

Dear Friends

I just saw the last brittle Christmas tree being picked up from the pavement, and before it is December again, we want to send you our best wishes for joy, peace and fulfillment in the new year and decade - and also fill you in on the crescendos and diminuendos (and a few staccatos and fortissimos) of our past year.

It was indeed a memorable year: Pierre celebrated a new decade in June, and in October my Dad counted 8 decades (they are so secretive about it, I almost have to write in code...). End May Niels graduated from UC Berkeley with an EECS (honors) degree. He then crisscrossed the US to select the best fit for grad school, and in September started with his PhD in Computer Science at Stanford – jubilation! Even more so, as they deemed him worthy of a very nice Graduate Student Fellowship☺ To celebrate the occasion my parents decided to join us for Cal's graduation ceremonies in May, and stayed till Independence Day. We had unforgettable trips to Point Reyes, Muir Woods, Lick Observatory, Chinatown, San Francisco, boat trips to Sausalito, and a visit to friends in Sonoma wine country. The absolute highlight for Dad was the camping trip to Yosemite's White Wolf region, pitching tent under the stars, and hiking and driving through the rugged beauty of Tioga Pass, Bodie frontier town, Glacier Point and Yosemite Valley. I surprised them in return with an impromptu (unannounced) 4day visit for Dad's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The big days were filled with joy and laughter, memorable wine tours, a trip up Table Mountain, delightful visits to relatives, friends and colleagues, and a drive past my old home – sweet memories... My eyes were indeed feasting on beauty with every tick of the clock.

Back home Dieter finished his freshman year at college, and will soon be back at UC San Diego for more Economics, Math and Music. Pierre-Henri discovered the academic load of sophomore year does not allow much time for his favorite PC games, especially since he is also a clarinetist with ECYS, one of the celebrated Youth Symphonies in the Bay Area. He is almost as tall as Dieter, and still growing... His mentor and inspiration remains his clarinet teacher, Roman Fukshansky. Dieter exchanged his cello for guitar, piano and more singing, and explores a variety of subjects before making a career choice. He recently took up Rock Climbing as a hobby, and just received his belay certification. Niels invested in his own car – a sporty Subaru WRX, which shows great affinity for the road to the ski slopes in the Sierras!

On the economic side the recession made 2009 a tough year. We were surrounded by daily calls, conversations and meetings on lay-offs, pink slips, budget cuts... Pierre in the meantime started his own company, Brutesoft, with collaboration of old colleagues, friends and family. Just before Christmas their product was launched for their first big client, and we hope to breathe easier soon. Pierre is stalking the Venture Capitalists down Sandhill Road, Niels impresses with software skills, and VC presentations are continuing. Dieter sacrificed some time at UCSD by taking classes locally, which works well with the accreditability of subjects among colleges. A conference in San Diego and feature articles in the local Silicon Valley Business Journal brought further exposure to the company, and they now have 8 people onboard.

I am still running the SEM lab at Stanford Medical School, and apart from training and teaching, I collaborate closely with groups from Microbiology, Chemical Engineering and Bioengineering, with the reward of a few publications in the pipeline. Some more proposal writing took me to SLAC and APS, and the challenges of synchrotron research. I travelled more this year, attending the annual American Microscopy Conference in Richmond VA (also picking up a very timely MSA Professional Technologist Award, which helped motivate traveling in the frozen academic budget). In November I spent a week at Argonne IL on an invigorating research project, using technology that still seems a little like science fiction – and where trikes are the way of transportation around the facility! For a fulltime mum, housekeeper, researcher and advisor the times in hotels were total bliss (though motherhood remains a state of guilt...)

Our favorite hobbies remain photography and music, and best active times are spent on the ski slopes. Weekend hikes in the hills are often planned, only to end up with Buffalo Wings and Beer at Alice's restaurant on the scenic route through the forest! For Christmas we escaped to Kirkwood and found perfect snow and sunny skies – and a big surprise to meet the Johnsons, old Cape friends who recently moved to Florida. The visit of cousins Pieter and Melanie du Toit with baby

Johan Josua from New York was a highlight – welcome to our first US citizen in the family! We were delighted to again spend time with Bernard and Ria Prior during their yearly visit to San Francisco, Mandhi and family from Switzerland - and meet new friends Eleni and Mark Forte from Albuquerque. At the moment we have relatives in South Africa, England, New York, Korea and Paraguay, with friends throughout Europe and Canada. Your contact by letters and postcards, phone calls, emails and social networks are indeed bridging the oceans and keeping us close. You inspire us - come visit soon!

With much love

Pierre, Lydia, Niels, Dieter, Pierre-Henri

