



## **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

### **January 2002**

Wow! Has it been another year already? Time is speeding by so quickly these days. It seems like I just finished our last annual family letter. Please forgive me for the length of our letter, but it's hard to cover a year for a family our size in just a few paragraphs. For some of you, it is the only time we get a chance to let you know what's going on with our family. We were showered with blessings in 2001. As I am writing this letter, we are in the process of buying a new home, finally! We found a terrific house out in Greatwood and the owner's have accepted our offer. Now we just have to have it inspected, negotiate repairs and close. It is so exciting to know that we are going to be homeowners instead of tenants. We'll keep you updated as things progress, but we are looking at a closing date of February 15<sup>th</sup>. Hopefully by March 1<sup>st</sup>, we will have everything moved in and settled.

Don and I just celebrated our eighth anniversary. He continues to work at ADP as Director of software development. His project, "Jupiter", is currently being tested and is due for its first installation at a pilot site at the end of the month. They will use this time to work out any bugs and add functionality that is needed before it goes into production at the end of the year. Don hasn't taken any business trips this year and we were very thankful to have him home. He is still very interested in golf. Work has been very demanding. I hope after Jupiter goes into pilot that he will have more opportunities to sharpen his golf skills and pursue some friendships. Family is still his top priority. He gets the kids up and going in the morning and then tries to be home in time to help with their nighttime routine. They get so excited when he comes walking in at night. I know it is a high point in his day to hear "Daddy! Daddy! You're home!" as all the kids run up to greet him. We attended Don's Christmas work party in December where Don surprised us with an unexpected musical performance. Many of you remember his days with the band, long hair and leather pants. Thankfully, the song was a bit more mellow and he did a fantastic job. He still has a great voice. We are members at First Baptist Church Sugar Land and in February 2002, it will be 3 years since we transferred from Second Baptist Houston. We are very excited about the growth of our church and the plans that are being made for relocation. I know God has mighty things in store for our church and I hope that with the new facilities we will be able to minister to peoples' needs and reach even more people for Christ.

My year was off with a bang when I found out I was expecting another baby. Then, a few weeks later our landlord called to say that he would need to sell the home we had been living in. We weren't going to be ready to buy a home of our own until the end of the year, so we had to find another rental. We moved to Sugarwood at the end of May. The house had a pool and I figured it would make for a great summer for the kids. I am still working with the MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group at our church and it is very fulfilling. In the spring, I attended a women's retreat at Columbia Lakes Resort with speaker Beverly Terrell and a luncheon at church featuring Jeanette Clift George as speaker. I managed to survive while Nicole was in Argentina

for over a week. We weren't able to communicate with her while she was gone and it was a real growing experience for the mommy! I received a day spa certificate from my sweet husband for Mother's Day and thoroughly enjoyed the massage, facial, and manicure/pedicure. I could get used to being pampered like that!

After moving in May, my summer was off to a pretty somber start. I underwent an ultrasound at the beginning of June and the doctor said that there could be problems with the baby, such as Down's syndrome. At the same time, I received a call from my mother who underwent a routine eye exam that resulted in her being referred to a specialist in the medical center where she learned that she had a tumor on her eye and it was malignant melanoma. She followed up with MD Anderson and learned that she would have to undergo further testing to see if the disease had spread before they could tell her what her options were. Needless to say, this was pretty hard for me to take in. My baby may have problems and my mom had cancer. I just had to lay it all at the feet of Jesus and pray that everything would be okay. I don't know how I would have made it through that dark time if I didn't have the Lord to lean on.

I tried to keep myself busy during the summer swimming with the kids and visiting with my mom. I just wanted to enjoy every moment with them. Then, an answer to prayer came when my follow up ultrasound showed that the amniotic fluid had returned to a normal level, there was no hole in the heart that the doctor could see and even though the baby's legs and arms were still measuring a bit short, the doctor thought it was not an indication of a problem. I was so elated with the news, but I was very guarded in my anticipation of the baby's birth. I knew that I needed to prepare myself just in case everything wasn't as good as they were projecting. But nothing prepared me for what actually happened when he was born. I spent most of the summer getting ready for the birth of our new son. I had so much fun decorating the nursery with Mary, and planning for his arrival home. The Kirkpatricks surprised me with a new cradle that was fit for a king. I tried to finish up any last minute projects so that when the baby arrived I would have everything ready.

My mom underwent a surgical liver biopsy in August and after we found out that the spot on her liver was benign, they were able to perform the surgery to remove her cancerous eye. She saw one of the top guys at MD Anderson who specializes in this type of surgery and her results are incredible. Her prosthetic eye moves around very well and few people would be able to tell that she has an artificial eye because it looks so much like her natural eye. Most of all, I was just so thankful that they were able to find the cancer and remove it before it had spread to other areas. We are so fortunate that the optometrist stumbled on it in his routine exam.

Aidan's due date came and went so the doctor planned to induce if I did not go into labor on my own after a week. The night before I was scheduled for induction, my water broke and I was so happy that I would not have to be induced. I arrived at the hospital around 11:00PM and he was born around 6:00AM on September 17<sup>th</sup>. That is when I understood that everything was not okay with Aidan. The neonatologist told me that things were very serious. Birth complications were caused by the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck twice and a knot in the cord. At birth, the cord ruptured and he had a lot of blood loss so he was given transfusions. He had heart defects which they thought were serious. Because of the complications, instead of making the transition to breathing from the womb to outside air, he continued breathing as if he were still in the womb. He was intubated and they thought they were going to have to transport him to Texas Children's Hospital because they did not have the equipment to deal with his condition. But after a cardiology consult, they found out that his heart problems were not as severe as they had anticipated and he was able to stay at the intensive care unit at Woman's Hospital. He remained in critical condition for a week and then was transferred to the intermediate care unit where he learned to breathe and eat on his own. Three weeks later we were finally able to take him home and what a glorious homecoming it was! I had to stay around the house with him for the first few months so that he wouldn't get sick and end up back in the hospital. The doctors are not sure what his long-term disabilities might be. Because of the oxygen deprivation from the birth complications, they are following him during this first year to track how he meets his milestones.

Stacey is 26 years old now and living on her own. She got a new apartment in the Heights and is working for a temporary agency doing secretarial work. They have placed her on long-term assignments so she only worked for two different companies this year. She went to Dallas for the first time to attend an Anime Convention (Japanese animation). During the summer, swimming was a regular event as she got out to the community pool each day. She has been exercising and took some classes in dance and kickboxing. Her exercising has paid off and she is very slim and trim now. She is enjoying shopping for new clothes. She is still taking some college classes and hopes to have her own business one day. She is practicing playing her bass again. She is making a lot of new friends and is excited about having girlfriends to hang out with. She stops by the house to visit a couple of times a month and sometimes Nicole goes to visit her for a few days. They have a lot of fun together and the kids love her. I can't believe it's been five years since she left home. She is an extraordinary young woman.

Nicole is fourteen and a freshman at Fort Bend Baptist Academy. She took voice lessons this year and continues to pursue singing. She participated in New Life Weekend (youth group church activity) and had a great time. Probably the most exciting event for Nicole this year was her participation in a church mission project to Argentina over Spring Break. Many of you helped her by providing the needed funding and also prayer support for her. I am so grateful that she was able to participate in this life-changing event. She witnessed conditions much different from the comforts of home and came back with the realization that we are so blessed in our country, and yet there is a complacency in regard to the things of God because we've never known true need or what it means to rely fully on God for everything. I know this is an experience she will treasure for a lifetime and we are so thankful to those of you who made it possible. She also went to Big Bend for a week for her 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Trip. In May, Nicole had her 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation ceremony at school. Then, as summer was beginning, Nicole took off for a week in Florida for

youth camp. She had a great time and also learned a lot about what the Lord wanted from her. I think Nicole also enjoyed having the pool this summer and in August, when school started, she was sporting a great tan! Since she is no longer cheerleading, she was able to try out for the basketball team this year and made it. She enjoys sports and we have fun attending her games and watching her play. She likes to hang out with her best friend Jodie shopping at the mall, having lunch, or seeing a movie. They also attend the same youth group at church. I can't believe my little girl will be driving in a year!

Adam is six years old and is in Kindergarten at Fort Bend Baptist Academy. Adam's year got off to a rough start when Aaron took a new Christmas toy and slammed it into his face while he was watching a video. Aaron knocked his top two front teeth loose and a week later, the dentist had to remove them because they could not be saved. In May, he made his debut in a children's choir performance at church called "Sermon on the Mound". He practiced very hard to learn all of the songs and he did a great job at the performance. He completed a year of AWANA (sort of like a Christian scouts program) where he memorized loads of scripture and had fun participating in the crafts and activities. Aaron once again sent Adam off to the emergency room when he slammed his hand in a door. Adam ended up with a broken finger on his left hand and couldn't swim for the first part of the summer. After it healed, he had a great time swimming in our pool and would have stayed out every moment if I would have let him. He's a great swimmer. In fact, he had a swimming birthday party and was so happy to have friends over to celebrate and swim. By the end of the summer, he looked more Hispanic than Caucasian. He started half day Kindergarten in August. He is still struggling with some self-control factors at school, but he is much improved. He has a very extensive vocabulary and cracks my friends up with some of the things he says. He is continuing to learn to read and always enjoys sitting down with a book to learn more about how things work. He is fascinated with weather and loves books on tornados. In fact, that is about all he ever wants to talk about. If you have a chance to talk with him, prepare to come away knowing everything about tornados from F0 to F5. He is very informed and feels he has to share this information with everyone we come in contact with. He also enjoys making up stories about his imaginary friend "Sonic". He got to go to work with Don for a day in November and he enjoyed being dad's big helper.

Aaron is now 3 ½ years old and stays home with me during the day. We were able to attend Blue's Clues Live as a family with our friends, the Merritts, in February. Aaron had a blast except that he thought it was too loud. In fact, until we left the auditorium, left the building, got into our van and were halfway to Sugar Land, he remained with his fingers buried in his ears and refused to remove them. It was pretty cute. Aaron took his turn in the emergency room in March. He thought it was pretty fun to twirl around until he was dizzy and fell, so he kept doing it over and over. Finally, he twirled around, got dizzy, and when he fell, the back of his head landed at the corner of the fireplace and he busted his scalp wide open. The ER doctor fixed him up and all of the other kids thought it pretty amazing that he was walking around with staples in his head. Aaron enjoyed most of the summer in the pool with the rest of us. He took a little encouraging to get into the pool at first, but then he was almost as excited about swimming every day as Adam was. He has a great time during the day playing with his brothers and sisters and likes to copy everything that Adam does (good or bad). He loves to wrestle around with Adam and they take turns just laying on each other, just to see if they can get me all flustered. He is a big charmer and has a smile that just lights up a room.

Abbey just turned two years old and is really beginning to show a lot of her personality. She has started talking up a storm, and will repeat almost anything you say. She absolutely adores "Miss Pattycake" which is a Christian video series and Blues Clues. She loves her Handy Dandy Notebook and the Thinking Chair. She has started playing with her dolls and it is so adorable to see her caring for her baby. Abbey could have cared less that we had a pool to swim in this summer. In fact, most of the time we had to schedule our swimming around her nap schedule. I put her in the baby safety float a few times and brought her in the pool with me and she was NOT impressed. She enjoys being outside but would much rather be playing in the dirt than swimming. She loves spending time with the boys playing and reading stories.

Aidan is three months old and an absolute joy. We are just so blessed to have him home with us. He was born September 17<sup>th</sup> and three weeks later, on October 8<sup>th</sup> we were able to take him home. His first outing was the fall festival at church where he dressed up as a crocodile. His first smile was October 22<sup>nd</sup> and I don't think I could express how happy it made me to see him smiling up at me. Here was this baby that I thought might never come home, and instead here he was looking up at me with those big eyes and just smiling from ear to ear. Words cannot express how much joy that day held for me. He is very talkative and will smile and coo at you when you talk with him. He is holding objects in his hand and has figured out that his hands are pretty fun toys themselves. He has started sucking his thumb. He holds his head up very well and has started trying to turn over, but he hasn't quite managed it by himself yet. But he is very close. Last week, I heard him laugh out loud for the first time and I thought I would burst. He had a follow up MRI and EEG performed in October. The results showed no seizure activity and that the bleeds on his brain have resolved to a pinpoint. His neurologist evaluated him in November and felt that he was doing great and with the test results felt that if he has any long-term problems, they will probably be mild. His follow up cardiology visit went great and the doctor said that if she didn't know his history, she would not have known there might be something wrong with his heart. She wants to wait another four months and repeat his tests, but she said that if they come back positive that he wouldn't have to see her anymore. He had his first set of immunizations and is due for his next round. He weighs over 14 pounds now. He has a therapist who comes by to work with him for an hour each week on some extra muscle tone, but other than that he is doing great. He truly is a miracle child. I don't know what the year will hold for us. Aidan may end up with physical or mental disabilities, but I am thankful for every day that I have with him, no matter what the difficulties.

As you can see, it was a tremendous year for our family. We walked through some storms but God remained faithful and saw us through. I guess the greatest thing that I learned this year is that God is faithful and you can trust Him. I always felt the biggest test of my faith would be if something were to happen to my family. This year I faced the possibility of losing my mother and my son. Thankfully, the outcome was a happy one. However, I learned through those dark hours, that whatever the outcome would have been, that God was carrying me through it and that He would comfort me and give me a peace that I can't explain. For all of our loved ones receiving his letter, I would just like to take this opportunity to ask, do you have any kind of spiritual beliefs? To you, who is Jesus? Do you believe there is a heaven and a hell? If you died right now, where would you go? If what you believe wasn't true, would you want to know it? Take a few moments to read these scriptures. In Romans 3:23 the Bible says that "all have sinned". Romans 6:23 states that "the wages of sin is death". In John 3:3 Jesus says that "you must be born again". That is why Jesus came to die, to pay the penalty for our sin so that we might have eternal life. We can't do it on our own, no matter how good we try to be. John 14:6 says "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. So what is it that we have to do to have a relationship with God and be forgiven? Romans 10:9-11 says "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." Romans 10:13 for "whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved". 2 Corinthians 5:15 says "He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me". Knowing all of this, do you believe that you are a sinner? Do you want forgiveness for your sins? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross for you and rose again? Are you willing to surrender your life to Christ? Are you ready to invite Jesus into your life and into your heart? Being a Christian doesn't mean we won't have struggles and trials. But by having Christ in my life, I know that no matter what may come, that I have a security that He is with me. This life isn't all that there is and one day I will see Him face to face and I want to honor Him by being faithful to share all that He has done for me with everyone around me. It's not an easy thing for me to do because I never want to hurt people's feelings or make them feel uncomfortable. But I would rather live a lifetime of someone not liking me or understanding what I stand for than to face Him one day and have to explain why I didn't share His truth with those closest to me. In consideration of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> I am reminded that we never know what a day might bring. This life is but a moment, but then there is eternity. I know that I will spend it with my Lord and Saviour. I want to have as many of my loved ones with me as I can. I've just been reminded by the events of this year that the things we strive for on a daily basis are temporal. I want to live my life for things that are eternal. I want to be faithful to share all that God has done for me with everyone that I know so that you never doubt Him. You can trust Him. Will you trust Him today? God's sacrifice of His Son for a relationship with us is truly the greatest gift we will ever receive.

You are in our hearts and our prayers always. We wish you His continued blessings in your lives through the coming year.

In His Service,

The McGee Family  
Don, Connie, Stacey,  
Nicole, Adam, Aaron, Abbey and Aidan