

## Happy Holidays to All!

2008 was a stressful year for the Livingston gang. Sarah and Scott are applying to college and high school, respectively. A pile of applications and standardized tests to be finished put too much pressure on everyone. Sarah has applied to eight colleges and Scott to five high schools. How many ways can you tell your life story? We found out this year. Both have worked hard and deserve to get into some great schools, so we are holding our breath and crossing our fingers. The process really did consume all of us. Cindy is so glad that when her turn comes, we won't have to visit any schools since we've been to them all. That's the third child's good fortune.

Cindy and Scott had great fall soccer seasons. Scott joined a talented and well-coached team that won their flight (the top flight in the league) and went all the way to the State Cup tournament championship game. Scott played center midfield and was a difference maker. He plays with his eyes up all the time and thus sees the field with great vision. Cindy's team finished 9-2-1 and got second place. Cindy scored three goals during the season. We were proud to have weeks in which both had their names in the local paper for their soccer successes.

Sarah worked at Abercrombie & Fitch, some kids' tennis camps and babysat on an aggressive schedule. She worked hard and gained a great appreciation for the value of money. She went to some fun concerts this year and loves hip-hop and rap music. One concert was a little scary so Dad got dragged along for protection. We saw Snoop Dog, T Pain and Flo Rida in a truly memorable, but a little too-wild, performance at Long Island's Nassau Coliseum. "Low" became our song of the year.

We tacked on a trip to Zion and Bryce National Parks to our annual August Colorado vacation. We traveled with the Madison family and, amazingly, they are **still** talking to us. We had a spectacular river-hike up the Narrows Canyon in Zion. Geared up in river boots with walking sticks, we walked for about five hours in the river with thousand-foot sheer walls on both sides. The kids had a hard time keeping up with the adults, but they didn't hold us back too much. We even hit Vegas for a little fun in America's craziest town. That August period was clearly a turning point as Vegas was packed with visitors and the National Parks were jammed with Europeans vacationing on the cheap US dollar. While we didn't see the coming economic collapse at the time, the situation changed rapidly as the price of oil plummeted taking the US dollar and the economy along with it.

Other great memories from 2008 include Sarah turning 17 and arriving home to find a car waiting in the driveway. Karen got the whole event on video. The sight of her driving off with Scott as the only passenger brought a somber smile. They have to grow up unfortunately.... Sledding, skiing and horseback riding in Colorado for New Year's was incredible. At times I was convinced that the thermometers were broken as they indicated -15 degrees. We skied Winter Park and Sol Vista and especially enjoyed skiing with friends..... Spring break was a college hunt based out of Santa

Monica. Cindy and Dad rode the giant Ferris wheel then watched Adam Sandler and Kerri Russell shoot scenes for the movie *Bedtime Stories* on the beach at dusk..... Phil's family gathered in NJ in July and enjoyed a great weekend together. Golf, Jersey shore, Broadway show and shopping make this annual gathering heartwarming for us all..... Karen's mom, Ginger Wood, visited during the November elections week. On the Wednesday morning after the election, they went to the set of ABC's *The View* to watch the broadcast. After the show Ginger said "I would have told them what I thought, but I couldn't run fast enough." Well said Ginger..... Thanksgiving weekend was special with more good friends gathering to enjoy the Macy's parade, dim sum in Chinatown and pasta and pizza on Staten Island..... Karen and Sarah had a great trip to Karen's alma mater, **The** University of Texas. Karen's good friend Pat rolled out the red carpet to all the Austin highlights.

Cindy's favorite part of the year was three and half weeks at Wavus camp in Maine with her good friends Emma and Shelby. They celebrated "no parents" everyday and every minute. Her favorite activity was woodshop so we are pretty sure she will be a carpenter someday. Cindy intervenes - "In your dreams." Cindy still dances at Gotta Dance Studios every Monday night - where are you Emma? Her reading skills are strong and she recently read *Twilight* and *New Moon* as her knowledge of vampires expands.

Scott is excited to be going to the Presidential inauguration in January. He is also in the church confirmation process. He and Dad sold trees at the church lot recently, a longstanding tradition. At 14, he's grown out of angling for tips from the customers. He's well rounded and confident in all that he does.

Phil's grandmother, Frances Eleanor Field Heisch, 1910 - 2008, passed away at 98 years of age. Some of my strongest childhood memories are of visits to her Scotch Plains, NJ home. She helped nurse me back from appendicitis when I was sick on one of those visits. After recovering, my dad came to pick us up and his get-better gift was a very early Kodak Instamatic camera - remember flashcubes? In my mind Grandma will always be wearing an apron and serving good food. I often think about how life took me from Maryland, to the hills of Oakland, California, the Flatirons of Boulder, Colorado, then Tampa, but finally settling down in New Jersey, 15 minutes from my grandparents' home. When the NJ Transit train cruises past the old site of Granddad's Westinghouse Newark plant, I think about them both, the path they laid, that I've followed, and that the kids will explore.

Well another year has passed. Kids are 17, 14 and 10. Karen and I celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in April 09. We're in our tenth year in New Jersey, happy on Ridge View Drive. We hope you are well and that you will visit if at all possible. Our NYC tours get better all the time.

All our love and best wishes.

***Cindy, Scott, Sarah, Karen and Phil Livingston***