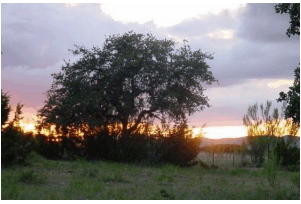


Dearest Friends and Family:

December 2006



From the Texas Hill Country, Chad and I wish you a safe holiday and a rewarding, prosperous, and fun 2007. This year brought trips to and visits from special folks, life changes, and minor disasters--in other words, a quite normal year around here.

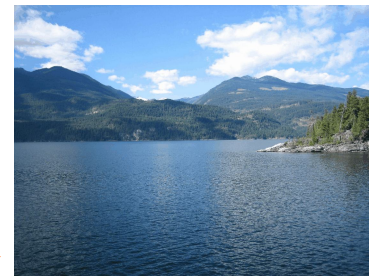
I took the plunge in August and retired from Child Support in the Attorney General's Office. So much celebrating went on, I wonder if folks were wishing me well or rejoicing in my departure. Best not to ponder. I still wonder what came out of this gift bag. I look apprehensive.

It's a scary and exciting time. I'm taking courses from local conservancy groups and Texas Parks & Wildlife to become a "Master Naturalist," a fancy title for someone who practices and teaches community groups about habitat stewardship and wildlife protection. I hope to go back to work in January on a seasonal basis (*not* in Child Support) to collect some extra funds for environmental and animal rescue work, a rainwater catchment system, sustainable farming tools, trail riding, horse training, woodland restoration . . . if I'm scared, how do you think Chad feels?? My two-year butterfly garden project is almost complete--anybody want to see a home-raised Gulf Fritillary? I thought not.



My significant other will also join the ranks of the retired when he leaves the Tax Assessor's Office December 31. I doubt he'll remain quiet for long, as he "stayed retired" from the military for a full two days. Among the many to dos on Chad's "ten-year" plan are clearing our land, perhaps some volunteer work, traveling, and trying to keep *my* ten-year plan in check (see above). I'm trying to sneak building a guest house onto his list. Here he's doing some practice relaxing, off hunting with brother Gary and nephew Nathan. Note Chad's cap; Nathan had treated Chad to a Chicago Bears game just a few days prior.

Other happenings included a visit with dear friends at their beautiful home on stunning Lake Kootenay in British Columbia, Canada (pictured here); my high school reunion, which included two surprises: a mini-reunion of friends in which we picked up our late-night talks as if we had never moved apart (a large dose of tequila helped), and a driving tour with an old friend along the beaches and waterways where I spent – or mis-spent – my youth; Chad's trip "home" to Illinois to visit family and friends; to see the Bear's game, and to hunt pheasant in South Dakota. Not least of all were the many visitors to our Ranchito - including life-long military and childhood friends, and family – Chad's sister Lu and husband Gary, and my cousin Muriel and husband Roger. These visits always provide an opportunity to sit on the porch, talk, and watch the wildlife eat the yard. It's all good.



The critters--horse, donkey, goats, dogs, cats, deer, squirrels, birds--are all healthy and, as could be expected, well-nourished. Quarter horse Sunny Girl is in tune-up training now, and I hope to take her on trails within the month. From their couch, Shiner and Tequila wish you puppy-dog and cat relaxation.

Take naps and eat chocolate.
And come see us. We have a new guest room.
And have the best holiday ever. With our very best,

Linda and Chad and the Animals

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