

## LYONS FAMILY NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2011

As I sat and pondered what to write in this latest edition of our family newsletter, I decided to read our last letter, dated January of this very year. How much has happened in just 11 months!

We are very much enjoying our life here in the small town of Clinton, IL. Our big old “grand villa” is comfortable and is very much “home” for us now. We still think back fondly to our years in our dear house on West Monroe in Bloomington. We occasionally stop by to say hello to our much-loved neighbor Mrs. Davis, who always finds snacks to hand out to the kids. We are renting out our old house, so Michael will sometimes need to go make repairs, and he comments about the memories that flood over him as he works on the house. I am sort of glad it’s still our house, at least for now.



Here in Clinton, our closest neighbor is the library. I can’t say enough about how much we appreciate our library! The staff knows our children and is so kind to them. Since we live so close, the younger children are able to walk over by themselves and enjoy the services and programs of the library. It has become an extension of our home and school. What a wonderful gift to have such an amazing resource.



I am also very grateful for the grocery store across the street. Not only are the prices friendly, but the convenience of having a store so close is impossible to ignore. I feel like I have an “extended pantry” available to me, and the children are eager to be my runners when I need an item or two as I’m preparing meals. Recently the owner of the store asked me if I still did the majority of my shopping elsewhere, and I confessed that I did. He challenged me to compare prices and products and consider filling more of my list at his store. I have given his earnest sales pitch serious thought and am trying to

shift my loyalties and my thinking. It surprises me how comfortable I am at my old shopping haunts and how hard it’s been to transfer my routines to the store across the street. But I have to admit that there is no reason not to patronize our neighborhood store, since the quality and pricing is very good.

While life in Clinton has been almost idyllic, I must confess that it has been harder than I thought it would be to move away from Bloomington. We are only 20-30 minutes away from most places in Bloomington, but that distance is enough to make us think twice before making the trip “to town”. I don’t like that, because I want to stay involved and engaged with our contacts we have had for so many years. We do make the trips as needed, and we spend a lot of money on gasoline. If possible, we combine errands, but it’s not always possible. It’s just the way things are right now.

Michael’s mother, Nancy, who moved here to Clinton with us in May of 2010, is an important part of the dynamic in our home. The children know they can always find a sympathetic ear or enthusiastic cheerleader when they visit with “Grammy”. She is very patient with all the interruptions and chaos,

and she is ever-ready to lend a helping hand with mending or fixing things. She also faithfully gives many rides to and from Bloomington for the various activities the children are involved in.

One interesting turn of events this year is that we were able to meet a very special person who has been a part of the family history but has remained a mystery to us for many years. Long ago, Grammy found herself in a difficult situation and unexpectedly pregnant. At the time she was a single mother to two children. She bravely carried the baby to term and gave her up for adoption. For all these years Grammy has wondered about that baby girl (incredibly, also named Nancy - after her adoptive maternal grandmother), and finally, this past January, she was reunited with her. To our delight, Nancy and two of her children came out to visit us in April of this year, and we were delighted to meet her and amazed to see the family resemblances. It has been so much fun to have a new sister-in-law, new cousins, and a new story for Grammy to tell. It has also been a blessing to see how this has opened up a whole new ministry in Grammy's life.



And now here's an update on the children.



This year has brought some big changes for Laura. For starters, she is now 16 years old and will soon have her driver's license. It is a bit nerve-wracking to me to have one of my children driving. However, Michael seems convinced that we will soon find it indispensable to have another driver in the family. We tease Laura that she drives like an old lady, staying exactly at or below the speed limit and being very cautious. I never thought I'd have to urge a teen driver to please accelerate up to the speed limit. But I am very grateful she is so cautious.

Laura is enjoying piano lessons again this year. She is learning to play keyboard in the youth-group worship band, and doing more sight reading, which allows her to play the popular music she enjoys.

One big change is that this fall we allowed Laura and Isaac to take a few elective classes at the local public high school. Isaac is taking shop class and Laura is taking an art class and a foods class. They have loved having this opportunity, and eagerly get up every morning to make it to their first-hour classes. They also have gained a new appreciation for being homeschooled. It has been nice to see them gain some perspective into life and school outside of our family.

This past summer, Laura hunted all over Clinton for someone who was willing to hire a 15-year-old. Unfortunately, she was unsuccessful in her search. Now that she is finally 16, she hasn't been as enthusiastic about pursuing employment. However, a job has found her instead. Laura cleans house once a week for her Aunt Julie, and that provides the perfect amount of spending money to allow Laura to do the things she wants to do. Also, it doesn't take up too much of her time that needs to be spent on her academics and music.





One of Laura's current artistic interests is the varied uses of Sharpie markers. She has discovered that her skin makes an excellent canvas, and has decorated herself with interesting artwork. Anything from product logos to intricate ivy qualifies as useable ideas. The best part about it is that it all washes off and my "tattooed girl" goes back to looking quite normal again.

Isaac has grown into a very tall young man, and he's only 14 years old (with size 14 shoes)! He is the tallest member of our household, and has made us smile with the way he uses his height to his advantage. He notices things that we don't, and does things differently than we do, simply because of his different angle on life. Isaac really likes for me to ask him to do things that take advantage of his height. He never hesitates or complains when I stand, staring up at the tallest shelves, and ask, "Hey, Isaac, would you reach the sugar for me...?"



While Isaac continues to challenge Michael and me in almost every way, he is also growing into a very interesting person. He is intrigued by many different crafts and projects. He learned to knit, made himself a scarf, and started working on making fingerless gloves using several needles and "knitting in the round". He also has learned to make chain mail, and experiments with bracelets and pendants. Anything qualifies as craft material. Key rings are turned into decorative rings for fingers. String from the inside of a baseball gets woven. Pretzel dough is made into interesting knots. And bones from a turkey neck are bleached and made into a necklace that startles those who notice it. (More than one person has looked at Isaac's necklace and asked tentatively, "Are those bones...human???" )

Watching Isaac knit is an entertaining experience. He certainly does not knit like a girl. He intently leans over his work, carefully forming each stitch. Then, should he need to cut his yarn, he whips out his large pocket knife, shakes the blade open, slices through the yarn, then returns the knife to his pocket.

He also enjoys using knitting looms, and he recently made his own little knitting "rake", by using a piece of salvaged floorboard from our Monroe house and a couple of nails pounded in the top. That way he could hold the board between his knees and keep his string pulled tight. There is some talk about him using this method to knit some thin copper wire he salvaged from a speaker.



Isaac doesn't really understand or appreciate the need for formal education. Geography and Biology are subjects to be avoided. However, Isaac is full of interesting facts and knowledge about things which do interest him. Tanning hides, sharpening knives, and ancient methods of torture are some of the subjects that have his rapt attention.

A very strange thing has happened in the last few months. For reasons yet unknown, Isaac decided, after years of disinterest, to join the homeschool choir. In addition to that, he has started a collection of formal wear. Yes. You read that correctly. Formal wear. Suits, a bow tie (the kind you tie, not the pre-tied kind), suspenders, and even a top hat. For the past few weeks, Isaac has showed up to church and other events "dressed to the nines". No one knows what to think. Several people have suggested that perhaps Isaac

is interested in a girl. However, I will not suspect such a thing until I see Isaac taking showers or wearing deodorant without being reminded. So far, that has not happened.

Unfortunately Isaac had to say farewell to yet another bird friend this year. He was enjoying getting to know "Jules", the Cuban conure who took the place of his best friend, "Chico". She had a sudden short illness and then died in Isaac's hands. We don't know for sure, but wonder if she had a series of strokes. I think we will take a break from any more birds for now.



Luke is turning 13 in the spring. That means we will have three teenagers in the house. Luke is proud of the fact that he is taller than me, and he'll be passing up Michael soon. Luke is also pleased with his curly hair that he is growing out. Whereas Isaac doesn't want any hair, Luke begs me to not have him cut it too much if at all.

Like Laura and Isaac, Luke is eager to find employment. One of the disadvantages of being young is that it's hard to get a job, especially when you're new in town. But Luke remembered the hordes of people who flooded into Clinton last September for the Apple & Pork Festival. So he saved some money and prepared to sell sodas on the corner of our property, which happens to be right in the middle of the festival. Thanks to the fact that Luke was the best deal around at only 50 cents a can, he did a booming business. Also, Luke made contact with one of the organizers who hired him last year to empty trash periodically, and he retained that job again. All in all, at the end of the two-day run, Luke had \$100 profit in his pocket, and he was exhausted! Michael and I were so proud of him for working hard and seizing the opportunity.

Thanks to setting aside most of his money in savings, Luke was able to pay to attend the Winter Youth Camp coming up soon. He also had money to spend for Christmas gifts for people, which pleased him greatly.

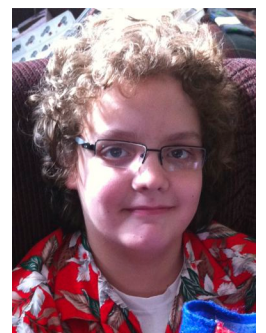


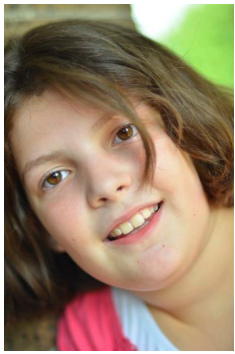
Luke is taking piano again this year and having a lot of fun learning music from the Harry Potter movies. He is wishing he could take guitar, so we are keeping our eyes and ears open for an opportunity for him to do that.

Even though Luke will sometimes use his size to his advantage and be a little pesky at times, for the most part he is very kind and patient with his younger siblings. When we go to the pool he often stays with the younger children and plays with them. He will give them piggyback rides and join in their games.

Luke really enjoys helping in the kitchen. He is becoming adept at making basic foods, and enjoys trying to make more complex things. With as much as Luke enjoys eating, it's nice that he can prepare nutritious things for himself, as well as help with younger siblings.

Just recently Luke got glasses, so a new world has opened up to him. We have agreed that Luke looks much more grown up and studious with his new glasses.





Ten-year-old Amelia is such a capable young lady, it's hard to know how to start describing her. She continues to play the piano beautifully; she is quite handy in the kitchen; she is a very reliable and competent babysitter; she is diligent with her chores; and she is eager to make friends.

In the spring, Amelia joined the youth soccer team at the local YMCA. She had such a good time, and I enjoyed seeing her enthusiasm, even though I wasn't able to attend any of her games (more on that story later). Michael helped Amelia shop for some pink soccer accessories, which pleased her greatly. Amelia played with gusto and was delighted to get a second soccer opportunity when the Fall teams were formed.



Amelia was the only other child to independently purchase Christmas gifts. Somehow she scraped together some dollars and found some economical treats that were fun to give. It really tickled me to see Luke and Amelia so intently preparing for Christmas. They made lists, asked for gift ideas, shopped, hid their purchases, and then carefully wrapped the goodies. Then, at our gift exchange, both Luke and Amelia were so eager to give their gifts, and to see the reactions of each recipient.



Amelia has learned to take good advantage of the programs and resources offered at the library. Nearly every Thursday Amelia hurries over there right after piano lessons to attend the program of the week. She often comes home with beautiful crafts and interesting stories to share. And if she happened to make a new friend, the day is declared a success.

At one program at the library, Amelia and Miguel watched a demonstration by a man who made balloon creations. They came home so excited about what they learned, so I decided to order balloons and pumps for them to continue using at home. This happened the week before the Apple Pork Festival, so Amelia and Miguel decided to try to market their new skill. They sold their balloon creations for a small fee, and then enjoyed walking around the other festival vendors spending their earnings. It tickled me so much at one point to see Miguel deftly twisting balloons while children stood in a circle around him each holding dollar bills waiting for their turn to choose a creation.

Speaking of Miguel, what a character that boy is! At 8 years old, he is wiry and swift. Miguel reads very well, loves to put together jigsaw puzzles, and is interesting to talk to. He is also so excited about his baby sisters. He has loved them intensely since before they were born, and continues to be eager to hold them and carry them around. The twins seem to respond eagerly to Miguel, also, and he can get beautiful smiles out of them when he is talking to them.

Miguel is in third grade, and is very clever with reading and math. He loves to learn, and he soaks up information at a startling rate.



Miguel is such a personable young man. He strikes up conversations with people and makes friends easily. He has gotten to know a lady who walks her dogs near our house almost every day. He knows her name and the names of both of her dogs, and enjoys running out to visit with her when he sees her. Recently he dashed out to invite "Ms. Martin" to our Christmas open



house. To our surprise, she came! It was our delight to welcome her and get better acquainted with one of our neighbors.

When the opportunity came to join the soccer leagues this Fall, Miguel was eager to join. He was delighted that Michael took him shopping for some accessories, and he played very well for his team. I loved getting to go watch the kids play soccer. I hope we can do that again next year.

Judah is growing up so fast, and I am in denial that my “little guy” will be 7 on his next birthday. He is in first grade this year, and is doing quite well in school as his reading improves. Interestingly, Judah is one of my better helpers when it comes to feeding babies. Somehow he is able to get them to take their bottles very nicely.



Judah loves computer games and video games and iPod games. He is good at them, and it's easy to forget about him when he's playing.

Sometimes he misses meals or other activities because he's sitting quietly playing while the rest of us stampede to the kitchen for supper.

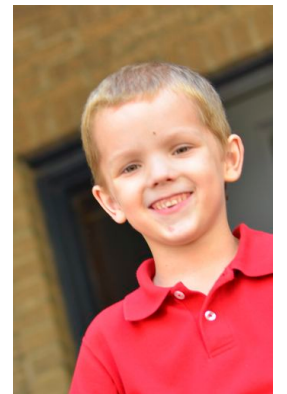
Judah has learned that when no technology is available at home, he can go to the library and play on the computers there for a while. While it is awfully nice to have something that he enjoys so much, I suppose I should work on reining it in a bit and expanding his interests to other things.



Judah is also says the funniest things. Recently he has told me that he cannot smell anything because he was born without nostrils.

Judah also joined the soccer fun this Fall. He seemed to enjoy it very much, but as we watched his team play, we realized that Judah was often not really as engaged as he could have been.

He did improve as the weeks went by, but often it seemed he was in a world of imagination instead of in the middle of a soccer game. It was fun to see our “lefty” playing soccer though. He kicks with his left foot, which looks strange.



Little Miss Lilly is four years old, and is quite a little diva! She still has blond ringlets and an attitude to match! Her current fascination is with the character “Dora” on the Disney Channel. Since almost every store features a product endorsed by Dora, Lilly has no trouble finding many things she would like to buy and wear.



Lilly also loves clothes. She really enjoys getting new clothes, modeling clothes I find for her at garage sales, and picking out what she's going to wear. She loves wearing tights, fancy shoes, and a ballet skirt if one is nearby. Crowns, headbands and clippies are also popular.

Out of all the children, Lilly is extra special friends with Grammy. I wonder if it's because we shared living accommodations with Grammy when Lilly was a tiny baby, and they spent a lot of time together then. Grammy will often dress Lilly, fix her hair, and they ride together to

church most Sundays. Lilly has even accompanied Grammy to some lunch invitations on Sunday afternoons at Uncle Todd and Aunt Julie's house.



If Lilly isn't in her own bed in the morning, she is likely snuggled in with Grammy, where she crawled in sometime in the night.

Lilly loves our babies, and to her delight, she became mama to her own set of twins this Christmas. Grammy even made blankets for Lilly's twins that match the ones she made for my babies.



And that brings us to Levi, who is turning two years old in January. He is a busy, busy boy, who is very noisy and inventive. He can figure out a way to get to just about anywhere he wants to go, using chairs and tables to help him gain access. He loves to flip switches and push buttons, which brings us no end of consternation as he turns off the power strip to the TV, resets computers, flushes toilets, turns off the ice maker and modifies the settings on the washing machine. He is also at the age where he loves to get into things but doesn't yet know what is permissible and what isn't. He has marked on walls, floors and windows. He dropped Luke's iPod into the bathwater. Every chance he gets he pours out his cup of water, or pours his drink from one cup to another...and back again. He swishes the toilet plunger in the toilet. He shakes the salt and sugar out of their shakers with great delight. This boy also discovered the joys of dropping various and sundry items down the laundry chute. Fortunately he did not put himself down the chute before it was finally sealed off, thus ending this particular amusement.



Levi also enjoys wearing hats, and can often be seen wearing a Steelers hat, or the hospital hat that was given to Tallie, or even one of Lilly's headbands. Despite all of his mischief, we sure do love our littlest boy.

Our biggest news of the year is the birth of our identical twin girls. Since our other girls are named after grandmothers, we decided to continue the tradition of naming our girls after family members. We named them Patricia Joyce (Tricia) and Natalie Christine (Tallie). Patricia is my father's sister, Joyce is my sister,

Natalie is Michael's sister, and Christine is my mother's sister. It's fun to have so many aunts represented. I'm also very pleased with the fact that each of these women is someone I'd be proud to have our girls emulate.

The first few months of my twin pregnancy were fairly calm, and life continued as normal. However, complications started cropping up at about 15 weeks gestation. It was discovered that I had "placenta previa", but the hope was that it would resolve itself and then the



pregnancy could get back to normal. I tried to take it easy, and after a few weeks, the doctor decided that my condition looked like it was improving, and I could do a few more of my normal activities. I enjoyed singing in the choir for Easter weekend, and Michael and I went to the homeschool convention in Peoria, and enjoyed it very much!

A few weeks after that I had a little setback, and once again I was put on restricted activity, which meant that I needed to stay very still and quiet as much as possible. That idea sounded delightful for about one day. Then it got old really fast. The rest of the family did their best to jump in and take over as many of my responsibilities as possible, but I soon started to see exactly what my role in the family is. For years I've wondered exactly what I did and I've questioned my value. But as I sat in my chair and chafed at the idea of staying there for many hours no matter what, I started to see how much of a difference I really do make each day. That was an encouraging thought for a while, but the days still stretched on endlessly.

Even though I was trying to behave, I still had setbacks, and still had episodes of bleeding, and still had to keep going to the hospital to have the babies checked out. Each time was worse than the last, and each time I came home even more gingerly. We limped along, day by day, and week by week, trying to get as far along in the pregnancy as possible. Finally, in my 27<sup>th</sup> week, I had another bad bleeding spell, and was kept in the hospital for a few days. This time my doctor said that if I could not stay perfectly still at home he would need to admit me to the hospital. I promised that I would do my best to stay as still as possible. Only a few days later, despite being on my best behavior, I had yet another bleed, so we trudged back up to Bloomington to the hospital, wondering the whole way if we even needed to keep going back, since the bleeding always stopped and I always got sent home again. Again, they kept me overnight, and the next morning as I was waiting to see the doctor so I could be released to go home, I was surprised to have my water break.



That changed everything. No longer was it an option to go home. Instead the doctor was called, and I was told that I would be flown by helicopter to Peoria where I would stay until the babies were born. Michael left his meeting at work and came to see me off on the helicopter. Even though I was so disappointed to not be going home, I was really excited about riding in a helicopter.

Michael followed me over to Peoria and sat with me through most of the day. Not much happened, other than lots of questions, forms, baby monitoring, sonogram, and more waiting. I felt pretty crummy, thanks to some medicine they had me on to keep things calm. Finally, as evening came, I urged Michael to go home. Things were quiet, and Michael was so tired. So he drove home, took care of a few things, and went to bed.

Shortly after midnight, things fell apart. I started bleeding profusely, and the doctor on call declared our wait was over. Time to have babies! Everyone sprang into action, and before I could think about it, we were hurrying down the corridor, with the breeze in my face, heading for surgery. I was trying to call Michael, but I was nauseous and having a hard time talking. The nurse offered to talk to him for me so I handed over my phone. She explained we were heading into surgery right away. Poor Michael! He knew there was no way he would make it even close to when the babies were born, so he just methodically gathered a few things, let his mother know he was leaving again, and started the hour-long drive back to Peoria.



The babies were whisked off to the NICU, and then the surgical team worked to get me put back together. It took some doing, but finally they got me stabilized and stitched up. (They also told me later that I really shouldn't try to do this again, since they might not be able to put things back together another time. So, no more babies for me!)

When I woke up in the recovery room, Michael was allowed to come see me. He had already been to see the babies, and gave me a report on them. When I asked how they were doing, and if they were beautiful, his only response was to repeat, "They're so small!"

I couldn't believe it was over. Not pregnant any more. Done. No more pregnancy complications.

Thus began our three-month adventure with the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in Peoria, Illinois.

God provided a home (through a friend of a friend) where I could stay during the parts of the week when I was in Peoria. People I had never met before opened their arms and drew me into their family. I was cared for and loved by a former nurse who fussed over me and made sure I took care of myself.

We learned that the NICU is one of the top-rated neonatal units in the world, so we felt assured that our babies were getting the best care possible.



My life became one divided between two places. Four days a week I stayed with our babies and had a sort of retreat and haven from the busyness of my normal life. The other three days of the week I was soaking up the sights, sounds and smells of home. Since the babies were at the hospital, I had the most unusual "newborn" experience I've ever had. I was able to focus on my own health and recovery, knowing that the babies were being cared for. I could sleep through the night, take the older children to the pool, and go to church activities without having to worry about the babies.

As I think back to those months, I remember them as being a very strange time. Michael took over most of the meal preparation and household care. I was absent more than I was home. Maybe it was a sort of role reversal.

Our church family provided many meals for us, and was also very supportive with money gifts and prayer for our fragile babies and divided family.

I started keeping a careful log of all the gifts we received, and I started writing thank-you notes to people. But as the gifts kept flooding in, and I fell further and further behind on my thank-you notes, I found it harder to try to catch up. People were so kind and generous, and it was overwhelming and humbling.

During one of the weekends I was home from the hospital, our faithful mini-dachshund, Mac, woke up with his lower half paralyzed, so we hurried him to the vet where the decision was made to put him to sleep. There was a bit of confusion with the children as we explained Mac would be "put to sleep". Miguel especially was concerned about what would happen when Mac woke up, and if we were going to bury him while he was sleeping. I had to adjust my words and explain that Mac would die, and

would not wake up, therefore we needn't worry about him after he was buried. We had a short ceremony, buried Mac next to his favorite bush, and planted petunias on his grave.

During the weeks that the babies were being so well cared for in Peoria, I really enjoyed certain things at home that had been prohibited while I was on bedrest. For instance, I took the children to the pool almost every week, and I was able to work in my garden, which delighted me.

Finally the day came when Tricia was allowed to come home. There was much rejoicing, but also sadness that Miss Tallie had to stay in Peoria alone. Two weeks later Tallie was allowed to join her sister and come home. Finally, our family was under one roof again.

Since that time, I have not yet slept through the night. Sometimes I think my life is just a series of naps; some shorter and some longer. While it seems to be taking forever for the girls to be at the stage of sleeping through the night, I keep reminding myself that before I know it this stage of life will be over, and my babies will be grown up.

Taking care of the girls is such a time-consuming job. I often feel like once I finally get them fed, burped, changed and down for a nap, it's time to start all over again. The children and Michael try to be helpful when they can. But the biggest help of all is Grammy, who is tireless in her willingness to hold and feed babies.

The babies are finally getting to where they go to bed at a semi-regular time in the evening and sleep for about 6-8 hours before waking up and wishing for attention again, so that is wonderful. I'm so grateful for at least that respite.

As we celebrate Christmas and reflect over the past year, it's obvious how fortunate we are. Sometimes I remind the children of our riches, as we carry groceries into the house and fill our pantry and fridge with all the food. I remind them that God has allowed their Daddy to have a good job and they don't have to worry about having to go without clothes to wear or food to eat. I point out that we have our very own washer and dryer, which is such a wonderful thing. I also comment frequently on how much I enjoy our house and neighbors and town.

Recently some friends of ours lost their 4-year-old son very unexpectedly during what they thought was a bout with the flu. The reports later showed a congenital condition, but the simple fact remains that their family has suffered a loss greater than I can imagine. I have been reminded in such a serious way that I need to open my eyes and appreciate each day and moment that I have with my children. There is no guarantee that I will have that child in the next moment, and the very things that irritated me would be the things I would miss terribly if I lost that child. I hope I never forget this lesson.

In light of all the changes and delights of the past year, I find that I'm eager to see what the new year will bring. The future is exciting!

Thank you for all of your prayers for us this past year. We felt loved and supported as we welcomed the last of our children into our home and lives.

Christie



...for Michael, Laura, Isaac, Luke, Amelia, Miguel, Judah, Lilly, Levi, Tricia and Tallie