

Merry Christmas, 2008

To our dear friends and family members,

We wish you peace and grace this Christmas and all year long. Our years keep being filled with gifts and blessings, the most important of whom are all of you. There cannot be a Clayton-Diggles-Hamilton Christmas letter without an introductory photo of the Angel On Top. This year we have three angels including the sister we got for our daughter: Kim. She is a foreign exchange girl from Frankfort and we get to keep her until nearly July 2009.



Angel on Top

For most of the last five years, we end our holiday season at Big Sur. We used to stay at an inn there but since we bought Button, our cute (as a button) Airstream on eBay last year, we do Glamour Camping. We stay in the redwoods, watch sunsets, sip wine, and watch storms while we stay warm.



Big Sur

For the last three years, we have hosted students from Bogotá for about a week each January. This year, Erika joined us. While she was staying at our house, Clara Rojas and Consuelo González were freed by the Fare; it was wonderful.

http://www.diggles.com/photography/2008/080106-13_Erika_from_Colombia/080110_Fentons_with_Colombians/ has more photos.



Erika from Colombia

Deanna and I both turned a new decade this year. We had 110 candles on our cakes. There was a lot of smoke in the room after we got them all blown out. Pop-quiz time; this is one of those "two-equations-and-two-unknowns" math problems and there is not a unique solution but name two numbers that are divisible by 10 and add up to 110. At least you figured out that we are not quite the same age.

http://www.diggles.com/photography/2008/080223_Decadal_birthday/ is a photo collection from the event. The house was full of little kids, church folks, lots of nursing and geology colleagues, and a refreshing number of folks decades older than we.



110 candles

Each Spring Break, we travel down to Santa Monica to visit my oldest sister, Linda and enjoy gatherings of friends and family in southern California. It is always a joy to visit Joy, my niece Kathryn's daughter. We took Maurie's friend Nia from school. Her friend Amanda from church stayed up north for one of her moms' birthday and then flew down to join us half way through. Maurie and Nia hit Disneyland; Deanna and I hit an Airstream-supply shop in Corona and got a new cover for the front of Button. It makes her look like [Gort](#) from *When the World Stood Still*.



Easter with Joy at Linda's

We proceeded from Linda's to Aunt Sue's and thence to the Yosemite Association meeting all in the same whirlwind week. Y'know how some people select books by author? Well, we pick seminars by speaker. We attended a field class on ceanothus by Joe Medeiros and one on lichens by Margaret Eissler. Yosemite is a small town; while we were there, Meli, the girl across the street at home, happened to be visiting also. And, of course, the Spring run-off was in full swing and the falls were just gushing. It was glorious.



Amanda, Nia, Maurie, and Meli in Yosemite

This Glamour Camping is pretty cool. My friend Paul Sumi invited me and my camera gear to join him in

Death Valley while the Spring wildflowers were still to be found, albeit at higher elevations and farther north than a week or two earlier. Paul and I met at 200 feet below sea level about midnight, made camp, and were up before dawn the next day to shoot dunes. We pretty well were shooting sunrises and sunsets the entire time and took naps in the afternoon when the sun angle was undesirable for photography. We made a spike camp at 4,000' in the Last Chance Range one night (after 50 miles on a dirt road in 4WD). We watched the sun go down, the moon come up, the moon go down, the sun come up, then drove 50 miles back to Button and had hot showers and cold beers. http://www.diggles.com/photography/2008/080417-22_Death_Valley/ has all the images.



Death Valley

A year in the making, our book *Antarctica: A Keystone in a Changing World* came out and is available from National Academies Press. It is the tenth such book in the series in 40 years but the first to hit the street in under a year after the symposium. <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2007/1047/> is the full text



Antarctica publication

Our dear friends Mary Jane and Chris got married this year. They are very sweet to each other and Maurie was protective of MJ; she made sure Chris was good enough for her. He was, so the wedding proceeded. http://www.diggles.com/photography/2008/080315_Mary_Jane_shower/ is her shower but guess what? Somebody else photographed the wedding; Yay!



At Mary Jane and Chris' wedding



Mom teaches the kid some moves

My cousin Wayne has wanted to go back to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and this time take his college roommate. But as luck would have it, a snowboarder slammed into him and busted his shoulder so he had to stay home. So he gave me his reservations (people wait a year to get those and still miss out). So I grabbed one of my editors, Jim Hendley, and off we went. Jim got his Masters in Paleontology at Vanderbilt but the poor guy did his thesis on the Ordovician; that time period is missing from the rocks of the Grand Canyon; they jump from Cambrian up to Mississippian. But he suffered gracefully having to look at a billion years or so of other rocks. We drove out one day and slept on the ground up on the rim. The next day we played Tourist and recovered from the drive. The third day we left our camp set up and hiked 5,000' to the bottom where we used Wayne's reservations at Phantom Ranch; hot dinner, soft bunk, and warm shower. We were up before dawn (a lot of that in 2008) and were a couple thousand feet up before the heat came on, had our Red Bulls at the base of the Redwall Limestone ("Red Bull Limestone" and had beers in the one bar at the top

where you can come in sweaty. See <http://www.diggles.com/grandcanyon/> for lots of photos.



Grand Canyon

And no fair looking at the following photo before you answer this pop-quiz question: How old is Maurie now?

http://www.diggles.com/photography/2008/080629_Maurie_16_bday/ is a bunch of shots of good friends celebrating this milestone.



Maurie at 16

We make it to Yosemite at least two times each year: the Yosemite Association Spring Forum (see above) and their Fall Meeting. The Fall gathering is in Wawona every other year (and Tuolumne the other years) so off we went with Button; our friends Helen,

Lisa, Cara, and Kyle joined us. On our way home, Button bent a wheel spindle and we had to abandon her behind the firehouse in Wawona. I had been wanting this new drive train since I saw it earlier at the shop where he bought the Gort so I just had 'em ship it. Mary Jane came down and helped me cut the old axle out and bolt in the new one. Button now sits 4" higher with good suspension, has fresh shocks, new bearings, and upgraded hydraulic disc brakes. The water heater failed next and I got an upgraded version bolted in (normal gas plus added electric) just in time to drive back to Yosemite with Deanna for our fifth wedding anniversary. We discovered this place in El Portal just down the Merced River gorge from The Valley and it has full hookups (sleeping on the ground is fine for paleontologists).



Button repair-job in Yosemite

This was quite the year for being thankful for health insurance. Deanna, you might recall, had her shoulder in the shop a year ago but it had to go back in for a tune-up this year. And you've heard the term "like mother like daughter." Maurie was at a Church gathering in southern California (the day of the earthquake) and leapt off of one of those air-filled slides. She was so far out in space that by the time she came down, the slide was somewhere behind her. So her foot took the hit. Following is a photo of my two ladies in their Little Black uh..., er..., slings and casts: Last year was characterized by Maurie having braces on her knees so it kept her from doing much dance. So when she showed up in dance class this year with her foot in a cast instead, she sat in the back hidden behind other girls. That worked for several minutes. When the teacher finally saw (caught) her, she teased Maurie with this summary as she lifted her hands from side to side: "Pick a bone—any bone." Maurie is presently dancing five days a week at school and also after school at Destiny Arts Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays.



One in a sling; one in a cast

Dear Neva made it to 100. Bless her. She is one of those gifts about which I wrote earlier. She is not longer with us and we are quite sad about that but we thank God for all of the years we had her. http://www.diggles.com/photography/2008/080920_Neva_at_100_years_old/ is her birthday party and what a grand gathering it was.



Neva at 100

We've been getting our money's worth out of our National Park annual pass. I think it covered Yosemite five times, Death Valley once, and Grand Canyon once. I forget how many years before I get one of those fogies ones that are cheaper.



Fifth anniversary; dinner at the Ahwahnee Hotel

You got an inkling about our new family member earlier. We are on the Skyline High School listserv messages and one day the call went out that a family was needed for a student from Germany. As I recall, Deanna got the message, Maurie got the message, and I got the message. We all independently thought it would be wonderful to respond; "We'll take her!" So we cleaned out the guest room and Kim is now also our daughter until June. Oh, OK; she'll always be our daughter now; she's delightful. Remember that "gift" stuff I wrote earlier? She is the youngest kid in her family and has a sister who is in Washington, D.C. at the moment so the two sisters got together there over Thanksgiving. But we will have her for Christmas, her 18th birthday, Disneyland, Yosemite, homework... Yeah, all of that.



Kim joins our family

Oh, did I mention that Yosemite is big in this family? For my tenth year in a row, a few of us adults took 60 eleven-year-olds to Yosemite for a science-education camp with the Yosemite Institute. The rockfall at Curry complicated housing a bit but we pulled it off. See <http://www.diggles.com/yi/2008/> for just 400 photos of the event.



Yosemite with sixth-graders

We are off to dine at Susan and Wayne's for Christmas (Deanna and I hosted Thanksgiving) so there will be much food and lots of joy and love in a couple of weeks. Be sure you all do the same, at least that love part; that's the most important.



Merry Christmas from all of us including the Furry People

Have a grand and peaceful Christmas and New Year,
 -Michael, Deanna, Maurie, and Kim
 -Lilly, Luv Dove, Yo Yo, Lola, and Jazz

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