



The family (including new Baby Kuwata) last week.

19 December 2006

Dear friends and family,

Life is never boring here in Minnesota. The biggest news is that Alexa is expecting a second child in early February. Margaret has some understanding, perhaps, of what's coming. Periodically she will pat Mommy's tummy to say hi to her new sibling. (Once she patted Daddy's tummy, so her understanding isn't perfect.) Things seem to be calmer the second time around, since we have a better idea of what to expect. Our attention seems to be focused more on Margaret's ongoing development. At her two-year-old checkup in late October, she clocked in at 35" (90th percentile) and 24 lbs. (25th percentile). She is, in other words, a tall, slender, and active child. Seeing her potential to climb out of her crib, Mommy and Daddy have decided to give her a new bed for Christmas. The twin bunk beds we've purchased should serve her and her sibling (and Echo, the grey and white cat from California) for years to come.

Walking, running, and even going up and down stairs are now old hat for Margaret. She has also largely shed her separation anxiety. I was able to join Alexa and Margaret last spring for some early childhood classes offered by the Saint Paul school district. The class included play time for the toddlers while parents met to discuss child-rearing issues. Margaret never seemed bothered by Alexa's and my leaving her in the play room—toys and playmates were all that she required. The really dramatic developments recently have been with language. Right around her second birthday, her vocabulary exploded, as she started saying dozens of words and reciting pages from some of her favorite books. Her longer sentences tend to the imperative: "Daddy, get out of the chair and play with shapes!" Also, she has recovered some of her enthusiasm for sign language, and looks forward to teaching the new baby some key words like "mommy," "daddy," and "milk." Finally, she now calls herself "Mar-git" instead of "Mah-Rose."

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Besides regular contact with fellow toddlers in play groups, Margaret also enjoyed taking a music class in the fall. Class times were filled with singing, playing instruments, and especially dancing (one of her favorite activities), with a CD to reinforce the music at home. She began learning the words and tunes to some of the songs, and particularly enjoys singing a folk song lullaby from the CD to her various baby dolls and animals. (She clearly has maternal instincts!)

The spring semester at Macalester College was quite hectic, teaching a new general chemistry lecture (with 54 students) and my standard analytical chemistry lecture and lab (with 23 students). In the summer, I started trying to work at a pace commensurate with having received tenure. I had three research students, who kept me busy during the work week. However, I did keep nights, weekends, and even a few work days open for family and household work. The latter included spending painful amounts of money on exterior painting and a new roof. (The latter involved the removal of three layers of shingles.) I have been on sabbatical during the fall, and have slowly been working on a manuscript describing three years of computational work.

The three of us returned to the Outer Banks of North Carolina during the last week in August, in fact staying in the same condo we rented in May 2004. (At that time, of course, Margaret was still inside Alexa.) The family enjoyed the weather, mostly (see photo below) until Hurricane Ernesto went past the Carolinas. (We suffered only a little flooding on the Outer Banks as a result.) We also went back to visit family in Los Angeles in January, April, and September.

We remain active in our local parish, Nativity of Our Lord in St. Paul, and other religious activities. Alexa is now a co-leader of her local Familia group, and helped organize an Early Catholic Family Life class at Nativity. I continue singing baritone in the Nativity choir. My imperfect mastery of our challenging repertoire is sometimes mitigated by singing pieces I sang at the Church of the Ascension some ten years ago. More Anglican connections: Nativity has a new liturgist who asserts that the (Episcopal) *Hymnal 1982* is “God’s gift to the earth.” While I would put other liturgical works in that category, it is still interesting to note continuities in our lives. We enjoy hearing from all of you, and hope you have a wonderful 2007.



Margaret in December 2005



Margaret and Alexa in the Outer Banks,  
August 2006