



Greetings from the Apfelbeck family!



18 December 2008

Yep, it was a spectacularly dull year up here at the edge of the treeline, which is really just the way we like it. Isa and I just sat down to discuss where we went and what we did, and it was truly one of the most pleasantly uneventful years of our lives. The only really long distance trip we took was the same one everyone else took around the sun. Otherwise, Isa hasn't been out of the state all year long - a few trips to Fairbanks and Anchorage. Joe went out to Fairbanks for a basketball camp and went to a buddy's house down in Soldotna. I had a conference in Colorado and went to the wedding of two friends in Chicago in July, but otherwise,



most of the time has been spent north of the 60th parallel. Isa and I decided that we would save money and just relax this year. We did buy a small boat - a 17-foot Roughneck with a 50-hp motor. It's not the monster yachts that you sometimes see on the Yukon River, but on the other hand, we'll be able to afford getting out on the river most weekends in the summer. OK, so here's the year in review.



Last Christmas we decided to go to Anchorage and introduce Joe to skiing. Joe loved it; Isa and I really enjoyed ourselves, too. Anchorage has a little ski area right in town, which was easy to get to and easy for a 9-year-old to learn on. We also took a trip down Turnigan Arm to Alyeska, which is more Alpine-style resort. Joe and I had an interesting time sliding down the mountain on our butts when we accidentally went down the black diamond slope.



JoJo at the Huslia Little League tournament in July; Joe showing off the spruce grouse he got one Saturday in September, when the birds gather along the roads and pick at the gravel (he later cooked them, too); Joe playing for the Little Hawks in March; Joe yukking it up at his birthday party on March 19.

Spring came and went; Mom was here for Joe's birthday, which he appreciated. I had pneumonia for a week in April, which was an experience in illness, but fortunately it happened at the end of the year, so I wheezed into class, slapped some finals onto desks, coughed a lot, and graded papers.



The summer was a typically Alaskan experience. Usually we joke that summer was



Garden stuff, clockwise from bottom: Gloxinia; Green Acre cabbage; neighbor kid with a daikon radish; Isa in the brocolli; cauliflower; poppies, marigolds, and allysum; inside the greenhouse in late June.



great - "This year it came on a Thursday" - but 2008 was actually like that. We had frosts through the first week of June, another light frost at the end of July, and a week of killing frosts the third week of August. A growing season of 74 days. Fortunately, salmon don't care, so our freezer is full, and we managed to get enough veggies and berries for the winter anyway. No beans or pumpkins, though.

Steve and Sarah invited me down to their wedding in Chicago (actually, northern Illinois near the Iowa-Wisconsin border) and wanted me to take photos of their wedding, which I loved to do. It's nice to think that my photos are on the walls of a dozen different homes right now. Steve and Sarah worked as resident advisors at the boarding school dorms, and they used to hang with us at least once a week. Great guys.



The back yard in mid July.

Isa sewed (put together?) several quilts for the Galena Ag Fair, and helped organize it, and it was a real hit here in the community. She's been sewing a lot of quilts lately, and has started to tan her own hides for sewing. Joe and I took part in the canoe races, and of course my stuff won a bunch of prizes. A bunch of folks from the University of Alaska came to Galena to look at my garden (and others around town) and I've been invited to take part in a con-



Joe and his dad during the canoe races at the Ag Fair in August.

ference later this year. I'll be doing seed trials and so forth for the school out here.

Leanne sent me some cool potato varieties from a place down in Maine and the university folks were really interested in those. They were also interested in seeing what could be done on a limited budget out here, since the nearest Home Depot is about 300 miles away.

Joe is doing well. He is near the top of his class academically and plays basketball and baseball. He's on a school team called the Little Hawks (after the school mascot) and runs like a little bullet out there. He is also in the Little League and

went with the team to the tournament in Huslia (check it out on the map - if you think Galena is isolated, you ain't seen nothing). Joe is also learning how to play the guitar and he'll perform a little for the Christmas pageant on Thursday (December 18). One of the advantages to being 300 miles from the ACLU is that the school calls the Christmas Pageant... the Christmas Pageant. Yeah, we're primitives. We'll send pictures.

In the realm of trying to keep up with stuff, I'm going to rearrange the web page so it is more interactive. I'm teaching myself PHP, which is a fancy way of saying you'll be able to

use the site for instant messaging and leaving notes (once I figure out how! LOL). As always I aim to be better with getting up-to-date photos on the page. My aim isn't so hot sometimes, though.

For the upcoming year, we hope to start exploring this country in the boat. Hopefully, we'll come home with a moose in the fall. As far as travel goes, we love to stay up here during the summer, when the weather is nice, and you have no idea unless you've been here how enjoyable the mid-night sun can be. Unless you're Mom and you manage to break your shoulder when the dog pulls on the leash.



Joe and his mom looking at a local pond at the start of fall.

That little incident was quite exciting. Mom came up for Isa's 50th birthday. I put on a nice party for her, and bought her a 32-inch flat screen television, since she wanted to watch the Olympics. (The television worked right until the gymnastics event, at which time it fell apart, giving us the "blinking green light of death." Sharp sent us two other sets, neither of which worked, leaving us to conclude that the acronym POS means "Piece of Sharp.")

Anyway, Mom was bringing in our little puppy and the dog pulled on the leash a bit too hard, causing Mom to fall -

and breaking the shoulder and several bones. We went to Fairbanks and got everything fixed there, and she had to go to physical therapy for a long while. Not the Alaskan vacation she had planned.

Isa is also working with the Catholic Church in these parts as the lay leader. There's a priest shortage (at least here in North America - in Asia and Africa, the church is booming), and the local Father was called to another church earlier this year. Isa and some of the other leaders in the community stepped up and

lead Mass and do the daily work needed to keep the church operating. You'd be impressed and proud.

We'd like to get out next winter at some time. We realized our error when the sun rose this morning at 11:31 a.m. and we haven't been Outside all year. We'll remedy that next year by making sure we're getting enough vitamin D at the right time of year.

Be well and thanks for keeping in touch throughout the year! Have a happy and prosperous 2009.

Paul, Isabella, and Joe



From top to bottom: A summer day on the Yukon River, looking toward Galena; me at the canoe races; our friend John Korta leaving Galena with his Iditarod sled dog team; Joe at the Yukon Jamboree; Isa on the banks of the river; a typical meadow in the boreal forest.

