

## Life in Minnesota 6

Where to begin? Let's start with the recent past –Chanukah. Our kids had never been to Minnesota, much less to our house, so all of them worked in a conspiracy of harmony to be together as a family, including Mariah and Destiny for first lighting.

Prepping the house for their visit was a month-long endeavor. You'd think the Queen of England was coming to visit. I made sure there were enough warm (down) blankets for each room; a set of towels for everyone; stocked the bathroom with shampoos, soap and etc., and the day before they came, I prepared tiny baskets lined with colorful linen napkins with fruits, Chanukah gelt (chocolate for those who don't know) & cookies, and granola bars for each of their bedrooms to nosh on.

Our friends the Brickwedde's came on a Saturday the week before to help me trim the house with Chanukah decorations that the kids grew up with. I should say Laurie and I did the dressings, while the boys played on the computer in the office/basement. I made a centerpiece on the dining room table with blue and white ribbons, beads and blue tinsel, Chanukah gelt, various small bears and even a camel –all wearing kippot (head covering). They are such sweet people, the Brickwedde's. We treated them to chicken soup with matzo balls for lunch. And we are toasting to the New Year at their house New Year's Eve.

I was not alone, however, preparing for this happy invasion. For two evenings after work, Howard worked in the garage. If you can imagine this, I peeked in on him to see what he was doing and there he was with his back to me, his bald spot on the back of his head bobbing feverishly to the rhythm of sawing PVC piping. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"Have you seen the neighborhood?" he said, still sawing away. "It's war out there!" He purchased 3 or 4 long, thin PVC piping and made a 4ft. wide Chanukah Menorah and wrapped each branch with little white lights. He hung it with fishing line over the smaller bay garage door (where my studio is) so instead of being the only dark house in our cul-de-sac, much less the entire neighborhood, one house stood out with a large lighted Chanukah Menorah. I have to say that every time we drove up at night coming home from somewhere, it was delightful to see it stand out amongst all the eye-piercing Christmas decorations around us.

Days before the kids came, I asked each of them what dishes they would like me to make. The requests poured in like a flood. No way there were enough days to make everything they wanted. They would have to be here a month. I made Chanukah cookies, baklava and mandel broit. I prepared menus for 4 days including freshly made egg rolls, blintzes and Greek pasta salad with feta cheese –French feta no less.

I cannot put into words the joy we all experienced being together. Our friend Bill Booth called later and asked how it went. I told him that if he could see my face right now, he'd have to describe it as incandescent! In addition to the visit, the food and playing a new board game called *Scene It* (which should be in your repertoire of board games), they organized the loveliest surprise imaginable for us.

We took them to the famous Mall of America with acres and acres of shops on several floors that includes an aquarium, and an indoor Boardwalk of thrill rides. How and I stayed together while they all split up and we arranged to meet in a couple of hours. Unknown to us of course, they all made a mad dash to Sears photo to have family pictures taken. We had not noticed that they were all wearing black tops with denim jeans including Destiny. That evening, they gave us a photo package with a CD of the shots that were taken. All of the pictures were near perfection in varying combinations of our three kids and Asher's family. We were blown away. What a glorious visit it was.



In other news we're experiencing the strangest winter since 1928, I heard a forecaster say. We had one full day of snow and then it warmed up again. The 3 inches of snow that fell is melting away. Minnesotans in our area thought it was going to be a brown Christmas. Fortunately, that one snowing came just in time for Christmas.

The lake looks frozen solid and a couple of brave souls have put up their tiny shacks to ice fish, but I think they are going to sink or fall into the lake. Newscasters are warning people "not to drive out onto lakes just yet." It has to be 8 inches thick to safely do that. And do you know that if your truck or car falls into the lake, it is not covered by insurance? But Minnesotans do it all the time. Would you do it? I think it's crazy too.

People are so anxious to play in the snow with their toys and they're extremely annoyed that they can't. One of How's more staid colleagues hooped and hollered in rapturous delight when the first snow fell. Now he's crestfallen. Wouldn't you know that when we came, we brought some California weather? Are we the mystical harbingers of things to come? Oooh...that's a skin prickler!

So ends one full year this January 20<sup>th</sup> when we moved into our home. I ask How all the time how he's feeling about the move and as each day passes, he is blissfully entrenched here and loves the work he's doing, the people he works with, the countryside and our house. He reports that we made the right decision –the only decision, to leave Silicon Valley and do something else, something that helps people and that's what he's doing.

Me, I drive miles and miles commuting to get the cultural stimulation I need. While I'm driving, I always think about what it's going to be like in twenty years when I'm aging. Will I be able to do all this driving to sing, get active on seniors' issues, hopefully on a state level, do community organizing, not to mention doing a few commissions as well? I worry about that all the time, but I guess I can't worry about tomorrow or the next day or the day after that. I'm still learning to be in the now –the present. I'm still struggling with that.

I'm meeting some pretty remarkable people and that's exciting. Howard Lake, however, is another matter. I find that I am very circumspect about what I say and how I interact with people. Everything about my encounters scream, "Be careful." I suppose it should be no surprise to anyone that this is a very red, conservative Republican dominated enclave –mostly of German and Scandinavian descent.

To date I've written seven columns. I've attached the last two and I want you to notice how I am very carefully introducing Howard Lake to some diversity issues. Housing development is

changing the landscape and so quite naturally, infrastructures need to change and accommodate the load. That's not going over very well with a lot of folks who have lived there all their lives. There's a huge disconnect between what it is and what it should be.

I've started inviting people like my hair dresser over to the house for lunch. I've learned a lot about Howard Lake from her, for example. She was born and raised here and she still has teenagers at home. I told her that the next time she comes (because we're going to do it again) could she think of two other people she could bring? She's bringing two pastors. It goes on from there.

In a subtle or not so subtle way, I'm picking up where I left off in Santa Cruz, building community relations for power and action. I thought, "You know what? My house is big enough." So I am having small get-togethers for lunch. The hope is to conduct these small gatherings to build and deepen public relationships and trust in the community. You use these opportunities to find out about someone's motivations, interests, frustrations and passions. In the intimacy of a home, you might hear something or feel free to share something you might not otherwise share. What is amazing about this process is that I sometimes find out something about myself as others do AND you find out something about the other person.

I am going to take my time about this –work very slowly. Maybe I won't have more than 3 house meetings in the year 2007. That's not too ambitious is it? Anyway, enough of me. I better end this before it becomes a novella.

Happy New Year to you. You're in our minds and hearts as 2007 rolls in. Until next time...

December 29, 2007