Angela is s Sales Representative for the Northeast Spirit Marcet of GTM Sportswear. They enjoy going to the KState games and have spoiled their dog Ammy. We were very happy they were able to come visit last March.

Perry is working for Budweiser and Sammy works at the Walton County Courthouse. Last spring they were coaches on Kacey and Caitlynn's T ball team. Kathy and I were able to go to some of the games and I was very impressed with both the players and the coaches. With juggling school schedules, ball games, and jobs they are on the go much of the time. Kathy and I remember our time raising four kids and Perry and Sammy have our sympathy.

Justinn earned her two year degree from Northwest Florida State College this year. We are VERY proud of her! She is taking more classes working toward her 4 year degree in between working at a radio station and Carters. Cory is an assistant manager at Publics and

with Angel in school this year they too have a sometimes hectic schedule. Justinn continues to paint wonderful paintings and has even taught some art classes. We proudly display some of her great paintings on our living room wall.

In April Marc surprised us by moving to Miami. He is working at Barnes and Nobles and hoping to take some classes in 2012. In August Kathy spent some time with her sister Lori in Orlando. Marc surprised Kathy with a visit while she was there. One good thing about having a son living so far way in Miami is - we have a warm place to visit if it gets too cold this winter.

It's hard to believe but Taylor is nine and now in the fourth grade. It seems like just yesterday she was about to go to her first day of school. Kacey turned six last January and is in the first grade. She will soon turn seven just three days after Caitlynn turns six. Caitlynn started kindergarten this year. She reminds me of Perry (in more than just her resemblance). And Ryan turned four last June. He is handling having three older sisters without too much trouble. Angel is five and she too started kindergarten this year. Angel (like her mom) is very creative and loves dolphins and butterflies. Abigail turned one year old this past October and is a very happy baby (reminds me of her Uncle Marc). She is very inquisitive and loves trying to play bamboo flutes. She decided it was time to start walking this past Thanksgiving.

We are all healthy (for the most part) and that is always a good thing. We hope you enjoyed this year's newsletter (or at least enjoyed seeing recent photos anyway <g>) and hope you have a very

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Favorite Quote:
"Don't sweat the small stuff." - Richard Carls

Chapter 21
(2012)

December 15th, 2012

This year's Family News marks several anniversaries.

30 years ago Kathy and I said - I do - until death do us part.

25 years ago I began working at Chelco, our electric cooperative.

20 years ago we published our very first Family Newsletter.

10 years ago Taylor Nicole Fannin came into the world.

10 years ago Kathy and I began building houses for Habitat for Humanity.

It's always amazing to stop and reflect on the passage of time and the many changes that come not from day to day, but from year after year. With all the anniversaries we decided to do a four page newsletter.

Kathy and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary on February 14th at a hotel in Key West. We woke up that morning watching the sun rise over the water from our room with a huge wrap around porch right next to the

water. Then we had breakfast on the beach. I highly recommend having breakfast while listening to the sounds of waves with the one you love. And for the record, she is still the one I want to spend the rest of my life with.

This has been another year with lots of traveling for us. After the trip to south FL in February, in June we spent a week next to the Atlantic Ocean in Myrtle Beach. In September and October I had 4 trips in 8 weeks. The last one was the best because it was not work related. We took another vacation to the Keys. We spent a week on SugarLoaf Key with our friend and gracious host, Marty. In November we enjoyed a great Thanksgiving meal at Kathy's brother's house. Dave and his wife Deb sure know how to prepare a feast! And once again Lori and her husband Bill were kind enough to let us stay at their house. And SeaWorld at night with Christmas decorations is something to see!

In May Kathy finally got the new truck she has been wanting for a couple of years. Since we had the truck, we were able to take it to Hunting Island State Park, SC. Celebrating 30 years in Key West kayaks to the Keys with us in October. I loved watching the sunrise and sunset over the Keys from my kayak!! What a relaxing vacation!

Speaking of kayaking, we've done quite a bit of that this year. We've kayaked on the Cold Water River near Milton, the Ecofina near Panama City, Morrison Springs, Seven Runs, and Grayton Beach. Most weekends I find

time to take my kayak out on Lake Juniper and play one of my bamboo flutes. Sinder (my dear friend and partner) and I continue to make and sell flutes. We sell primarily through our website (tgflutes.com), although we did do one festival this year for Octoberfest. We sold a record 18 flutes at that festival, but are still short of selling more than the 65 flutes sold in 2011.

I continue to ride my bicycle to work. And after 18 years of riding, I am happy to say I now have a bike rack to park my bike at work. We had to buy Kathy a new bike after hers was stolen from our front porch. That's the first time since building our house in 1985 that someone stole something from our yard. I also ride my bike to have lunch with mom once a week. It's kind of strange to ride a bike on the same streets where I rode my bike 45 years ago!

In November I began laying the first sandbags for a new sandbag cabin. It will be much bigger than the hut (which is now 7 years old) and will have a second story loft. The kids love to go down to the lake and check out the hut. Maybe I can get them to help build the cabin when they come over.

Taylor turned 10 this year and she is in the 5th grade. She loves science and geology. Hopefully she will still be interested in science in another 5 years and then she and I can have some great conversations about particle physics, biology, quantum mechanics, and astronomy. She is getting very good at computers. Maybe she will

let me teach her how to write computer programs someday.

All of our grandchildren are doing well. Kacey is now 7 and in the second grade. Caitlynn and Angel are 6 and in the first grade. Ryan is 5 and in kindergarten. Abigail just turned 2 in October.

TJ and Angela are still in Kansas and doing well. Perry, Sammy, and the kids have moved to a new house near Black Creek outside of Freeport.

Justinn and Cory still live south of Freeport. Marc has moved back to Walton County. All of the kids are healthy and happy (as far as we know anyway). Here are more pictures from this year:

That ends this year's newsletter. Looking forward to the next 20 years! For now we'll leave with more kayaking photos from the Econfina and sunset near SugarLoaf Key (10 miles north of Key West).

Favorite Quote:
"Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect." Marc Twain.

View past newsletters at hosttg.com/fn
Merry Christmas!!!!!

Chapter 22
(2013)

December 15th, 2013

It's time for our annual Christmas Newsletter. Here are some of the things that have happened in 2013. Kathy and I did not travel as much this year as we have the past couple of years. In fact we had no trips from July - December. I think that is a first in many years.

Last February we spent a week in New Orleans. One the way over we stopped in MS and ate with a cousin from Nevada we had never met. It was great meeting Toni for the first time and there is no doubt we share some of the same DNA!

On the way back from New Orleans, Kathy and I stopped at Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island near Mobile. We had the entire fort to ourselves (other than the park staff and museum personnel).

In April we spent a week in downtown Indianapolis and loved it. What a beautiful, clean, entertaining city! Our hotel was next to a big park, a zoo, museums, ball fields, beautiful canals and rivers, and lots of great restaurants. We were able to go to our first minor league baseball game while there. It just so happens a long-time friend from before high school works in downtown Indianapolis, so we were able to meet Tim

and enjoy a couple of wonderful meals while we were there. Excellent restaurant choices Tim! If you ever have a chance to visit Indianapolis - we highly recommend it.

Shortly after getting back from IN, we loaded up our kayaks and my good friend Sinder and headed south. We spent a fantastic week on SugarLoaf Key (just 10 miles north of Key West). What a wonderful time! I loved taking the kayak out on the water each morning and watching the sunrise. What a great way to begin a day. It would be so easy to live on the water full time in the Keys! Great weather, excellent company, and lots of delicious food.

Sinder and Kathy talked me into going to a yard sale while we were there. I found (okay, maybe Sinder found) professional $100 scuba flippers for $1. I used them at some local springs when we kayaked on Ecofina back in July and they work great!

After the Keys, Kathy and I spent a week looking out at the Atlantic Ocean in Myrtle Beach, SC. That was a work related trip, but as usual I took some extra time off so we could enjoy the beach. On the way up we stopped at Santee state park. We followed a nature trail and saw sinkholes and alligators in SC rather than FL. It is a huge beautiful park that we will definitely go back and explore.In the summer our local habitat group takes a break from building houses. Kathy and I used that time to do a lot of kayaking.

This year we not only saw several new springs on the Econfina, we also found a river within 45 minutes of our house with crystal clear water. It is on the Eglin military base which also means … no houses. Turkey Creek quickly became one of our favorite places to spend a day kayaking. We returned again and again until October came. I'm sure we will go back again (several times) next year as well.

Each year Kathy and I treat ourselves to 3 or 4 Broadway plays at the local college. This past spring we saw "Hair" for the first time. Our seats were on the 4th row and my seat was the end seat next to an aisle. That meant I was so close to the stage, I was asked to stand up in the aisle to dance with one of the performers (Sarah from Ohio) as part of the play. It also meant at the end, a dozen audience members (and yes, I was one of them) were asked to join the entire cast on stage to sing -let the sunshine in (Aquarius). So I joined hands with the others on stage and helped close the show. So now I can honestly say I have sung on stage under the big lights in front of 2,000 people.

Marc 2013 down in the history books - I recently got my very first cell phone! As an IT manager for an electric utility, I decided it would be best for me to learn to use them especially the texting part. That does not mean I will take the phone with me wherever I go! I hate talking on phones and love my quiet time.

A year ago last November I filled up the first of what would become one thousand sandbags to build the

lower floor of what I am calling “harmony cave." It was not easy filling up that many bags (with just a shovel and a wheelbarrow) and still working at a full time job. On top of that we helped build two more habitat houses last year. I’m still not finished with the cave, but it is far enough along where I have been able to spend the night there at least once a month since my birthday this year. I love the peace and quiet in that place. It is a very comfortable space. There are lots of pictures of it on facebook, including several with the grandchildren in and on it.

Speaking of grandkids, we had all six of our grandchildren over this past summer for a campout. Our tents were set up near the lake and we had a good fire to roast marshmallows and hot dogs (veggie dogs for me). We were having a great time, but around 10:30 a nasty thunderstorm hit us. We quickly piled sleeping bags, pillows, and clothes into a wheelbarrow and ran back to the house (the cave was not waterproof at that point. You can imagine Kathy’s surprise when we all came barging into the house (she was expecting a quiet evening at home alone) just as it began pouring down rain. Despite the rain, we still had a good time and will try it again next year.

TJ and Angela are still living in KS. Its been way too long since we have seen them. It’s a good thing they are both on facebook. At least we can check in with them now and then. If they do not come visit soon, Kathy and I may have to take a road trip to KS.

Perry and Sammy spent much of 2013 building a new addition to their house. They added 2 more bedrooms and another bathroom which means all four kids now have their own bedroom. They did a wonderful job! The new addition looks great. In October they took all of the kids to the mountains. After looking at the pictures, I think it is safe to say they all had a lot of fun.

Justinn started a donut shop on the beach in 2013. The owner has a bike shop next door and decided to open the donut shop after talking Justinn into going to work for him. Justinn worked at a donut shop while she was going to college in LA. She talked Marc into leaving Publix to help and then a few months later, she convinced Cory to leave Publix to work at the Donut shop. So all three are working there and they make some delicious donuts. Every time I have stopped by to visit they have always been very busy. Guess word is getting around about the delicious, fresh donuts.

Marc lives just down the road from Justinn. He is within walking distance which makes it easy to carpool to work with Justinn and Cory. He recently wrote a new song and did a video recording of him singing it and playing the guitar on facebook. If you have not seen it, you should.

That wraps it up for this year. Kathy and I are loving the empty nest thing … a lot! With our grandchildren living 45 minutes away, we do not get to see them as often as we would like. They are all growing SO fast and each of them are very special to us!

Our grandchildren's ages:

Taylor 11	Angel 7
Kacey 8	Ryan 6
Caitlynn 7	Abigail 3

Favorite Quotes:

"Health is the greatest possession. Contentment is the greatest treasure." Lao Tzu

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For past newsletters go to: hosttg.com/fn

MerryChristmas!

Chapter 23
(2014)

December 14th, 2014

2014 has been a great year with a couple of firsts. On Valentine's Day Kathy and I spent the night in a room right on the Gulf. I surprised her with two concert tickets to see Elton John. It is the first concert she has ever been to. We had a blast! And then in July Kathy and I joined Sinder, Ronda, and Ron on an 8 day cruise to the Caribbean. That was the first time I had ever been on a cruise and I loved every minute of it. We stopped at four different islands and had a blast relaxing on the ship. I may have even kissed … a stingray.

This year Kathy and I also spent time in Myrtle Beach, the Smoky Mountains, Nashville, Athens (GA) - home of the tree that owns itself, Orlando, New Smyrna Beach, and SugarLoaf Key. And I had one trip alone to Kansas City (which was also a first for me).

This past April I Marced 20 years of riding a bicycle to work. In July I began riding a small fold up bicycle and I love it. People ask me if I can do circus tricks and make other funny comments about the bike, but I don't care. It is much easier to ride and I love that I can fold it up and put it in a back seat or trunk if I need to.

TJ and Angela moved back from KS this past summer. It sure has been good to have them home. Once they settled into their new place in Crestview they hosted our first Family night in years.

Kathy and I sent saliva samples in and had our DNA tested this year. We now not only know more about where our ancestors came from, we also have a good idea of what major diseases we are at higher risk for. It is very interesting discovering what our DNA says about us.

In September we received news that Kathy's brother Jimmy was killed in a motorcycle accident. The world is missing a unique and free spirit. We were in Orlando for Thanksgiving and it was the first one without him. It is never easy to lose a loved one, especially at the age of 55.

I finished the lower floor of my sandbag "cave" in July of 2013. Every month since then I have spent at least one night in the cave. I call it Harmony Cave because of the peace and harmony I enjoy during my monthly retreats.

In August we had all six of our grandchildren campout in our back yard down by the lake. We had a blast taking turns in the kayak and taking the paddle boat across the lake to see the beaver lodge. Unfortunately we had about an hour of heavy rain around 9:00 pm. Everyone was able to get inside the cave except Angel. She was already asleep in the tent and slept right through the storm.

In September we joined Perry and Sammy and all their kids for a camp out at Grayton State Park. Sunset on the beach was spectacular. Next time we will plan to take our kayaks and enjoy the lake and the beach. It was a quiet event which made up for the excitement from Ryan's birthday party in June. They had a huge blowup slide for his party that began blowing away when a thunderstorm suddenly started. I think I may have been airborne for a bit.

Kathy and I did not go kayaking a lot the last half of the year, but we made up for it in the first half with trips on Cold Water, Ecofina, Grayton, and several trips on Turkey Creek. I also continue to enjoy taking the kayak out on Lake Juniper nearly every weekend.

Justinn opened an art gallery last spring. She spent much of the summer teaching art at the Library. The kids she was working with not only drew pictures, they wrote a book to go with their pictures and Justinn had it published for their parents. She continues to amaze me with her creativity.

If you have not seen some of the sunrise pictures Marc has been taking on the beach, you owe it to yourself to visit his Facebook page. The donut shop where he works is right on the beach and at break he slips down now and then for some spectacular photos.

Everyone in our bunch is doing well. Everyone in our bunch is doing well. All of the grandchildren continue to

shoot up. I predict Taylor will be taller than Kathy before her 13th birthday next June. She is within an inch now. We enjoy going to school events, ball games, recitals, … when we can. All of the grandchildren are about 45 minutes away, so we do not see them as much as we would like. We are SO proud of each of them!

Our dog Charlie passed away last May. We've had her for over 12 years. She was one of our favorite dogs. And for the first time in our almost 33 years of marriage, Kathy and I are alone in our house with no children and no pets. Although Kathy says that may change soon. She is keeping her eye out for a new pet.

Grandchildren's Ages:

Taylor 12	Kacey 9
Caitlynn 8	Angel 8
Ryan 7	Abigail 4

For past Family Newsletters go to:http://hosttg.com/fn/

Favorite Quote:
"Happy is he who forgets ... what cannot be changed." Marc Twain

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We wish each of you a very Merry Christmas!

Chapter 24
(2015)

December 14th, 2015

What a wonderful year we have had. I'll begin with a couple of big events. Last January we were having a Family Night at TJ and Angela's. After a great meal, Justinn passed around a sonogram. That was her way of letting us all know she and Cory were having another baby. On August 22 James Tiberius Kurtz came into the world! With the name - James T Kurtz we just … have to call him - Captain.

Two months later, the last of our children got married. Marc and Leo tied the knot on October 17th at a wonderful ceremony in their spacious yard. The wedding had a movie theme complete with a huge blow up screen for watching slide shows and a movie once it got dark. It was a great time and we proudly and officially welcome Leo into our family!!

We've had some wonderful Family gatherings this year at each of the kids' houses. In February we were at Justinn and Cory's and Kathy and I were given a fantastic gift. All of our children, spouses, and grandchildren posed for some western themed photos. They gave us framed photos as an anniversary gift. Kathy and I loved it!!!

When we gathered at Perry and Sammy's house last spring we had a great time playing corn hole. In fact, Kathy was inspired to make some corn hole boards which we carried to our first annual Family Campout at St Andrews State Park. It was a big hit.

In September we had all of our kids, their spouses, and grandchildren (a total of 17 people) pitching tents and enjoying the waters of St Andrews Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. What an incredible time we had (in spite of eating breakfast under canopies because of heavy rain). The rain cleared out and everyone had a great time. Perry took his boat which led to an … adventure (just ask him about it). We took 4 kayaks which were a big hit with everyone. Abigail and I were able to get within 30' of some dolphins one morning. We all agreed to make it an annual event.

I finished my two story sandbag cabin in May. I continue to spend at least one night a month down by the lake to give Kathy a break from me as well as to recharge my batteries.

Last January the hut turned 10 years old. What a difference when I look at the photo from 2005 and compare it to how it looks today. When sitting in it, you can see half a mile away looking out across the lake. I have to say, I have spent many peaceful hours sitting inside, meditating, playing my flute, or just sitting and watching nature.

Kathy and I took our first trip to Denver last April and had a wonderful time. We were on the 22nd floor (top floor of the hotel) and looking out our window, the only thing between us and the Rocky Mountains was the Mile High football stadium. There was still snow on the mountain

In June we spent a week in Myrtle Beach, SC. On the way up we stopped at Huntington Beach State Park and took a tour of the Atalaya Castle. Kathy and I both love history and touring old forts and buildings and this one did not disappoint us!

In September we spent a week in Athens, GA (home of the tree that - owns itself). And two weeks later I went to Hampton Beach, NH for a few days. After that our traveling days came to an end for the year.

Kathy and I bought new river kayaks this year. We've gone out on different rivers almost a dozen times this year. One of our favorite rivers (and most often visited) is Turkey Creek about 45 minutes away. We kayak with our friends Sinder and Ronda and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature while having lots of fun and laughter.

Kathy and I continue to have a date night each month and we also enjoy going to Broadway plays at our local college. In July I bought a new folding bicycle for my daily commute to work. It is so easy to fold, I can fold it up and take it into my office with ease.

We welcomed Max (Kathy's new Yorkey) into our house last Christmas. This year Kathy and I celebrated 30 years in our house. We built the house in 1985. Thirty years is a long time to be in one place, but there is no doubt about it - it is home sweet home for us.

All of the above photos were taken in 2015.

Favorite Quote:
"Rainbows introduce us to reflections of different beautiful possibilities so we never forget that pain and grief are not the final options in life." -- Aberjhani

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That's the latest in our family news for 2015. We wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas.

Chapter 25
(2016)

December 14th, 2016



Clan Size: 17
(First family photograph with Leo, Kacey, Ryan, Abigail, and Captain)

We began 2016 celebrating my dad's 80th birthday. What a great time! I think he was surprised when he walked into the Civic Center expecting to see a concert and instead saw dozens of family and friends. Here are some photos taken at his party:

Kathy and I traveled to New Orleans for a week in February, Myrtle Beach for a week in June, Athens for a week in September, and Orlando for Thanksgiving. Even though most were work related trips, I took a couple of

extra days off on each trip to allow us to do some sightseeing.

In August our entire clan went camping at St. Andrews State Park in Panama City. We had a great time. Marc and TJ were brave enough to paddle the kayaks from our campsite all the way to the beach. That was quite a workout.

Corn hole was a big hit at our family campout again this year. In fact there may have been one team that went undefeated no matter how hard TJ, Perry, Marc, and Leo tried to beat them. Yes, that would be the team of Cory and myself. We were 8 - 0, even though there were a couple of really close games. You did a great job Cory!! :)

In October my high school class held our 40th class reunion at a local restaurant. Out of a class of 192 we had 88 people show up. Some of these folks are really getting old. Sure glad I am not one of them (wink). Here is a photo of me with two of my friends from that night along with a picture taken after our 20 year reunion. Guess we will have to do it again in another 20 years.

In October, I decided it was time for a new bike. For the past 12 years I have been riding single speed coaster bikes, but the new bike is a 21 speed. I hate to admit that I am getting older, but the three hills I climbed on the way home were getting harder and harder. With the new 21 speed bike, it is SO easy. I probably should have done that months ago.

Kathy and I continue to kayak and she is still enjoying retirement. We now have 17 people in our clan. So, let's move on to the grandchildren. One of the biggest things from 2016 - Perry adopted Kacey and Ryan!! And now a little more:

Taylor keeps getting taller. She has beautiful red hair and blue eyes. She had to start wearing braces this year, but that just makes her smile brighter. She is also good at doing magic card tricks thanks to cousin Josh.

Kacey went to south FL back in the summer with her all star softball team. She is becoming a great pitcher and now that she is taller than Taylor she is taking up basketball. And she is wearing braces to Caitlynn has been asking me for 4 years to show her how to make a flute. I told her to wait until she was 10. This year she made a bamboo flute and a pvc flute. And may I say - she has a great laugh? She is a fun person to have around.

Angel was an angel at a beauty pageant this year when she shared some of her flowers with a girl who had none. She did a great job at her dance recital this year and even helped Abigail's age group. She has been a great big sister to little brother Captain.

Ryan has become quite the athlete from basketball to soccer, he can do it all. In fact he was on an all star baseball team and they did so well they qualified to play at Disney Elite 32 in 2017. But then what do you expect

when you have parents like Perry and Sammy giving him great support (Sammy was even his soccer coach this year). And … Ryan is wearing braces too.

Abigail was in her first dance recital last May. Talk about marching to the beat of a different drummer - while all the other kids turned left, she just had to be different and went right. She celebrated her birthday at Chuck E Cheese in October. All of her cousins were there along with several friends. Grandma and Grandpa could only last about an hour before we were wore out and had to leave.

Captain began walking when he was 15 months old (which ties me and Taylor for taking the longest to start walking). He is quickly learning to beware of Ms Abigail. Here he is saying a prayer when he saw her getting wound up. Even though his name is James T. Kurtz, he will not answer to James, only … Captain. :)

Favorite Quote:
“It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.” Chinese Proverb

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For past newsletters go to:hosttg.com/fn

Merry Christmas!

Chapter 26
(2017)

December 14th, 2017

It is time for 2017 to wind down which means it is time for our annual Family Newsletter. I often begin these newsletters by sharing some of the places Kathy and I have traveled during the year. Well, this year marks the first year in many, many years where I spent every night of the year at our property. Notice I said *I* spent every night at home and not Kathy. That is because Kathy celebrated her 60th birthday by going on a cruise to the Bahamas with her sister Lori. They had a wonderful time. Still it was very unusual for us to not take our normal 2 or 3 trips this year.

Even though I did not travel, each of our kids did. TJ and Angela spent some time in New Orleans, Perry and Sammy and the kids had a great time in Atlanta, Justinn and Cory and the kids found a beautiful cabin in the mountains of Tennessee, and Marc and Leo went to Universal.

For our anniversary this year, Kathy and I decided to go to Lowes. Yes, that's right - one of the reasons we did not do any traveling was because we decided to spend our anniversary at Lowes. She bought me a new refrigerator and I bought her a new stove for our

anniversary this year. Afterwards we saw a movie, went to a photo booth, and played goofy golf.

In May of this year all of my siblings, our kids (well most of our kids), most of my nieces and nephews from my side of our family, and dozens of others surprised my mom to celebrate her 80th birthday. We did a 50's sock hop theme and most people dressed in 50's clothes. We had a DJ playing Elvis tunes, a hula hoop contest, and lots of food. There may even be a video of me dancing with my mom, who can still "cut a rug" on the dance floor.

It was a wonderful time marking a big milestone in life for one of the most amazing women ever. I have nothing but wonderful memories of my mom. In nearly every memory I have (including photos and videos) she is smiling and laughing. The only thing that surpasses her good nature and humor is her kind heart. There is no doubt - if the world had more people like my mom, the world would be a much better place.

We have lived on Lake Juniper since 1985. This year marks the first time Kathy has ventured out into the main 665 acre lake in a kayak. She has paddled in the smaller 12 acre section in our backyard before, but it took a visit from my cousin and his wife to get her out in a kayak on the main lake.

We were very sad to hear Kathy's brother David lost his battle with cancer in July at the age of 55. Rest in peace David. You are missed by many.

Our annual Family Campout on the beach at St Andrews State Park was cut short this year due to Hurricane Irma. We were kicked out of the park two days early because of the storm, but we sure enjoyed what time we had before the evacuation. And for the record - I should mention - Cory and I remain undefeated in corn hole for the second year in a row.

TJ went back on the road again this year. That means we get to watch Ammie whenever Angela has to travel. She has been a wonderful house guest. One of the many things

Perry and his clan went to Atlanta to go to a Braves baseball game. We now have a video of the kids on the big screen and some may have been … dancing.

Justinn made us VERY proud this month when she graduated from college and was pinned as a teacher. There will be some lucky kids in 2018 with a wonderful new teacher!

Marc and Leo moved into a new house earlier this year. They now have much more room and Leo is within easy walking/biking distance to go to work.

The grand kids just keep growing. They seem to be growing at a faster pace than our kids did. Taylor went to her first Homecoming dance at the high school this year (see photo on page 1). Kacey made the volleyball team and was in a beauty pageant (see photo on last page).

Caitlynn made the cheerleading team. Angel started a new school at the Seaside Academy this year. Ryan continues to excel at baseball and fishing. Abigail still has more energy than the Tasmanian Devil. And Captain James T. Kurtz, well let's just say he has his own way of doing things and likes to be the Captain.

Ages:
Taylor - 15
Kacey - 12
Caitlynn - 11
Angel - 11
Ryan - 10
Abigail - 7
Captain - 2

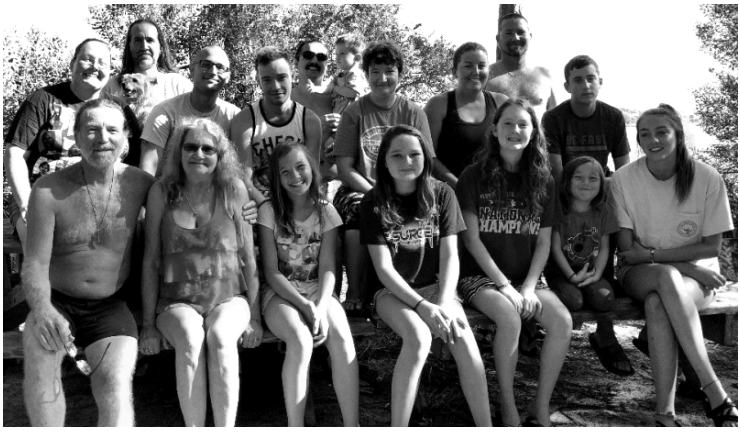
Favorite Quote:
"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken." Oscar Wilde

For past newsletters go to: www.hosttg.com/fn

Merry Christmas!

Chapter 27
(2018)

December 14th, 2018



Clan Size: 17

Well, 2018 turned out to be a full year for our clan with several life changes. What a great year it's been!! I'll begin with the announcement of the birth of our 8th grandchild - Acadia Blakely Kurtz on 11/27/18. Welcome to the family Cadie!! We now have 18 in our clan.

We are very, very proud of Justinn for getting her BA in education!! At the beginning of the year Justinn began teaching 1st grade at Freeport Elementary School. Now she is teaching 2nd grade and from what I hear she is an excellent teacher.

Justinn and Cory now have 3 girls and 1 boy (the reverse of Kathy's kids). Their family has gotten so big, they are moving into a bigger house. The house is still under construction and should be finished around March.

Speaking of new houses, this past January TJ and Angela bought a new house here in DeFuniak Springs. They are just on the other side of town from us. They hosted one of our family nights at their new house back in June and had a ton of room for our big clan.

Kathy and I also experienced a major life change this year. After 31 years at the electric cooperative, I decided to retire. My first day of retirement was on March 28, 2018 (Angel's 12th birthday) at the age of 59. And I have to say - it has absolutely been the best year of my life!!

We celebrated by taking a cruise to Mexico on Kathy's birthday in April. In June we rented a house on the Withlacoochee River north of Tampa with our friend Sinder for a week. We were 3 miles from the Gulf. We were able to kayak every day and loved seeing manatees directly below our kayaks (close enough to touch them). What a fun, relaxing time in Yankeetown.

During the first weekend in August our entire clan gathered at the St Andrews State park on the Gulf of Mexico. What a wonderful time. We rented a pontoon boat for the day and all of the grandchildren were able to go to Shell Island. It was a big hit! Relaxing days and enjoying campfires each night - what a lot of fun! The

only downside this year was … Cory and I lost our 3 year winning streak playing corn hole. Yes, I know it is hard to believe and I could go on and on about how close it was, but all I will say is TJ and Perry earned bragging rights by beating us. They are the current reigning family corn hole champs.

In September Kathy and I drove to Atlanta to visit my sister Tonja and see her new house. It was a fun trip. Tonja and I rode bicycles on a great bike path. We did 25 miles one day and 42 miles the next day. Even though I am retired, I still take the bike out for a 5 mile ride every morning. I also spend an hour kayaking on the lake. I spend many days in my sandbag resort down by the lake (I call it Harmony). I am still making flutes and I may have gotten a few naps in the hammock down by the lake. I am very happy with retiring early and highly recommend it!

Our bunch is doing well. The grandchildren will not stop growing. Taylor turned 16 last June! Yes, that means she is old enough for Homecoming dances. Current ages: Kacey 13, Caitlynn 12, Angel 12, Ryan 11, Abigail 8, Captain 3, and Cadie less than a month old.

Taylor is loving her second year of high school.

Kacey played softball, won the Miss Firecracker title, and is very good on her volleyball team.

Caitlynn made the cheerleading team and is growing up fast.

Ryan stays active and somehow found time to play football and basketball this year. Speaking of basketball, Angel was selected for the Seaside basketball team and is still going to the charter school near the beach. Miss Abigail is one of the top readers in the second grade. And Captain has some adjustments to make now that he is no longer the youngest child.

Kathy and I celebrated our 36th anniversary with dinner and a movie followed by a walk on the beach. Sometimes the best anniversaries are the ones where we stay in our own area rather than traveling somewhere, especially when you live near the world's most beautiful beaches. In the photo of us and the kids (below right) there are 30 years between the top and bottom photos! I am 30 years old in the top photo and 60 in the bottom. Since retiring, Marc and I have gone kayaking a few times and I had time to write a book. It's 240 pages and titled "Life In Harmony" and is available on Amazon. We celebrated Thanksgiving in Orlando with Kathy's family this year - what a wonderful time!! Now that I am retired, we hope to make more trips to Orlando (so consider this fair warning). :)

Whew - that was a lot to cover for just one year. I'll end with a family photo from our campout.

We hope everyone is healthy and happy. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas!

Favorite Quote:

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." — FerrisBueller

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View past newsletters at: http://hosttg.com/fn/

Chapter 28
(2019)

December 14th, 2019

I began doing these newsletters in 1992 and this is the hardest one I have ever done. This will be the first one that Kathy will not proof read. We lost her on April 26th a week after her 62nd birthday and our lives will never ever be the same again.

Me, the kids, their spouses, our grandchildren, and both of our families and our friend Sinder still struggle with Kathy being gone. We miss her so very much!! Kathy loved to have fun. She loved life and knew how to enjoy every day. On the day before she died, she showed me, her mom, and her sister Lori - she still knew how to have fun and enjoy life to the fullest even though her life was near the end. It was a gift to see her smile.

She loved to go kayaking on the river with Sinder and Ronda. She retired in 2006 and could do anything she wanted - most people only dream of that. She often said she was a lady of leisure, but mostly her life was one of pure joy, adventure, and fun. It is still hard to believe she is gone. She is dearly missed.

Exactly two weeks after having a memorial service to tell Kathy good-bye, we had one for my mother. She died on Mother's Day, May 12th two weeks away from her 82nd birthday. I am thankful mom sat beside me at Kathy's

funeral. I think the thing I miss most about mom being gone is - her laughter. Mom always had a smile on her face, laughter in her soul, and love in her heart. I cannot tell you how much I miss these two ladies.

Justinn and Cory moved into their new house in March. I spent a few days with them in the mountains in June. In July I camped with Perry and his family in their new camper in Panama City. TJ and Angela have a new deck on their house and Marc is now managing a store in Panama City. I have visited with my sister Tonja in Atlanta a couple of times. I set a new record for riding a bicycle 56 miles with her one day.

Had a wonderful road trip with my sisters, Tonja and Terri to NC to see mom's younger sister (Aunt Dean) in August. I also camped with Terri and Chester in July. Last February Kathy and I camped with them in St Augustine and took a tour of the lighthouse there. It is exactly 219 steps to the top. I speak from experience!! And Chester and I had a great time kayaking near the lighthouse!! And I have to give a big shoutout to my dear friend Sinder for helping me get through this year. Who knew last January would be mine and Sinder's last bean lunch with mom and Kathy. Those sure were some good beans.

All 8 of our grandchildren are pictured above! Kathy sure did love her grandchildren!! I will let the photos below share a little more about my beautiful bride. We had a grand and blessed life filled with lots of fun:

Merry Christmas.

We are looking forward to a better year in 2020!! In 2020 we will go on our family cruise that Kathy had been planning the past few years. Me, all the kids, spouses, and grandchildren will be heading for Mexico in June. Kathy's ashes will be going along with us.

Favorite Quote:
"The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living." – Marcus Tullius Cicero

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View past family newsletters at: http://hosttg.com/fn/

Chapter 29
(2020)

December 14th, 2020



Clan Size: 17
(First family photograph without Kathy)

I ended last year's family newsletter by saying: "We are looking forward to a better year in 2020!" Well, I have to admit, I do not think there could be another year as hard as 2019 because of losing Kathy and my mom, but 2020 was not one of my favorite years. What an … insane year this has been!!!

The family cruise we had been planning for almost 3 years was canceled because of Covid along with all of my other travel plans for the year. But that was just the tip of the 2020 iceberg. I will not even mention all of the hurricanes that hit the northern Gulf of Mexico. So, I will

repeat what I said last year and say - we are looking forward to a better year in 2021!!!

Last year at Christmas, Marc and Leo gave me and all eight of the grandchildren a very special and unique gift - a teddy bear made from some of Kathy's clothes. It made my heart smile. Earlier this year they got two kayaks and began taking regular kayaking trips on Lafayette Creek which borders the subdivision they live in. Last June I was kayaking with them and Marc found two turtles on a tree limb above his kayak. When he stopped to look at them one of them dropped into the seat of his kayak and it was a … snapping turtle. Marc looked a little awkward holding his butt up in the air to avoid the turtle and not flipping the kayak. But he never flipped.

Justinn and Cory have their hands full managing and raising 4 children. The new subdivision they live in continues to grow. They are next door to the pool and clubhouse, which allows them to meet all of their neighbors. Justinn is teaching the second grade again this year and Cory is working hard on getting his four year degree while working at a local bank. They celebrated their anniversary this year by flying to Nashville and enjoying a long weekend without the kids. Last Spring their whole family went camping on Anastasia Island in St Augustine.

For three years Kathy made corn hole boards as Christmas gifts for each of the kids and their spouses. When we exchanged names for Christmas last year the

only one of our kids that did not have corn hole boards was TJ and Angela. Perry stepped up to the plate last Christmas and hit a home run. He drew their names and made the exact corn hole boards that his mom was planning to make - one for Notre Dame and one for Kansas State (TJ and Angela's favorite college teams). Well done Perry!!

Speaking of Perry - he and Sammy and their family have been getting a lot of use out of the new camper they bought in 2019. Plus he was able to trade in two of his smaller boats to get a bigger and better boat (and I will not mention the fantastic deal he and Sammy got on her new Cadillac, but I will say - Perry is one of the best horse traders ever).

TJ and Angela are learning what it is like to be home owners. After replacing their back deck in 2019, this past year they replaced the windows in their house. But they take it all in stride and are enjoying their house, especially when they can look at the woods in the back and often see deer coming up to their backyard. Angela is able to work from home, but TJ often has to work out of town. That has made it hard on her this year with covid, but she is managing it well.

Even though our family cruise was canceled we were still able to pull off our annual family camping trip in spite of the wind and rain from Hurricane Delta. We had a wonderful time! My sisters Terri and Tammy were able to come join us for one afternoon. And I have to give a big shout out to Caitlynn for doing SO WELL in playing corn

hole. She is only 14 and I think next year I will have to team up with her instead of her teaming up with Marc.

Taylor began her senior year in high school. She is doing the best she has ever done so far. She is a school spirited girl with a love for life and has a beautiful class ring she wears proudly. She is working on getting a job soon. For her 18th birthday I took her out to eat. We had a great time. Her red hair and blue eyes make her one of the prettiest girls in the county.

Kacey received her driver's permit in January on her 15th birthday. She missed school to get it. She had knee surgery and came back to play volleyball, but her season ended with a back Injury. She had her first real job over the summer.

Caitlynn began her first year of High School this past fall. She absolutely loves it. She has a couple of honors classes. She is gearing up to get her permit In January on her 15th birthday. She caught up in height with her siblings and she still has more to go.

Angel is finishing up her last year of middle school this year. She is a great big sister and a huge help to her mom and dad. She will be 15 in March. She lets her dog Tank visit me and Max now and then which is always fun. And she is very creative with her phone apps.

Ryan played on the Varsity Basketball team and Baseball Team as a 7th grader. He also decided to give Football one more shot this fall and has enjoyed it as he

plays offense, defense, and special teams. He's a straight A student with 2 honors classes. He did extra classes over the summer to gain his Boaters and Hunters licenses. He also held his first job this summer at age 13 doing landscaping for a local company.

Abigail turned 10 in October. She got a pro skateboard for her birthday and loves trying new tricks. She is on the Lego robotics team at school this year and is in her last year of elementary school. And her energy levels are as high as ever. I gave up on trying to keep up with her.

Captain James turned 5 this year and started kindergarten. He is doing really well and is at the top of his class despite being the youngest.

Acadia "Cadie" is a typical two year old. She loves playing with her brother and sisters and making a mess. She is starting to talk really well. Her favorite person to talk to is Captain. Cadie tied my record of taking 15 months before she started walking last March.

I continue to ride my bike 5 miles each day, kayak (bought new kayaks this year), and take Max on weekly hiking trips, usually some place on the Florida Trail near DeFuniak. Max often goes with me kayaking. If only he would learn to paddle. In September I went camping with Perry and his family. I was planning to go with Justinn and her family last March, but Covid got in the way. We built our house in 1985, so this year marks 35 years in the same house. To the right is a photo from

our house warming party. I am loving retirement. I highly recommend it as early as possible.

Our clan is doing well in spite of 2020. We hope you have a very MERRY CHRISTMAS!!

Favorite Quotes:
"Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience." Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees." Henry David Thoreau

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Chapter 30
(2021)

December 14th, 2021

Welcome to the 29th year of our family newsletter. Let's begin with a first in our clan (our first grandchild to graduate). Yep, Taylor graduated from Freeport High School on May 20th 2021, complete with beautiful fireworks in the sky behind her as she walked off the stage.

Last February I went camping with Marc, Leo, and their roommate Taylor at a campsite near the river. Even though we had rain one day, we made the best of it by spending the time telling stories under a covered pavilion. We were able to hike a few miles on the FL Trail and enjoyed some kayaking time.

Marc and Leo have gone to the Smoky Mountains twice this year. In October they went as far north as the Shenandoah Valley where they did a ten mile hike to a summit with a view that looked like the top of the world. Marc and Leo enjoy hiking on the FL trail and Marc got his Eglin permit this year and he and I did a fun hike to Little Alaqua Creek at the end of summer.

Justinn and Cory are doing well. Justinn still teaches the second grade (teachers do not get nearly enough credit for ALL that they do) and Cory changed jobs and is now

in the cyber security field. He has his associates degree and is close to receiving his bachelors!

Perry and Sammy are staying very busy raising four teenagers. Sometimes their lives go at a non-stop pace. This past September Sammy adopted Taylor and Caitlynn!! Perry had already adopted Kacey and Ryan, so now they are officially … one family with no more of the yours and mine hassles. Congratulations!!

TJ and Angela are doing well and continue to live on the south side of town. They often see deer in the woods behind their house and recently they had to call a beekeeper to come remove a swarm of bees. For our family campout this year they rented a camper and retired their older pop up camper. This was their dog Ammestist's last year camping with us. They have had Ammy for over 14 years. She passed away 10/19/21. Kathy and I often watched her when TJ and Angela were out of town.. Ammy will be missed.

Taylor graduated high school and at the beginning of the summer began working at McDonalds. Now that she is an adult we put her name in our family Christmas drawing. Now she can spend some of that hard earned money on one of the other adults in the family.

Kacey turned 16 last January and immediately took her driver's test and got her license. She has been a big help to mom and dad now that she can drive and run errands for them. She is a junior in high school and over the summer worked two jobs. Her boyfriend, Robby also

began a new job working for the same company that Perry works for. The two of them teamed up to coordinate the fireworks at Taylor's graduation. Kacey called Robby who was in the woods behind the stage at the football field and she told him when to shoot the fireworks when Taylor and all of her many friends received their diplomas. It was a spectacular firework show!! Great job Kacey and Robby!

Caitlynn is now a sophomore in high school and continues to grow and grow. I don't want to stand back to back with her for fear that she might be taller than me. She got her learner's permit and is starting to drive. She also worked two jobs over the summer. And she is still pretty good at our family corn hole games when we are camping. Right is a photo from the adoption at the courthouse.

Angel graduated 8th grade at the Seaside Academy last May. She is now in high school at Freeport with her cousins and likes it a lot. Angel got her learner's permit and is now driving. She too is growing fast and helps mom and dad a lot with her sister Cadie.

Ryan is also now in high school (which means Perry and Sammy had one graduate and the rest of their three kids are in high school now). He is active with sports and fishing. He is becoming a fine young man and I am very proud of him (and so are mom and dad).

Abigail turned eleven in October and continues to be full of energy and intelligence. She got a new drum set for

her birthday. She loves skateboarding, surfing, and swimming and hanging out with her best friend Ava. She recently made a motorized bank that sucks in $20 bills from an old toy car motor. So if you give her $20 for her to demonstrate, you may not get it back.

Captain James began 1st grade at Freeport Elementary (the same school as Abigail and where Justinn teaches). He loves his teacher this year. She has inspired him to do his homework after school this year instead of sleeping (which is what he preferred last year).

Acadia (better known as Cadie) just turned three this past November. Her mom takes lots of photos of her and she almost always has a different expression. I recently saw a video from her mom of Cadie playing with Abigail's drum set. I have to admit, she did pretty good. She really enjoyed going out on the kayak with Grandpa on our family camping trip this year.

I still ride my bike every day around the neighborhood. My dog, Max and I continue to hike on the FL Trail and kayak. Last May we hiked to the highest point on the FL trail (272' making it the lowest highest point of all eleven national trails LOL). We met two ladies there and I began hiking with one of them. Deb and I have now hiked all of the FL Trail in Walton County (over 60 miles) and plan to do even more miles in 2022.

This past spring my best friend Sinder and I split the cost on a condo at Treasure Island (part of St Petersburg, FL). We had a wonderful time. One day we

traveled to Fort DeSoto. Another day we rented kayaks at Weeki Wachee springs. And another day we rented a speed boat and found some islands where we hung out with a family of dolphins. I have to admit it was kind of fun driving a boat that was a little faster than our kayaks. And we enjoyed lots of beach time and pool time, not to mention a delicious breakfast every morning!

Merry Christmas!

Favorite Quote:
“Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds.” George Elliot

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View past family newsletters at: http://hosttg.com/fn/

Chapter 31
(2022)

December 14th, 2022



Clan Size: 18
(First family photograph with Deb)

I began doing the Family News in 1992. This marks 30 years of newsletters. I've decided 30 years is long enough. This will be the last edition. All things change over time and all things come to an end.

This past February my father died at the age of 86. He was a man of many talents and loved by most people who knew him. Rest in peace dad.

Several people have died since I began doing this in 1992. When I look at past newsletters and think of the many people that have touched our lives, I cannot help but to feel grateful. I will never forget those who have left us. I know death is part of life, but it is still sad to lose the ones we love. Maybe 30 years of newsletters will keep some of the memories alive.

Looking at the photos over the years, tells a story. I glance over past newsletters and the memories put a smile on my face. I give thanks for the “many blessings that have been ours.”

Marc and Leo have had a busy year. They took a vacation in south FL in February. They hiked from the southern terminus of the FL trail, rode bikes on a section near the Everglades, had an airboat tour, kayaked and camped before going to Key West. They went to the buoy ten years after Kathy and I were there for the first time (in 2012).

It was appropriate that Marc spread some of Kathy’s ashes there. In June Marc took a work promotion and they moved to the east side of Birmingham. Deb and I paid a visit in September and hiked to Kings Chair on Oak Mt with them. They camped in KY in Oct at Mammoth Cave. Marc was only five when I began this. He has had a wonderful smile the whole time. Keep smiling! I am blessed to be called your dad.

Justinn and Cory were brave enough to take all of the kids to Maine in the summer to see his dad. They flew into Boston and took a car to Maine allowing them to do a lot of sightseeing, including spending a night with my nephew Jason and his family in Boston. Justinn still teaches the second grade and Cory is loving his new tech job. The two of them make a great couple. They have a wonderful family and I have to say - I am very thankful for my creative, hard working, fun loving, free spirited, “little girl”!

Perry and Sammy stay busy with work and three teenagers in highschool. This year Perry built Sammy a new office (with some help from Ryan) that looks amazing! Perry got a new truck this year. He and Sammy have done a wonderful job raising four great kids. When I started the Family News in 1992, I had my doubts about Perry, but he has become one of the best young men I know! He is a strong rock for our clan. I am proud of you son!

TJ and Angela are doing well. They had a great time on the cruise to Mexico with Marc and Leo. They still live in DeFuniak on the south side of town. Angela got a new ride this year. TJ was with Kathy even longer than I was. We all miss her. I know Kathy was VERY proud of him. As the oldest of our kids, he often had to help out the most and he always did it without complaining. Hard to believe he is 45 this month. Thank you for all you do TJ!! He has touched many lives and all for the good.

Taylor is 20 and working at McDonalds. She is living with AJ (Aunt Justinn) because she can walk to work. I am very proud of my red headed, blue eyed granddaughter. She is a gentle soul and has a lot of patience and a kind heart. The Family News has featured Taylor for the past 20 years. She can see her whole life in these photos over the years.

Kacey turned 17 last January and is a senior in highschool. I remember all of the grandkids camping in our backyard ten years ago and I wonder how can that sweet little girl now be a senior in highschool? Fly high and far Kacey!! You have an amazing future ahead of you.

Caitlynn is 16 and has her drivers license. She is a junior in highschool. For the past few years she has gotten very good at cornhole and has always been one of my favorite cornhole partners. I predict great things are waiting for this young lady.

Angel is also 16 and has her drivers license. She drove me around in the golf cart on our family camping trip and I can certify she is a safe driver. She is a sophomore in highschool and is kind, polite, intelligent, and beautiful. She has my blue eyes and she will always be my angel. Ryan is a sophomore in highschool. He is 15 and has his learners permit and loves fishing and sports, especially playing baseball. He is a hard working, polite young man and I am very proud of him, so is his mom and dad.

Abigail turned 12 in October. She found a geocaching stash at family camping faster than the older kids and that includes the adults!! Abigail is taking advanced science at the middle school and she is one of the smartest 12 year olds I have ever known (and that includes me)! I look forward to all of the creative, energetic, and amazing things she will do.

Captain James T Kurtz is seven and is in the second grade. He wears glasses and this year he lost his two front teeth. He smiled when I showed him a picture of his mom without her front teeth. He played soccer this year and is very good on his scooters and hoverboard. He does a good job being the only boy with three sisters. I know Kathy would be proud of him (I am)!

Acadia (better known as Cadie) just turned four this past November. I promised Kathy I would not let the grandchildren forget their Memaw. Cadie is probably the most photogenic of all the kids. She always has a smile! So Cadie, this picture is for you. I hope you remember the smiles on both of these faces in the years to come.

Deb and I met at the highest point on the FL Trail last year. We decided to hike to the highest points in different states this year (AL, SC, FL, MS, AK, & LA). We also hiked some of the Foothills trail in SC along with more miles on the FL Trail. We have now hiked 300 miles of the FL trail so far. Deb joined us at our annual family camping trip and we had a blast.

We returned to St Andrews state park for the first time since Hurricane Michael in 2018. We had a wonderful time, but the park does not look the same with most of the trees gone. I should mention that did not hurt our corn hole skills (at least not mine and Perry's since we went undefeated this year). There's nothing like sitting around a campfire at night, especially once the fireball comes out (thanks to Perry). The adult e-scooters I bought were a big hit! We enjoyed sunsets on the beach and had great weather for camping.

I continue my daily bike rides, kayak often, and take Max for a walk each day (he also loves to go kayaking and hiking with me). Max has been a true blessing to me. He is loved by Deb along with friends and neighbors Dan and Janet (who spoil him)! It is safe to say, Max is loved by many and is living the good life.

The above photo was taken at our annual family camping trip at St Andrews State Park in 2022. Kathy and I had an amazing life together. I cherish all the photos of her and the newsletters that told much of our story for 30 years. I have grouped past newsletters into two separate volumes of 15 years each. Click the link below if you want to go down memory lane. Note: it may take time to download the pdf files (especially the first volume). I am looking forward to more hikes and adventures in the coming years with Deb. She and her son Rollin (who will soon be an officer in the Army) are a big part of my life. My life has been better since meeting Deb! I am grateful for my siblings, as well as my wonderful family! I love you all! The time has come to

end the Family News. I hope you have had a wonderful 2022 and I hope that 2023 and the years after are great years! From the editor (aka Tommie). In Peace!

Merry Christmas!

Favorite Quotes:
“I found things in the woods that I didn’t know I was looking for.” Jennifer Pharr Davis

“Two roads diverged in a wood and I - I took the one less traveled.” Robert Frost

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View past family newsletters at: http://hosttg.com/fn

Chapter 32
Family News Trivia

Without a doubt the hardest newsletter was in 2019, the year both Kathy and my mother died. I almost stopped doing the newsletters that year, but I could hear Kathy's voice in my head telling me to keep doing them.

Now, I am glad that I continued, but after 30 years (in 2022) I decided it was time to stop. I combined the newsletters into a single pdf file complete with the original color photographs (see the link below):

http://hosttg.com/fn/

I hope reformatting the newsletter and combining them into this book format will give others (especially my family) a glimpse into our lives over the years and always remind them of the value of family.

While creating this book I had to reformat and proofread past newsletters. As I reread 30 years worth of newsletters, I thought - it might be interesting to compile some Family News newsletter trivia.

Here is a little trivia from the past 30 years:

The first family newsletter appeared in 1992 and the last one in 2022.

Combining all of the newsletters over the years, there are a total of 118 pages with 532 photographs.

In 1994 the first pictures were used in the Family News newsletter.

The first color photos were used in 1995.

No quotes were used in the years 2002, 2003, and 2004.

The only two years when there was not a newsletter in December were 1992 and 1993.

In 2013 the exact same photograph of me and Kathy was used on both the first page and the last page of the same newsletter.

Even though pictures were first used in 1994, there were no photographs of me in 1994, just Kathy and the kids.

There were also no photographs of me in the 2001 newsletter.

Here are the number of times the following members of our clan are in a newsletter picture:

150 Kathy
121 Justinn
119 Tommie
117 Taylor
110 Marc

93 Perry
86 TJ
81 Angel
79 Caitlynn
57 Abigail
49 Kacey
48 Ryan
47 Cory
44 Angela
43 Sammy
32 Captain
25 Leo
11 Cadie

In 1994 and 2010 the same Shakespeare quote was used.

"*To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man*." William Shakespeare

In 2001 and 2016 the same Chinese proverb quote was used.

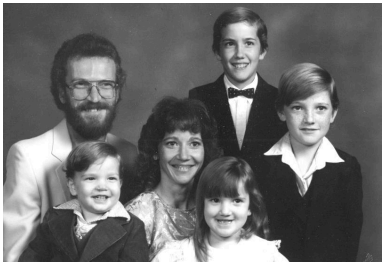
"*It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness*." Chinese proverb

More trivia from photographs used in this book:

The photographs in each of the chapters below show the changes in our growing clan.

- Clan size: 6, Introduction - photograph from 1988
- Clan size: 7, Chapter 9 - 2000
- Clan size: 9, Chapter 14 - 2005 (first family photograph with Cory, Taylor)
- Clan size: 13, Chapter 16 - 2007 (first family photograph with Angela, Caitlynn, Angel)
- Clan size: 13, Chapter 18 - 2009 (first family photograph with Sammy)
- Clan size: 17, Chapter 25 - 2016 (first family photograph with Leo, Kacey, Ryan, Abigail, and Captain)
- Clan size: 17, Chapter 27 - 2018 (last family camping photograph with Kathy)
- Clan size: 17, Chapter 29 - 2020 (first family photograph without Kathy)
- Clan size: 18, Chapter 31 - 2022 (first family photograph with Deb)
- Clan size: 18, Chapter 33 - 2018 (first family photograph with Cadie and last family photograph with Kathy)

Chapter 33
Final Words And Photographs (2023)







The above photographs show our clan size when it was 6 in 1988. It is followed by a family picture of me, Kathy, and all four kids 30 years later in 2018. It became the last photo of the original clan of 6. The most recent picture (the one on the bottom) shows the remaining original 5 in 2020.



Clan Size: 18
(First family photograph with Cadie)

The above photograph is the only family picture with both Cadie and Kathy (Kathy died six months after this photograph was taken).

"*In family life, love is the oil that eases friction, the cement that binds closer together, and the music that brings harmony.*" –Friedrich Nietzsche

Even though we are near the end of this book, the story of our growing clan will continue for many, many years to come.

I cannot imagine my life without my wonderful family and the treasured memories we share. We continue to make

new memories each year, especially during our annual family camping trips that we have been doing every year since 2013.

I am proud of each of our four kids (TJ, Perry, Justinn, and Marc) and the successful lives they have built. Each of them are healthy and happy and carving out their best lives in their own ways.

I am thankful for each of my children's spouses (Angela, Sammy, Cory, and Leo). They have added so much to our clan and the fun times we have together. They are a big part of "*the cement that binds us closer together*."

My eight grandchildren (Taylor, Kacey, Caitlynn, Angel, Ryan, Abigail, Captain James, and Cadie) give me hope for the future and always put a smile on my face when I think of them. They bring the "light of life" to our clan in so many ways. I hope this book always reminds them they are part of our unique clan and the importance of families in our lives.

After Kathy died, Max (Kathy's Yorkie) and I began hiking on the Florida Trail. Max has been a true blessing, a faithful companion, and the best hiking and kayaking dog ever. He along with neighbors Dan and Janet and my friend Sinder helped me through some very rough times after Kathy died.

Hiking the Florida Trail has been therapeutic for both me and Max, not only for how it helped me move forward

(which is something I promised Kathy I would do), but it also opened the door for me to meet Deb.

Below is an article published this year (2023) in "Footprint" Magazine, (a quarterly publication of the Florida Trail Association). They selected an article I submitted in early 2023 that describes how I met Deb on the Florida Trail.



How The Florida Trail Changed Our Lives

By Tommie Gipson

I discovered the Florida trail from a youtube channel a few months after my wife died unexpectedly. We were married 37 years and losing her left a huge hole in my life. I decided to get outside more and began section

hiking the trail near my home in the panhandle. Hiking with my wife's Yorkie became therapeutic for both me and her dog. Being in nature and soaking in the quiet stillness of life all around, helped heal the deep wound in my heart.

One day while hiking to the highest point, I stumbled on something I could not believe. There is a bench at the highest point along with a sign. Two ladies had covered the bench with a tablecloth of the American flag. On top of that, was wine, cheese, grapes, crackers, and chocolate. I knew we were at least five miles from the closest road and just had to stop and talk to them. They had been section hiking from the northern terminus over one hundred miles away and decided to celebrate. They loved my dog and asked me to join them. I took out a beer from my pack and sat down next to them.

We hit it off and I began weekly section hikes with them heading SOBO. Eventually one of the ladies (who was 71) decided she had gone far enough, but Deb and I continued hiking. Deb returned to the northern terminus and re-hiked the trail back to the highest point with me.

That was almost two years ago. Together Deb and I have section hiked over 300 miles from the northern terminus all of the way through Bradwell Bay in the Apalachicola National Forest (including the connector trail through Blackwater Forest to Alabama).

Deb was not sure what direction to turn before she discovered hiking. She tells people, hiking literally saved her life. When she was hiking, all was well with the world and she could once again see the magical mysteries of life.

We both allowed the Florida trail to change our lives. Together we have enjoyed the diverse beauty of the Florida trail and the wonders of nature. After many miles on the trail, we have become more than just the best hiking and camping friends ever. We have bonded in ways that can only come from hiking miles and miles together. Hiking the Florida trail has changed our lives in beneficial ways neither of us could have imagined. We will forever be grateful for finding each other at the highest point on the Florida Trail.

Deb came into my life over two years ago and has captured my heart. She is already helping to bring lots of fun memories to our clan. I suspect Deb will be a big part of why the next thirty years will be so exciting.

Deb enjoys taking photos while we are hiking. In 2023 she submitted a couple of her photographs for the 2024 Florida Trail calendar contest. One of her photos was selected from the hundreds of pictures submitted.



Deb is very talented and creative. She enjoys hiking, camping, and kayaking. She is a fan of being debt free and simple living. She has a Masters Degree in Education and works at the University of West Florida. She plans to retire in January of 2024.

Deb and I have a lot in common. We both enjoy hiking, camping, kayaking, and being outside. We both like things organized and a clean house. We also like to scratch things off of our to do lists. We both enjoy reading and good music. Add her good looks to the mix and it is no wonder, I began to fall for her once we began hiking together. Sometimes I call her my “hippie” girl because of her free spirit and adventuresome nature.

We have already made many, many memories including hiking, camping, riding scooters, biking, parasailing, geocaching, kayaking, and traveling throughout the southeast.

We met at the highest point on the FL trail in 2021 and since then we have hiked or driven to the highest points in the following states: FL, AL, SC, MS, AK, LA, MO, and OK.

I am grateful Deb and her son Rollin are in my life.

Our clan is growing. I hope to be around thirty years from now to see just how big our clan grows.

This book took over thirty years to write. It is … satisfying to look back over the pages and read the old newsletters. We enjoyed exciting times and many fun filled years. Hopefully the next thirty years will be just as much fun.

"*Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family.*" –Anthony Brandt

The photographs below were taken at our annual family camping trip in 2023.



Clan Size: 18

Our growing clan continued our annual family camping tradition and gathered at a campground with a water park near Milton, FL in 2023.

Deb and I scratched off a bucket list item and stayed in a covered wagon while camping. We had to admit it was a lot more comfortable than sleeping in our tent. The kids and grandchildren all stayed in RV's this year.

Everyone had a great time at this year's annual family camping trip. Corn hole, the lazy river, the water slides, arcade room, good food, and the adult only pool were very popular, but the best part was spending time with family.



Clan Size: 21
Includes Macee - (Ryan's girlfriend), Dugan - (Taylor's boyfriend), and Rollin - (Deb's son who is in the Army and was unable to be in the photo)

I will end this book with a chapter of quotes that were used in the Family News newsletter over the past 30 years. I hope the quotes encourage and inspire you.

One final note to my children and grandchildren: it is true that I tried to show our best side when doing the newsletter each year. But at the end of the day, there is nothing wrong with that.

Yes, we faced some bad days, some years more than others, but I hope reading past newsletters for 30 years will help you remember the many, many, many good

days we have enjoyed. I wish you all good health and happiness. Life is an amazing thing!!

In peace - TG (editor).

Chapter 34

Family News Quotes:

1992:

“We play our part, here upon the stage without the need to fully understand the final plot. We do not need to know the plot because we know the playwright.”

“Sometimes it is better to know what you cannot do than what you can do.”

“Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.”

1993:

“The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none.”

1994:

“To thine own self be true and it must follow as the night, the day, thou cans’t not be false to any man.” William Shakespeare

1995:

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.” Henry David Thoreau

1996:

“If fifty million people say a stupid thing, it is still a stupid thing.” Leroy Jack Syrop

1997:

“He who knows, does not speak. He who speaks, does not know.”

1998:

“Patience, patience, patience is what the sea teaches. Patience and faith. One should lie empty, open, choiceless as a beach, waiting for a gift from the sea.” Anne Morrow Lindbergh

1999:

“We haven’t the time to take our time.” Eugene Ionesco

2000:

“Happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but which if you will sit down quietly, may alight on you.” Nathaniel Hawthorne

2001:

“An expert is one who knows more and more about less and less, until he knows absolutely everything about nothing.”

“It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” Chinese proverb

2002, 2003, and 2004 - no quotes were used.

2005:

“One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say.” –Will Durant

“I have often regretted my speech, never my silence.” Publilius Syrus (~100 BC), Maxims

2006:

“Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.” Confucius

“You have succeeded in life when all you really want is only what you really need.” Vernon Howard

2007:

“A man should look for what is, and not for what he thinks should be.” Albert Einstein

2008:

“Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.” Marc Twain

2009:

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.” Henry David Thoreau

2010:
"To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." William Shakespeare

2011:

"Don't sweat the small stuff and it's all small stuff." -Richard Carlson

2012:

"Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect." Marc Twain.

2013:

"Health is the greatest possession. Contentment is the greatest treasure." Lao Tzu

2014:

"Happy is he who forgets ... what cannot be changed." Marc Twain

2015:

"Rainbows introduce us to reflections of different beautiful possibilities so we never forget that pain and grief are not the final options in life." -- Aberjhani

2016:

“It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.” Chinese Proverb

2017:

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” Oscar Wilde

2018:

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." Ferris Bueller

2019:

"The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living." Marcus Tullius Cicero

2020:

"Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience." Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees." Henry David Thoreau

2021:

“Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds.” George Elliot

2022:

“I found things in the woods that I didn’t know I was looking for.” Jennifer Pharr Davis

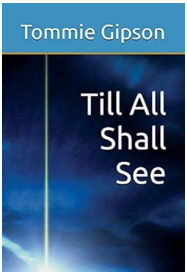
“Two roads diverged in a wood and I - I took the one less traveled” Robert Frost

The End

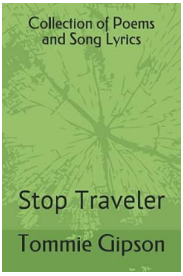
Books by Tommie Gipson:



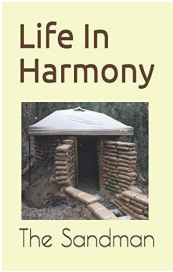
(2023)



(2023)



(2021)



(2018)