

Happy Holidays!

I usually start my letters with something about it being December again, but this year I'm getting an early start! Right now, it's not even Thanksgiving yet, and thanks to some planning, I'm already done with my shopping, and just a photo away from ordering my Christmas cards. I figured, since I'm so close to sending them out, I should write the letter to go along with them.

It's been a very eventful year. Markus turned two in May, and is growing up to be such a big boy. He very much wants to do everything himself these days. He loves going to the park and swinging on the swings and sliding down the slides. He loves riding on the Power Wheels Harley Davidson trike we found for him on Craigslist. He loves all kinds of bounce house places, and playing outside, especially swimming. By the end of the summer he was able to swim without help, using only water wings.

In March we visited my cousin Patsy in Orange Beach, Alabama for a quick weekend trip. Phyllis was there the same weekend, and it was so nice to see both of them after so many years. Markus loved the beach. If we had let him choose, he would have stayed there forever. He also enjoyed the local zoo, especially the chance to feed the llama.

In April Markus and I made a weekend trip to Tennessee to visit his cousins in Maryville. While there, I took the opportunity to attend a Pampered Chef training event, since I would not be able to attend National Conference in July. Markus loves to play with Cole and Zane, even though learning about sharing can be hard.

This year, we used the Museums On Us program to visit a local natural history and science museum several times. They have an area just for kids where they can learn about all kinds of science concepts, and they also have an indoor mineral panning set up and a "fossil dig" where kids can practice their archeology skills.

In May we celebrated Markus's birthday with our annual Memorial Day barbecue. We rented an inflatable bounce house, which was enjoyed by all the party guests, regardless of age. This year, enjoying a piece of cake wasn't as messy for Markus as it was last year. The food was good, and we all had a wonderful day.

In July, Mom, Laura and Jere (a friend of my sister) came for a visit. They had already spent five weeks in California, and stayed with us for another five weeks. Markus loved having Mummo, Täti and "Jete" to play with. They did everything together, but one of Markus's favorite things was to watch the two teens play Super Mario Bros. Having Mom here was a big help, and I wish she was closer all the time.

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, at 6:59 PM, we welcomed Samuel into the world. The nurse that morning had said that we'd have a baby before she went home, and sure enough, he arrived a minute before her shift was over. Mummo also got to hold him before she returned home on the 14<sup>th</sup>. So far, Markus loves his little brother, and constantly wants to hold him. Samuel has grown quite a bit in the last fourteen weeks, and is now wearing 6-9 month sized clothes!

This Halloween Markus dressed as a pirate, and Samuel was a clownfish. Not officially Nemo, since I didn't pay for it to say "Disney" on the tag, but no one knew the difference. This year was a lot of fun, because Markus really grasped the concept of trick-or-treating. After a few houses, he realized these people were giving him candy! We also had a fun time carving a pumpkin with him.

More recently, I've met a few other moms in the area, and have joined a local moms' group that organizes outings and get-togethers for the kids and moms to enjoy. We've only been to a couple of events so far, but Markus has had a blast playing with the other kids, and I've enjoyed meeting the other moms.

We've had a wonderful year in 2010, and wish you lots of joy for 2011. You can keep up with us throughout the year online, too. I post pictures at <http://picasaweb.google.com/nooraanddavid>, and both David and I can be found on Facebook. We hope to connect with you soon!