

Christmas 1996

from the Clifford's

What a year it has been, again! You know, it might be easier to tell about what didn't happen. For example, we did not ski, go out to dinner more than five or six times, no vacation trip to Connecticut, no church camp meetings, no sleeping in, no sleeping out, sometimes no sleep at all.

For Cheryl, little TV, crafts, or reading besides baby and parenting books.

For Steve, less TV, less reading, less evenings at the office, less preaching and Bible studies.

Our longest family trip was to Akron, twenty-five miles north. Cheryl cooked less, Steve brought home carry-out dinners more.

Still, we have witnessed such answers to your prayers, we are overwhelmed by the miracle of love, yours and God's evidenced in these four wonderful children.

In case you haven't kept up with the various TV and newspaper clippings, we offer a few highlights of this incredible journey. Much is overlooked such as new roofing, air conditioner, a storage shed, a longer van, ministry and work.

January: Whatever you know, whatever you have heard about precmies and babies, we began learning it times 4. Diapers, bottles, bathes every day, little things called "onesies", cribs, car seats, carrying chairs, diaper bags, bibs, burp cloths by the bundle, blankets, toys, rattles, walkers, play pens, high chairs, more burp cloths, dozens of pacifiers for four!

By now they are testing/tasting cereal and vegetables. Mmm good! No fuss, just 4 mouths crying for more.

February: First colds hit hard. One turned out to be a RSV virus. Paul was hospitalized for three days. All were on a nebulizer medicated mist machine several times a day. They recovered with no ill effects. Later we learned this virus causes over 80,000 hospitalizations and over 4,000 deaths each year among children.

The last week, Cheryl returns to part-time work at First UCC Church as Christian Education Director. 900 diapers a month add up. Volunteers help out at home.

March: In between colds, we began taking them to church. They were dedicated into God's Kingdom on the 17th with Aunt Heidi Kuchta holding Heidi.

Another cold shared all around, Mom & Dad too. Tax season kept Steve busy as ever. Often, he would get home just in time to rock Paul to sleep between 10:00 & 12:00pm. The girls were going down about 8:00 to start. Robert cried to go to his crib beginning at 6:00 and would sleep through the night.

April: Ruth crawls. Steve survived a hectic tax season. The dining room is cleared to become a large playroom.

May: Paul & Heidi crawl. Cheryl's first Mother's Day was shown on Channel 43/19. Aunt Heidi, Aunt Joan & Cousin Jackie visit from CT for Mother's Day. Paul is nicknamed "Sir Drools-a-lot". Heidi is known as "Bibs" as she goes through so many a day.

Lucy Southergill visits from CT for a week. With her help and two vans, we made our first visit to another home. All survive. Teething began, sleep ended.

June: Teething continues. Sometimes we sleep. Steve's first Father's Day was featured on TV Channel 8 although the kids upstaged him at every opportunity. In our garage is a testimony to Cheryl's organizational skills and the blessings of many generous families. Lining one wall are boxes of second-hand clothes sorted by size and for boys and girls, a humbling sight.

July: Just how long can you survive on 4 hrs sleep? During the days, while we were in a fog, Cheryl's mom was and is steady as a rock. Clear-headed, plain-spoken, overflowing with practical love and compassion, she has been God's hands holding us together. Often she reminds us, "I raised five kids but not a one was like any of these!" Nonetheless, her experience and wisdom are a constant blessing.

August: We began watering down the formula after 10pm. This begins to wean them off of the "2am" feeding habit.

Great Aunt Gladys, Anita, Brittany & Carissa visit from Massachusetts for 10 days. Somehow, we found room for all. What a great family I married into. Finally, Robert crawls, sits and stands in three days. They learned to crawl in their birth order.

September: A whole nights sleep, I mean at least seven hours, straight, quiet, peaceful, uninterrupted, and repeated. All at once, they started sleeping through. Within a week we had a consistent pattern which has held all fall. Ruth walks on the 19th. Heidi on the 22nd. Steve still trips on toys in the playroom.

October: First birthday, Aunt Heidi & 40+ volunteers crowd the house, without whose care and sacrifice our children would not know as much love. By the end, Robert takes his first steps, hands held high for balance.

November: We have our first night out in how many months? We hardly know what to do! The one year premie check up at the regional children's hospital finds none are developmentally delayed as is often the case. Ruth's wt. is low but her skills and vocabulary are typical of 18-24 mo. toddlers! Robert also tested very high. All appear bright and seem to have the ability to give their parents the challenge of their lives.

Aunt Joan, Aunt Heidi, Uncle Charlie & Fran visit for Thanksgiving. Paul took his first steps while no one watched. Under supervision, he wobbles and bends his knees and keeps trying to run if you will hold his hands.

Ruth, Heidi and Robert show off their molars for a total of 38 teeth between all four.

December: Woman's World magazine features our story in their December 10 issue. The Akron Beacon Journal puts our photo and story on the front page, 12/16. McCall's informs us our story will run in the March 1997 issue. The tree is up, lighted & decorated. Somehow, we're ahead of last year.

The year ahead is fraught with opportunity, challenge and change. Two years ago, we prayed quietly for a child and said "Lord, our lives are in your hands. Give us the family you want us to have." Today, we rejoice at the four miracles that keep us so busy but give us four times the kisses and laughter. Yes there are worries but your love and support have made the difference. We thank you and pray for you and your family to know the joy we share.

Merry Christmas!

May the joy of that first Christmas nourish your hearts daily

Steve & Cheryl

Ruth, Paul,
Heidi & Robert