



Holiday Hello

Russell, Heather, Dylan and Ben Thomas
114 Demers Drive | Fort McMurray, Alberta | T9H 2B1

2011

The days flow together, like a seamless tapestry, connecting us through moments and memories. Looking back on many years of sending out our *Holiday Hello*, we see the boys turning into young men, the many changes that have peppered our lives, and a consistency of place and of purpose.

We are deeply grateful for life's many blessings and the love we enjoy of friends and family.

2011 began with Dylan's return to Fort McMurray after several months of being in hospital in Edmonton following his second major leg surgery. At a recent check-up, his doctors declared the work that was done a complete success, with no need for additional surgeries in the near future, possibly forever.

Heather's health has also seen a constant improvement over the last 12 months. The facial pain and discomfort seem to be a distant memory. She looks and feels wonderful, and gets to live her "joy" every single day with her growing business.

In addition to getting his hearing back in the fall, Russell was inspired to change his eating habits. Following the Ideal Protein program, he dropped over 30 pounds and was declared "a shadow of his former self" by more than several people.

Ben continues to explore his creative pursuits. He'll get something in his head and the next thing you know a piece of paper will come alive with colour.

We hope the pictures and stories within our annual *Holiday Hello* make you feel a little closer to us, as we realize that our choice of making our home in Fort McMurray poses some geographical challenges in terms of staying physically connected.

We also hope that you will choose to stay in touch with us throughout the year by visiting our *Wood Buffalo Update* site on the Internet. Russell made the switch from email to the blog format a number of months ago. This is a central spot where you can read stories and see pictures of our adventures.

www.woodbuffaloupdate.blogspot.com

Russell continues to write several blog posts a week on all kinds of different topics. He has crafted over 400 posts since he started on Boxing Day 2009. Some are funny, some are sad, but all reveal a little bit about our life in the north.

www.middleagebulge.blogspot.com



Get well soon Dad!

The New Year will find Russell's dad going through the second phase of his healing journey. In late November, he was diagnosed with colon cancer and was operated on just days after. All the children traveled back home to be there in support. The surgery was a success in terms of removing the tumor, but as there has been some spread of the cancer, chemotherapy is in the cards in the next few months.



We are very optimistic that Dad will be successful in his recovery. He's taken remarkable care of himself over the years. And like Dr. Dudley says, healing is really about "everything that happens above the shoulders." Attitude is everything!



Ben is in grade 3 at Dr. Clark School, growing taller and brighter by the moment. Curious, creative, and independent, Ben in one moment will be immersed in his favourite online video game and the next busy creating another art project.



He spent some time in Tae Kwon Do earlier in the year and successfully transitioned to cub scouts in the fall. Being in a "team" environment and in a program that has very clear objectives (badges) seems to work very well with Ben.

This summer he participated in the interPLAY theatre camp, playing the role of the hero's sidekick. Like his father, Ben showed no fear in being on the stage and enjoyed the three week process of getting the production ready for an audience.

Ben's crowning achievement may very well have been his journey up to the top of Turtle Mountain, this is what is left of the big piece of rock that fell on the town of Frank back in 1903. Ben joined Heather, Michael and Kathryn on an early morning jaunt up the Blairmore side of the mountain and scaled the north peak two hours later. What a great moment for him standing on top of Alberta!



"The favourite thing I did this year was getting to the top of the mountain!"



"Sit down," he asked his parents after coming home after the first day of school.

"I have something important to tell you. I'm running for vice president!"

Dylan was successful in his election bid and has been doing a great job representing the student body. In grade 7 now, he is already looking ahead to next year when he plans to run for the president's job.



"I loved getting to meet Gene Simmons and KISS. They were great!"



There is no question that Dylan is on the cusp of becoming a teenager. He already has a peach-fuzz mustache and is almost as tall as Heather.

He discovered the wonders of reading this year, and without encouragement began diving into the Harry Potter series, burying his nose in the pages for hours at a time.

Aside from meeting famous wrestler Chris Jericho, Dylan had the most exciting 45 seconds of his life getting his picture taken with the guys from KISS. They were very welcoming, bumping fists with Dylan, making him feel like the most important man on the planet! He also enjoyed the concert which turned out to be the biggest event in Fort McMurray history - over 12,000 fans rocked it out!





Russell spent many hours by the river this year, finally experiencing the thrill of catching a large northern pike - a 14-pound beauty! He certainly does a lot better on our home waters than he did down on the Mexican Riviera, where he not only got skunked, he got violently sea-sick.



When he wasn't on the water, Russell was living the life of a busy municipal politician, still enjoying the public life after a full year in the role of Councillor. He has a great team that he gets to work with every week, and lots of progress is being made in our dynamic community that is set to experience another boom.



Still managing to write several blogs a week, Russell is able to explore his creative side. He even managed to paint his first picture in many, many years.

“It’s been great to lose all this weight.

I’m in the best shape of my adult life.”

Russell’s eating habits have changed 360-degrees since he began his weight loss efforts on August 27th. He now has to invest in some new suits, because all his old stuff swims on his significantly reduced frame. But, he’s not complaining! He’s enjoying the new look.



Heather started 2011 with a Vision Board of what she would like to see for the year. It is now 11 months later and almost everything on the board has come to fruition and what hasn't yet been manifested is in process! Prosperity and Yoga, Yoga Teacher Trainings, Travel, a Week of Yoga in Mexico, Reiki Training, a Love Story



with Russell, Play, Joy, Health, and Happiness! It really is amazing that when we put it out there with intention and feeling, everything is possible! Needless to say, she will be making another Vision Board for this next year!



Heather’s business is thriving and she enjoys the classes, people and opportunities that come her way every day. Heather has expanded into more retail sales and also made some changes with her work by adding CranioSacral

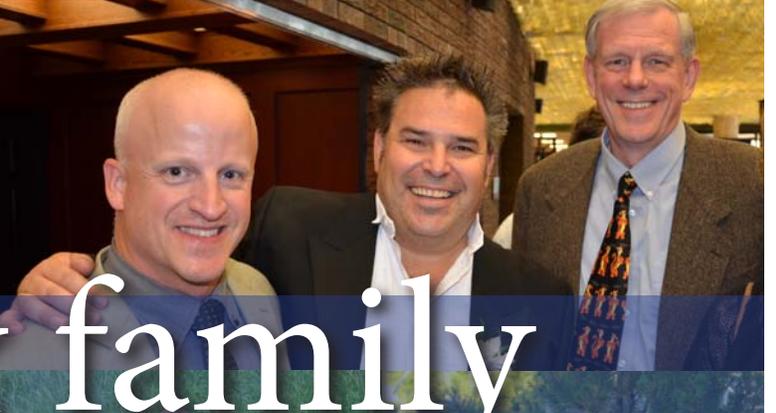
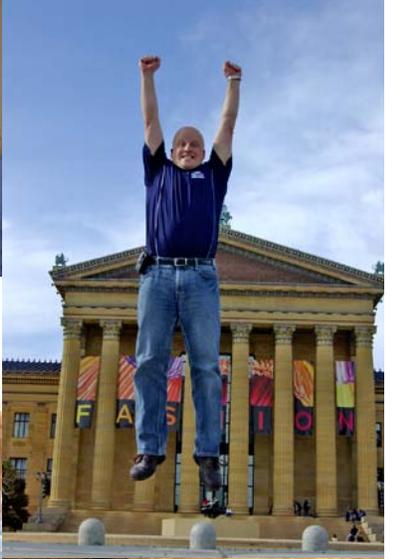
Therapy to the toolbox. She is slowly moving away from laughter yoga and traditional massage to focus mainly on this new therapy and the teaching of workshops and Reiki Energy Classes.



This year, one of Heather’s life goals has also been realized in that she is now part of the SOYA Primary Faculty and is working with a friend in operating Fort McMurray’s only Yoga Teacher Training School. Heather is looking forward to February when she will travel to Mexico to help her own teacher with a 200-hour Yoga Teacher Training Intensive.



“The best thing of all though, is the huge gratitude I feel for my ever improving health. Life seems to get better every day!”



friends & family

