

December 14, 2009
Tucson, AZ

Well, it's about to happen again: you'll squander 8 perfectly good minutes that you could have used making 8 unique servings of minute rice reading our Christmas letter instead. So what's been going on this year at Chez Sprinklé? Well, put down your chopsticks to find out. You might recall that in 2008 we successfully upgraded to Sprinkle 3.0, and as it ended up we started our year entertaining visitors, and finished it up visiting entertainers.

Our first visitor was our friend Mary from Berkeley, who visited us in February after visiting some family in the area. That went so well that we convinced George-Andrew's "Pops" (Rick Webb) to come out for almost a week, and GA's feet never touched the ground. During this time he made a few pilgrimages to the In-n-Out, and made sure to keep GA's sugar levels at rates not seen since Buddy The Elf came and made us pancakes and coffee.

In March, we made a special trip to Berkeley to visit some of our friends who were also living there when we did. This was great fun, we got to see our friends that are still Berkeley-based, and share what were to become new memories with our friends the Geyers and the Eklunds, including such famous hits as "the crazy car wreck," "late nights after the kids go to sleep, the parents become the kids," and many others. Regrettably, the bottle of Scotch turned out not to be bottomless, but we made up for it with lots of coffee from Peet's that turned magically into espresso. After we got back from Berkeley, CiCi (Cindy Webb) came out to make sure that Pops had spoiled GA enough. We had lots of good times on the back porch, enjoying the Spring warmth and the cute baby. It was much more fun than video-chatting, but we did lots of that throughout the year too.

You might remember from last year that Jon spent some significant portion of his time writing proposals (you might recall the workload breakdown was 50% writing papers, 50% writing proposals, 80% teaching, and 35% service to the University, with extra time devoted to the study of Reaganomics). It turns out that quite a few of them got funded. Now he doesn't have any time because he's busy doing the work that Uncle Sam is paying him and his students to do. The Economy got a good jolt from this, but (after arbitration) declined to press charges, in exchange for Jon being more careful about exposed wires. Step 2: write lots of papers. He's still researching unmanned systems, and this time next year he will have both unmanned aircraft, and an unmanned Ford Escape.

Mary Margaret is continuing her influence on the iPlant project. She pitched a few new ideas this year, including "iPlot it yourself" and "iPlant Touch", but sadly the management didn't invest in either of these technologies, deciding instead to continue their focus on cyber-infrastructure for plant sciences. As usual, she's doing the work of several dozen people, and ensuring that future generations can duplicate Mendel's pea experiments using faster and faster computers, I guess. Her official title changed from "Assistant to the Project Manager" to "Assistant Project Manager" last month. And she doesn't even have a Froggy 101 sticker at her desk.

You might be wondering what we do with George-Andrew while we're both at work. After deciding not to keep him on the sly under our desks, or carry him to lecture, we enrolled him in a daycare, which is really much more like a school than we ever imagined. And, as it turns out, the daycare is Jewish. He gets to go to a Shabbat service every Friday, and has dance class, and crafts. He is learning signs, and can even use some of them fairly well. Common signs are "more", "all done", and "You call this Matzo-ball soup? Ehhhhh..."

When not in school, GA is walking (and running), standing on tip-toes to see how close the sharp knives are to the edge of the counter, and babbling dramatically. He has "words" that he uses, but you have to have a pretty good amount of training to translate. He likes clocks and will start dancing to our chime clocks when they go off. He also enjoys Scrat from the Ice Age movies, for reasons that we may never really fully understand. When Scrat's on the screen, though, the kid stops moving and provides his undivided attention.

OK, back to our agenda for the year. We visited Nashville in May, to see Jon's brother Gabe and wife Jen graduate. It was really fun to see everyone mid-year, instead of only at Christmas time. We were so proud to be there, and to be able to spend time with everyone. As a bonus, we had a great meal at Miller's Grocery.

The Sprinkle grandparents came to visit in July, so as to get the full Tucson Monsoon Experience. We also took some time to go to the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas. Papa Ken decided not to collect the "look here for free information" cards they handed out on the strip. If you've never been to Vegas, you might still be able to guess why. Mama Teresa enjoyed seeing the topography of the ranges and basins¹, and even enjoyed the fountain show at the Bellagio, though not as much as the volcano at the Mirage. We did stay in a classy hotel (5-Star room prices at the Trump were lower than the 21st Avenue Hampton Inn in Nashville) that included such amenities as a widescreen TV in the main room, a TV in the bathroom mirror, a TV in the TV, and many others.

We also reunited with some Tennis-Shoe Tech friends this year—coincidentally, at the Grand Canyon and Vegas. We reprised all our old jokes and remembered how fun it was to hang out at someone else's house (we rented a home in Vegas for the weekend) instead of go to class (i.e., it was not at a classy hotel). Especially poignant was meeting the kids of our friends, and realizing we were all grown up, and then playing cards at night and realizing we were all still kids. The list of memoirs includes Tim Whiteaker's mortar and pestle, the caffeine high you get from betting blackjack with coffee beans, and Minnie Others.

In October we went to see GA's Godparents (oh, and for Jon to attend a conference). Denver in early October was fun: we got to see snow on the mountains, pick pumpkins, do hay-mazes, and see farm animals. Barry and Chelsey also have lots of pets, and GA learned up close and personal how to get licked by a "bow bow".

The second trip in October landed us in Orlando. We visited with some of MM's family, and spent a few days at Disneyworld². We visited almost all the theme parks by the time it was over, but in the end, GA's two favorites things to do were (a) play in the water features at our hotel, and (b) walk around in front of other people while they were looking elsewhere, and (c) Mickey Others. He may have enjoyed Disney more between the ages of 2-5, but as MM and I both enjoyed it like we were 25 years younger, it averaged out.

Well, that almost does it for what happened this year, so we'll give you a sneak peek at next year. After our successful migration to v3.0, we are excited to announce that we are currently somewhere around v3.3, and will be completing our upgrade to version 4.0 sometime in the middle of June of 2010. Since we're still in Beta mode, no ideas on whether GA will have a little brother or little sister, but we know there's just one of them.

Despite sleep deprivation and basic exhaustion, we did manage to stay tuned in to a few pop culture concepts this year. We're fairly active on FaceBook, so look for us on there and you won't have to wait a whole year to find out what sex the baby is. We also watched *Burn Notice*, *Doc Martin*, *The Closer*, and *Better Off Ted*, among our usual haunts.

To all of you who have left us, or whom we have left: Merry Christmas. Our thoughts are with you, and our prayers are always there when you need them. To those of you with us now, thanks for giving us these new times; we know that in years to come our eyes will well remember, and the words of *Auld Lang Syne* will bring us back to now.

Jon, Mary Margaret, and George-Andrew

¹ Ooooh, you've got a dirty mind. It's geology we're talking about here, not those cards.

² Our room contained the Disney Vault in our closet, which GA liked to program.