

Dear Family and Friends,

During this time of the year, I often catch myself humming, whistling, or singing a variety of Christmas songs. From the slow swoon of Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" and the quick tempo of the Trans-Siberian Orchestra's "Carol of the Bells", to the majesty of Handel's "Messiah" and peaceful sound of "Away in a Manger", I enjoy the songs of the season. And although the world around is focused on giving and receiving gifts, I am trying to continually bring my attention back to the Holy Child in the manger and the purpose of His birth. The angel spelled it out so clearly when he told the shepherds in Luke 2:11, "Today in the city of David, a Savior is born; He is Christ the Lord." What an incredible thing for those shepherds to be the first ones to be told of Jesus' birth, and then be the first to see God's promised Messiah!

The one down side for me in December is the reality that another year has come and gone. How quickly time flies by. So much has happened in this year of 2017. If you've read our previous letters, you know that there is very little "down time" from the schedule at camp. November and December are two of the very few months that we don't have people coming and going at camp. It does allow for a little more wiggle room in the schedule. But, as the kids get older, and have more opportunities to be involved in things at school, that time gets eaten up. It has been neat to watch each of them growing up, changing into their unique personalities and developing likes and preferences.

Ella has continued with piano lessons. She seems to really enjoy the piano and has done very well. There are those days when someone has to stand close and keep her on task with her practicing. (My mom could sure tell you some stories about my piano days...) She has been blessed this year to have her third grade teacher be the same teacher she loved when she had her in first grade. She is excelling in her school work and usually takes very easily to new things being introduced in class. Last week was the elementary school Christmas program and Ella did an excellent job with her 2 speaking parts.

William added fifth grade band to his schedule this year. He chose the "bells" as his instrument of choice. (Not bells that you ring but more like a xylophone.) We had the privilege to watch him perform at the middle school/high school band concert last week. He did a great job! He is also still taking piano and is getting very confident in his ability. He had the opportunity to play the piano in church a couple weeks ago, with Naomi playing her guitar, and the rest of us singing, "O Come, All Ye Faithful." He did a wonderful job and several people told the kids what a beautiful job they did.

Nicholas played seventh grade basketball this year which runs through the months of November and December and finished up last week. His team consisted of 16 boys. It was tough to get a whole lot of playing time each game, but he hustled and was an asset to his team. He is doing very well in school. He is very proud of his all-A's report card and works diligently to maintain his grades. He has graduated from AWANA to youth group and seems to be enjoying all the activities from air-soft battles to the white elephant Christmas gift exchange.

It is hard to believe that Naomi is in her 6th year teaching for Baker College at Mancelona HS. She loves to teach and enjoys the interaction with the students and other teachers. God has given her an incredible opportunity to live out her faith in that environment. Along with that, she maintains a busy schedule with her counselling. In the last several months, she has added several clients and is now the go-to female counselor for a couple churches in our area. It is so good to see her able to use her Biblical counseling to help people who are hurting and encourage them in their walk with the Lord.

Although basketball is a 5-night-a-week sport, and adds another thing to our calendar, I really enjoyed watching Nicholas play. He is learning so much. I've been known to get a little excited during the game (I think I inherited that trait) and as long as Naomi is sitting, watching with me, I can talk to her instead of the refs.

I don't struggle keeping busy with my varied responsibilities around camp. Much of my time is spent working with Nathan and volunteers on maintenance related things. This fall, we finished up the first phase of our Cook's Cabin renovation with some new windows and a new door, vinyl siding all the way around, new paint on almost every wall and ceiling, and some new flooring in part of the cabin. I have to say a huge "thank you" to Shelly for painting, the guys from FBC of Lowell, and the guys from Lake City who put so much time into that project. God graciously held off the arrival of snow until December to allow us to finish a few other outdoor projects also. Now, it's time to shovel, plow, and blow snow to keep things ready for winter retreats right around the corner. There are many people who played an integral role in providing a plow truck and tractor with blower for camp in the past 12 months. You know who you are. Thank you!

It seems impossible to believe that January will mark the 10th anniversary for Naomi and me coming to PVBC as full-time staff members. We share so many memories of God's great faithfulness and examples of His working in the lives of campers. I really did enjoy my job at the hardware store, the home that we lived in, and the church family we were part of at Ottawa Center Chapel before coming to camp. But I can't imagine what life would look like today if God wouldn't have called us to this ministry. We have had such confidence and peace, even in difficult times, that this is exactly where God wants us to be.

As we watched the Lord provide a buyer for our house in Allendale this Spring, I couldn't help but praise Him again and again for taking care of us and providing for us through the generous gifts of His people and the work that Naomi can do using her God-given talents. Many of you have been financially involved in our ministry at Pleasant Valley Bible Camp for years. Your on-going support month after month and year after year has been more of a blessing than you might ever understand. For those of you who are faithfully lifting us up before the Lord in prayer, all I can say is "Thank you so much."

As we close out this year and anticipate what God is going to do in 2018, please pray with us about our continuing financial support. We are averaging between \$500-\$600 short of our need, each month. As you can imagine, some months can be tight as unexpected expenses pop up. Naomi and I have every confidence that God will meet our needs, "according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus" which takes the pressure off. We can leave all our needs in His capable hands, each day.

May God richly bless you as you press on, by faith, to accomplish everything that He has planned for you to do in 2018.

Merry Christmas, from the Sponables
Steve, Naomi, Nicholas, William, and Ella Mae