



## Gibbs Family Christmas Letter 2011

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We have had many exciting expeditions this year: Arthur had folks come visit him during house arrest multiple times. Seth punched three holes in perfectly good doors. Rachel busted a windshield in a parked car with her head. Laura fell in love. And Ashley is getting counseling. Whew! And that doesn't even include moving to a new address although it might explain why we needed one. As fun as it would be to leave all these true statements dangling like ornaments on the Christmas tree of your mind, Arthur's desire to stay employed by the Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists mandates that we unpack these suspicious nuggets and humbly explain our actions with this sworn affidavit.

Yes, we finally did move the troops this year. After years of waiting for the housing market to recover, project Occupy Walnut Lane is in full swing as we moved much closer to our church and school. As we unpack box after box of books in our new home, 5 year-old, economist-in-training, Seth, turns to Ashley and says, "hey mom will we kids get all this stuff when you and dad die?" She replies, "yes but I'm not sure if you'll want it all." With unwavering confidence he states, "oh yes we will. We can sell it and turn it into money. I really need some money. As a kid I only get like one dollar, two times a year but you guys get like hundreds of dollars a day." Obviously he knows we hit 15 trillion in national debt this year and assumes we all enjoyed spending that money. Maybe we can get him into extreme couponing, an honest way out of debt. Or we can give him part-time work, fixing-up our old home that is still on the market, as it has some evidence still that angry birds was once played in there.

Our new house already appears lived-in with lots of bumps and scrapes from our personal loving. When we settle into a new place we are like a cozy black bear snuggling into a shoebox. Seth takes the lead in property damage with puncturing two holes in the door to the basement on two separate occasions. This is the reason that doorway is now an archway with the injured door abandoned to the garage. First the baseboard door stop then a higher hinge door stop, both popped right into the door's core. Seth was bellowing about some injustice he was suffering and in frustration bent the door back too far. The fact that new doors these days are made from something a little thinner than cardboard is irrelevant to this story. These events were concern enough for anger management class but there was another incident earlier in the year

when Seth accidentally cracked the glass of the church school front door as he playfully bounced it open enjoying the spring action. Obviously he is a strong young man in need of learning the art of gentle living, before he spends all of his college money on home repairs, or he will have to become a Navy SEAL.

Thankfully Arthur's house arrest was contained to the week of our church's Rome vacation Bible school. As Paul-in-chains, Arthur shared each night the risks of being part of the early Christian church and talked about Jesus to his guard Brutus. The kids were wide eyed with wonder and kept close watch on Brutus' inflatable toy sword. We are preparing a Babylon theme VBS with Daniel for this summer and our family can't wait to dig into that adventure. It takes a family, a village, a church and a prayer to pull a VBS together well.

When Arthur wasn't busy with Rome, he managed to work with the builder of our new home. To put it mildly we learned a lot; as with any project there are things we would have done differently. When you come visit you'll see a "perfect" spot cut out from the trees for the meandering gentle driveway that we envisioned. This begs the question of "why?" as you drive past it and then plummet down the brave-hearted descent of the actual concrete slip-n-slide to our humble abode. Come visit and we will give you the full story and maybe even a tour of the backyard with zip line potential.

Honestly we love our new home and thank God for the extra time it allows our family to spend together. The little oversights just challenge us to do it right next time. Seth mentioned that his favorite aspect of the new house was simply "knowing that no one else's bottom has been in the bathtubs." Something we obviously forgot to consider in our last house. Rachel, our six year-old social butterfly, loves her bedroom facing the street so she can see who might be coming to visit. Laura enjoys walking in this peaceful wooded neighborhood. With the fall leaves, she felt it was the prettiest place we could ever live.

Laura has grown so much this year. She turned 11 years-old and comes across very confident and self-assured. Now a part of our church's Pathfinder club, Laura has fallen in love with backpacking in the wilderness. She gets this genetically from her nature loving father and this has sparked growth in our whole family. Laura and Arthur backpacked with the Pathfinders to Joyce-Kilmer wilderness area in June to see popular trees over 400 years-old at heights of over 100 feet and some up to 20 feet around.

The whole family accompanied the Pathfinders for backpacking trips to Ellicott Rock wilderness in September and Linville Gorge in November. For those of you unaware, this is WAY out of Ashley's comfort zone so she is awaiting a gold star to be pinned on her at any moment. At Ellicott, Rachel and Seth hiked 15 miles; not too bad at their age. Then at Linville Gorge the first evening was windy in the low 20's. The upside was that the next night felt balmy with a low of 39°! Truly God's beauty outdoors is incredible. The whole family was only able to survive because of a gadget which Ashley recommends over a Swiss army knife – the portable potty seat.

As a family we also went to the 'Edge of the World' and rafted. It's actually a rafting outfitter out of western NC that takes you down a river in eastern TN. Much better than being called "end of the world." Seth was fearless, Rachel was drama but no one fell out so Arthur was probably a bit bored; however, the dam release water was 50 degrees in August so the splashes kept him awake.

Unfortunately August was also the month of Rachel's first migraine. It was heart crushing to see a little one endure such severe pain. Rachel has shown an increase in compassion after surviving her ordeal. Or maybe it was her head trauma in June that changed her? Rachel was in the passenger floor board then popped up to play with Seth but misjudged her height and busted the van windshield with the crown of her head. Ouch, yes, in a parked car none the less. We won't mention who

was in the car, carefully watching the kids, but he does like board games a great deal.

We have some issues with blaming in our family as you can tell. But usually we just blame each other and get it over with. Maybe we should reflect more on how that is working for us. The truth is that this year has involved a lot of digging, and this does not include excavating the house foundation or potty holes on camp-outs. Arthur and Ashley both hit 40 this year and celebrated 19 years of marriage. Maybe it's mid-life or maybe it's just the natural cycle of needing to go relationally deeper but Arthur & Ashley have returned to marriage counseling. These are the things rarely found in a Christmas letter but we hope our vulnerability will inspire others to deal with the problems so often swept under the rug. The process may not be pain free but an honest relationship is a priceless treasure. Marriage is not for wimps but all things are possible with our loving Heavenly Father (Phillippians 4:13). Dr. Gary Chapman and Dr. William Harley have some great marriage material and we encourage EVERY couple to choose one relational book a year and read it with your spouse. Consider it marriage insurance as it will both protect and mend you.

Pray along with our bank that our old house sells soon. The bad world economy has meant tough times for us all. But even if you are stuck in line at the unemployment office, take a moment during this busy season to open your Bible and your heart to our Father. As in the Middle East most of us are stifled under corrupt dictatorships, and I'm not talking politics. I'm talking about who has your heart? Who has your affections? We personally have recommitted to God first and then our marriage second above all else in our lives. Jesus is coming soon and the time is now to answer His knocking at the door of your heart. God loves you so much!

Turning our eyes on Jesus,  
Arthur & Ashley  
Laura, Rachel & Seth

