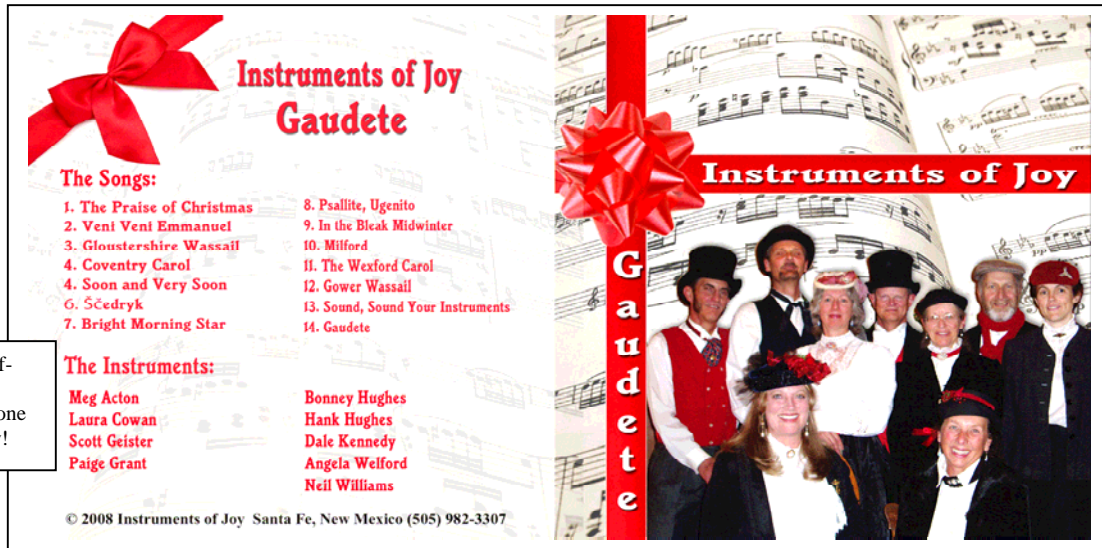


Was hael (Old English: wassail, “your health!”), and may all good things be yours as 2008 wheels through its winter solstice. We share our news of the past year in the spirit of chumming the water, and seeing all you fish leap to exchange *your* news with us by phone, e-mail or return post!



Cover of our self-produced CD. We'll send you one if you ask nicely!

Wassailing is on the minds of the “Instruments of Joy.” Our wardrobe mistress/alto Meg (seated next to Paige; Neil is back row left, in mutton chop whiskers and red vest) dressed us as Dickensian carolers for our Yule gigs, which are full of jolly wassails, haunting Medieval and Renaissance carols, and energetic shape-note hymns and spirituals. We have sung at our members’ churches, at May celebrations, at a blessing of the (dry) Santa Fe River, where children spontaneously stuck flowers in the moist sand, making a river of flowers. We sang for a dear friend’s house cleansing ceremony when he lost his partner to suicide; and of course we sing our hearts out for Christmas. Brian Eno said it wonderfully in a recent contribution to the NPR series “This I Believe:”

“I believe that singing is the key to long life, a good figure, a stable temperament, increased intelligence, new friends, super self-confidence, heightened sexual attractiveness and a better sense of humor. A recent long-term study conducted in Scandinavia sought to discover which activities related to a healthy and happy later life. Three stood out: camping, dancing and singing.

“There are physiological benefits, obviously: You use your lungs in a way that you probably don’t for the rest of your day, breathing deeply and openly. And there are psychological benefits, too: Singing aloud leaves you with a sense of levity and contentedness. And then there are what I would call “civilizational benefits.” When you sing with a group of people, you learn how to subsume yourself into a group consciousness because *a capella* singing is all about the immersion of the self into the community... to stop being me for a little while and to become us. That way lies empathy, the great social virtue.”

Next year, we’ll apply



ourselves to following Brian's advice on dancing. This year, besides singing, we've done fairly well in the camping department: that's Neil and our friend Dale on the San Juan River in Utah, where five of us spent five glorious muddy rock-rimmed days in September. We had the river entirely to ourselves – just us and the mountain goats and ravens.

We went to see our friend Carol in Longmont, Colorado over the Fourth of July, and were treated to a glorious Fourth in that classic American town. Later that month, we defied all advice and went to south Georgia in deep summer for a sweet family visit that started with Paige's cousins and brother and sister-in-law gathering at Susan & Don's Marshbreeze retreat near Darien, and included stops in Savannah (Susan's mama and sisters), Williamsburg (Neil's sister Lisa and her family), Washington D.C. (Lisa, her partner Pepper, Paige's lifelong friend Tim and all those great museums), and another gathering of cousins at Paige's mother's family place, Ditchley, in tidewater Virginia.



Neil and shrimping fleet, Darien, Georgia; Toby waits for a train at Williamsburg

Apart from these forays, we have stayed fairly close to home, cranking away at Watershed West (www.watershedwest.com, if you want to know details), hiking our local mountains, trying to do better at growing our own vegetables, delighting in the great music that comes to Santa Fe. We love the perks of self-employment: a beer with lunch and a nap after; our Wednesday morning hiking group that gets us out in the freshest part of the day and back by mid-morning. On our last outing, we rode the commuter train to Albuquerque on the first day the run was open to the public, and hiked all of three blocks to breakfast, where we planned a year of carbon-neutral adventures starting and ending with a train ride.

We relish the company of Paige's parents, who live just across town. Recently, we have been collaborating on a book of



photographs taken by Berry’s grandmother at the turn of the last century. This has turned out to be rather more involved than the “click and print” promise of the self-publishing website, but we’re so close we can taste it, and promise to send out notice when the book is available on line.

Neil’s mom celebrated a major birthday with a trip to Morocco with his two other siblings. We celebrate the health and creativity of our parents, and are grateful for their splendid examples of living long and well!

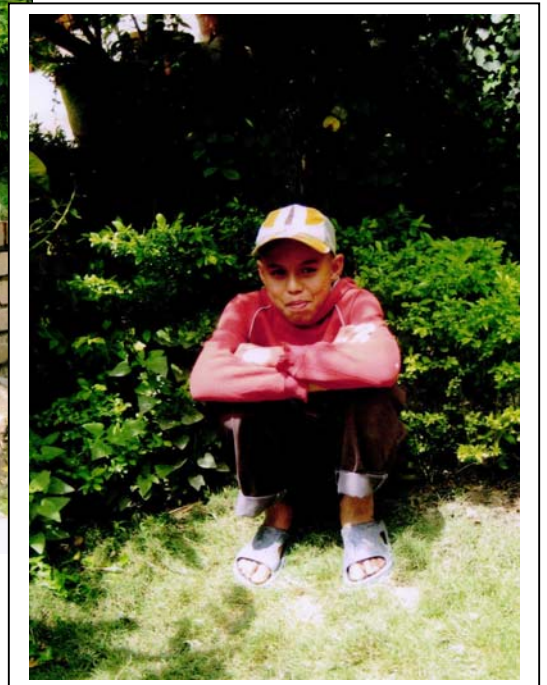
We continue to foster dogs for the Santa Fe Animal Shelter, and recently adopted two of our fosterees. We both put in time on Democratic campaigns this fall, and have felt a great weight lifted from our spirits at the outcome of the national election. Paige has been involved since last winter in a cold-weather homeless shelter that last year moved from church to church and this fall acquired a facility of its own. This year, Neil is keeping her company. It’s a slice of life that keeps us humble and grateful. Some of the guests are from that population that a cop described to us as being “not so much born, as ejected into the world, and scrambling ever since.” Others, if we had spotted them on the street, we would not have identified as “homeless”: many are educated people who have led orderly lives, and then got tripped up in a big, bad way. They remind us how many are just a paycheck away from destitution.



On our last night in Nepal last year, Paige fell into conversation with the teenaged desk clerk at our hotel. He told her that his father had died a few months earlier and his mother had gone off with another man, leaving him and his younger siblings to fend for themselves. He had rented a room for them nearby and took them food from the hotel, but he was frightened that his little sister was going to die. Paige gave him some money, but was haunted by the story, and on arriving back in the States contacted the Umbrella Foundation, the child rescue organization where Ariel had volunteered while we were trekking (we commend them to your attention: www.umbrellanepal.org). Umbrella investigated the situation, and wound up taking the two younger children into their care, with our sponsorship. The rest of the story is illustrated in the pictures below.



Laxmi and Saroj, November 2007 and one year later.



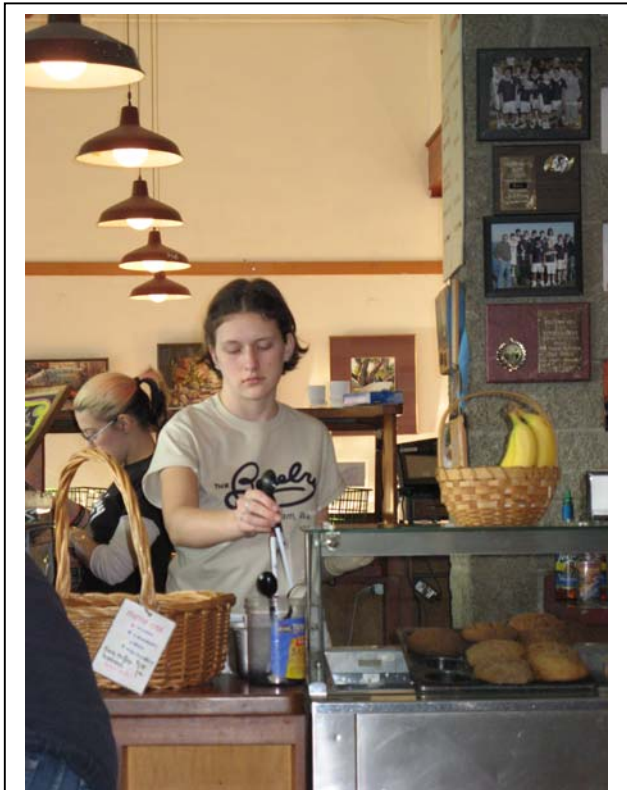
The older brother did not join them at Umbrella. He is doing well at the hotel – better, now that he is relieved of the worry for his younger sibs. He expressed a desire to learn English to improve his chances of a career in the hotel business, and we paid for an English class for him.

Heaven knows this little drama – often without the happy ending -- plays out a billion times a year in our overpopulated, misgoverned world, and one can feel hopeless about doing anything about it. But it's very satisfying to be a starfish-flinger: the guy who is walking the beach after an exceptionally high tide that has washed a lot of starfish well above the tidepool zone, and they are beginning to expire. He starts picking up starfish, one by one, and tossing them back in the water. Another guy comes along and laughs at him: "You can't make a difference to the outcome doing that, there are hundreds of them!" The starfish-flinger looks at the one in his hand and says, "It makes a difference to this one," and throws it out to sea.

Toby is the solo kid at home these days. He's still drumming with his Japanese Taiko group, and they've been getting paying gigs all over town – enough to pay the rent on the studio and buy more drums and costumes. He's also studying mandolin these days, acing his last year of high school and planning a trip to France next summer. Jake and Damon are working retail jobs, Jake in Santa Fe, Damon in Albuquerque. Jake is planning a move to Phoenix to be with his girlfriend.

Meade is experiencing a receding horizon in completing his bachelor's degree in History at University of Montana: it now looks like he'll wrap it December of 2009. He and some friends have started a free newspaper, and he writes glowing e-mails about going out duck-hunting at dawn on a Sunday when everyone else in Missoula is sleeping off their Saturday nights. Ariel is in her sophomore year at Western Washington University in Bellingham, taking too many credits, working too many hours at a bakery/café, and loving the challenge. This summer she spent six weeks in Nicaragua studying Spanish, building solar ovens and wiring solar panels. She came home to Santa Fe and settled into a summer job wielding wrenches and pumps at a bike shop. Shortly after she arrived, we hosted a young Peruvian woman who was representing her artisans collective at the Folk Art Market, the biggest event of its kind in the world. Ariel was able to use her new Spanish fluency with Zenovia, and they became friends. Zenovia was fascinated that Ariel was working as a bike mechanic: she could have just hung out all day at the shop, a fly on the wall, watching her work, and call that a day well spent.

They are all days well spent, when we pay attention to them: gifts wrapped in weather and filled with surprise.



Meade on U of MT campus, Ariel at work, February 2008