



Here we are at the end of 2023! I find it unbelievable that we are nearly a quarter of the way through the 21st century already. As a young person, I could not fathom making it this far, but now I am looking forward to all that the years to come will bring.

It has been a good year for our family, a year of growth and a year of new beginnings. As I mentioned in last year's letter, 2023 started off with Elizabeth going to Chile to work at a Word of Life summer camp. She spent six weeks in the heat while we stayed here in the Michigan winter! She returned the middle of February, and still had to experience some winter weather. It was a great time for her and served to whet her appetite for the future. She continues to study Spanish, feeling strongly that it is important to get fluent. As the year went on, Elizabeth began to form a vision for future missionary work. She wrote out that vision for herself and to share with others. It was a coffee shop ministry idea, in which she would help nationals start coffee shops in various locations throughout the world. In the fall, two opportunities came up at the same time which validated this dream of Elizabeth's. A new coffeeshop/restaurant planned to open in Plainwell, our sister city. They were looking for a barista manager. Elizabeth prayerfully applied. At the same time, she made contact with a missions agency which had the identical ministry vision she had already written down. The short story is that she got the job at Bloom Eatery in Plainwell, and also began the process of working with the missions agency in the future. Her current job will give her all the skills necessary to be able to eventually start what the missions agency calls "coffee shop in a box". Please be in prayer for her as this exciting opportunity unfolds.

Anneliese began a new job at the Otsego District Library in February. It is a job made just for her. She is surrounded by books, it is quiet, and she can help people find what they want to find in the library. Later in the year, Anneliese organized all the information she has been gathering for years in her research on organic agriculture and started a website: <https://www.historyoforganic.com/>. This serves several purposes. It gives her a way to put the extra information out there that she cannot include in a book. It also gives her a place to publish all the oral history interviews she has done over the years. She can also keep a blog of interesting information and can share her uniquely Christian worldview on the issues because it is her own website.

Laura has grown into her role at River Road Foods in Plainwell over this year. The business had just opened in its current location a month before she started there, so she has pretty much been there to watch and help it grow. They do catering and take-out lunch and dinner. Laura has been able to learn firsthand what it takes to run a small business and to see what dedication it takes to keep it going. They only have a few employees, so it is a very good experience for her. Her future dream still involves some kind of small food business, probably involving baking and coffee. She has been lovingly honing her sourdough bread baking throughout the year.

Tim is at the finish line! After five and a half years he will graduate on December 16, 2023, with his bachelor's in mechanical engineering. He spent the summer working for Peloton, a contract engineering firm here in Otsego. He enjoyed the work, although they didn't really have enough to employ him full-time. After he has finished his major projects for the year, he will focus on looking for a place to work. At this point, he wants to stay local. There are a lot of opportunities nearby. He has to decide what is most important to him and then see what is out there.

This spring we decided it was time to put up a full eight-foot deer fence around the garden. It was a big project, but several friends helped us out, and with the help of YouTube and some engineering from the resident mechanical engineer, we successfully got it installed before gardening season. It was astonishing how much difference it made! The first day we had the fence in place, not even attached yet, I saw three deer standing by the garden wondering what was stopping them from their normal feeding station! We had a bumper season in the garden, partly due to the fence and partly due to weather, I am sure. We had ten CSA customers again and were able to overload their baskets weekly from the beginning of July to the first week of November.

The other big thing we did this year was butcher our own poultry. We have been keeping birds since 2007. As each year goes by, the processing gets harder and harder and much more expensive. After last year, I decided to start investing in the equipment to do it ourselves. I recruited four friends to help. I did not want to do the killing, but fortunately one of the friends was fine with that. We did a "practice day" two weeks before our big day. We only processed a few birds to learn how to do it. None of us had done it before, so we studied books, watched YouTube



videos (not me, I just read the books), and gathered the tools we needed. When the big day came, it was raining, but we set up four canopies. We successfully processed 39 birds in four hours, so I felt like that was pretty good for a first time. I paid my help in birds. There is always something that goes wrong, and for us it was pretty funny. We got down to the very last bird, a turkey hen. The ladies and I were cleaning birds when we heard a shout. We saw the turkey hen take off into the woods with one of the guys close behind. He shouted, "I will get her!". I told the ladies he most likely would not. The other guy joined the chase and about a half hour later they returned, defeated. So we released a turkey to the wild. Later on, I discovered a rooster happily foraging in the side yard. He got missed when we collected birds the night before. So he got a reprieve as well, and joined the rest of the laying flock and the few roosters we keep for breeding.

At the end of the summer I found myself needing to sell several goats. I hadn't sold any spring kids yet, and I also had three adults that I needed to move on. This led to another new adventure. Tim and I borrowed a livestock trailer from a friend and hauled seven goats down to Shipshewana, IN to the livestock auction there. That went well, and I got fair prices for the goats. A month or so later, I realized I needed to sell another goat, a yearling doe. I took her to the local auction house just a few miles north of here. She also got a good price. So, I feel in the future I can use the local auction house if I need to do so. All that streamlined our goat operation, so we are in a good place as far as numbers. We also weeded out some poor genetics, so our herd is much healthier now.

With Elizabeth's new job, she decided to take the step of buying her first car. She had been using the old pickup truck when she needed to drive. It is 21 years old, and she felt she needed her own car. After that purchase, Laura decided to buy my Toyota Camry from me. So they both have their own vehicles now. Then, I decided I really don't need the old truck. So I am planning to sell it. If anyone is in the market, it is a 2003 Chevy Silverado. It only has 93,700 miles on it. It has four-wheel drive and is still a solid truck. It actually gets fairly good gas mileage for a vehicle of its class.

As I mentioned at the top of this letter, I find myself looking at the future with hope and anticipation these days. Steve died almost four years ago. We have really grown and changed in those four years. I am finally beginning to feel like I am alive again. We aren't just getting through; we are actually thriving. It has been a long and hard road to get here though. We still have hard days; I am not going to pretend we don't. Sometimes we don't even know exactly what triggers a hard time. But through it all, God is so faithful. It is so beautiful to see how God is working out each of my kids' futures. I am so grateful that they are able to use the unique gifts and talents God has placed in them in ways that serves Him and others. I am also thankful that I have more and more opportunities to use the gifts and talents God has given me to reach out to people.

I am still directing the choir at our church. This year we are doing a full Christmas Cantata called, "O Holy Light", on Christmas Eve morning. The cantata centers on the Advent wreath and the meaning of each candle. I have two young people doing the narration and candle lighting. In the evening I will be leading a women's choir during our traditional Christmas Eve candlelight service. The church is First Baptist Church of Otsego, address and service times are on the church's website: fbcotsego.org.

May God bless you and yours as we celebrate the birth of Christ and reflect on the past year and look forward to a new beginning in 2024.