

One quarter inch. Seven millimeters. About the thickness of a couple of crackers stacked together. That's all that separates Sam in height from Chris... right now. By the time you read this, he will probably be taller and another milestone will have gone whizzing by. We're embarrassed to realize it's been over four years since we last wrote an "annual" letter, almost an eternity in the lives of two young boys. The milestones on the road of life piling up behind us attest to our communication delinquency.

These years have seen a furthering of the interests and traits of which we've written in the past: Sam – imaginative, fantasy-fueled play, theater, ice skating; Nicky – computer and video gaming to add to his love of board and card games, collecting (fantasy cards, stamps), and entertaining his friends.

Now in the 8th grade, Sam led our household's transition from our small neighborhood elementary school to the town-wide middle school, followed by Nick two years later. The newness of rotating classes, added homework, and unfamiliar faces was both challenging and exhilarating, but Sam has successfully met the demands of an increased workload, and delights in his growing freedom and in the variety of people and class settings. He continues with piano lessons, now often composing his own music, plays percussion in the school band, and has taken up karate. This past year he came into his own as a "Dungeon Master" in the after school program's *Dungeons and Dragons* sessions, and during the summer hosted his own D & D campaign for five boys in our home.



Nick, endlessly fascinated with electronic games and computers, won us over to the Wii gaming system. What started as a fairly genteel game of tennis or bowling in the comfort of our home has now led to a full *Guitar Hero* rock scene (guitars, a drum set, and microphone) that has introduced the boys to the hits of our youth – Chris has gotten into it too, playing a flawless lead to Pat



Benatar's *Hit Me With Your Best Shot*. After less than stellar success at trumpet and clarinet, Nick finally convinced us to let him pursue his true musical interest, the drums, and as a 6th grader in the middle school, he plays alongside his brother in the back row of the band.

After trying a fencing class a year ago, Nick declared with his usual definitiveness that this is the sport he has been looking for all his life. He now has the full outfit – foil, jacket, glove, and mesh helmet.

There have been other transitions in the past few years, most notably the death of Phil's father in May, 2007. A week after surgery for stomach cancer, Dad's weakened body gave out, and in an unforgettable moment of beauty and grief, Phil joined his mother, brother Mark, and Mark's family at Dad's side, praying and singing as he took the step from this life into the next. The days following were filled with a remarkable outpouring of love and tribute from many whose lives he touched in India. Mark, Phil, and their Mom gave remembrances at Dad's memorial service (Mark's and Phil's reflections can be found at www.baumanhome.com/DavidBauman).

A month later we hosted the entire family in a week's vacation on Mount Desert Island, Maine, and Acadia National Park, a long-time favorite spot that we had looked forward to sharing with Mark and Janice and Phil's parents. Based in a spacious former bed and breakfast inn large enough for all 10 of us, we spent our days hiking, biking, clambering on the rocky Atlantic shore, and enjoying the wonder of this gorgeous place; we even put together a traditional New England

THE BOYS AT PLAY

- Graduating to "Summer Stage", the older kids' venue at KidStock theater camp, Sam, Nick, and their troupe not only performed in, but also wrote the scripts, constructed the sets and props, made the costumes and did all the back stage tech work for original musical plays set to foot-tapping jingles. A favorite: "The Jungle Cook", a twisting tale of deception and intrigue involving reality show contestants stuck on a jungle isle.
- Sam got into electronic music mixing when he started composing his own songs. A MIDI keyboard and mixing software allows him to create jazzy tunes on screen by combining instrumental loops of drums, bass, lead guitar, piano, and many more.
- Fantasy adventure play and stories captivate both Nick and Sam: from *Harry Potter* to *Eragon*, *Star Wars Minis*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and *LARP* – the Live Action Role-Playing game crafted over several months at their after school program.
- Nick loves hosting sleepovers and movie nights. The most gregariously social in our house, Nick is truly happiest (and loudest!) when surrounded by friends.

lobster dinner, made rather more difficult by the lack of tools necessary to crack the hard shells. Other summer family trips have included camping in Wellfleet on Cape Cod in a wildlife sanctuary nestled between the open ocean on the east and the protected bay on the west; and a stay on the shores of Long Lake in the Adirondacks, during which Sam and Phil took a seaplane ride over the lakes and mountains on Sam's birthday. Winter excursions have included Toronto, where we visited with Phil's uncle George, traipsed through museums and castles, and took a breathtaking ride to the top of the CN Tower, the world's tallest building. Sam and Nick pranced around on the glass floor at 1,122 feet, seemingly dangling in thin air over the ground a quarter mile below, assured by the claim the glass could hold the weight of 14 hippos (though we never did figure out how the hippos worked the elevator controls). Phil hugged the interior walls.



Both our mothers moved recently, Phil's to Madison, just a few minutes from Mark's family, and Chris' to Durham, close to Pam, Chris' sister, and her family. A leadership development course at Duke Divinity School this year gave Chris the opportunity for week-long visits with her mother during several trips to North Carolina. The rest of us eventually followed, with a post-Christmas visit. We were delighted to reacquaint Nick and Sam with cousins Lindsey and Emily, whom they hadn't seen in years. In the summer of 2008, we spent a week in Wisconsin with Phil's family, visiting his mother in her new home, taking in historic sites, and camping, canoeing, and bike riding on a trip to the Black River Park.

Chris continues her work as one of the pastors of the Wellesley Congregational Church and as a consultant with the Pastoral Excellence Program of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ. In both settings she coordinates mentoring programs for clergy in their first years of pastoral ministry. Last year, she wrote another proposal which led to the Conference receiving its third Lilly Endowment Grant, this one to extend the New Clergy Group Program Chris developed beyond Massachusetts into Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island. A similar extension of grant funds awarded this fall funds her work at the church for the next five years. Chris' position affords her an unusual freedom to create new experiments in pastoral leadership formation.



Phil's biggest recent adventure was a 10-day trip in the spring of 2008 to Jerusalem and Israel/Palestine, part of a group of 32 sojourners from the Boston area. As he had never had much interest in the touristy "walk where Jesus walked" scene, he was actually somewhat surprised he agreed to go when invited by friends from church. The trip was billed as an opportunity to explore as pilgrims the land of the roots of our faith, to visit sites of significance to the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faiths, seeing Jerusalem as a mosaic of interfaith diversity, and to encounter the current voices of faith from the political, cultural, and religious settings of our time. Centered at St. George's College, in East Jerusalem, and led by a resident scholar of the College, the group explored Jerusalem, parts of the West Bank and Galilee. Phil kept a narrative and photo web log for family and friends to follow back home, updating it nightly from his room (and therefore not sleeping); you can still see it at www.baumanhome.com/jerusalem. Even now, he continues to experience wonder in reflecting on those 10 days of sojourn. Phil continues his work at Mount Pleasant Home, which this year has finished fundraising and preparations for a long-planned expansion and renovation, to begin later this winter. The disruption of construction over the next few years will yield a new green facility, accommodating an almost 40% increase in the number of residents we serve and dramatic improvements in our physical space and amenities (including, finally, heating and air conditioning that are actually adjustable).



So we begin a new year, holding a deep concern for those on whom the cares of the world break – especially the poor and those terrorized by war and violence – but also experiencing a renewed sense of shared purpose and a surprising hope in the future. We are grateful that you are part of our lives.