

Dear family and friends,

December 2004

Merry Christmas! We closed last year's letter with perhaps the curious comment that we were still tentatively planning to live in Japan for four months sometime off in the future. That time is upon us, and we are moving in stages to accommodate work and school schedules. Eric is on a short sabbatical from the Air Force Academy (negotiated last year before we moved), as a Visiting Professor at Hiroshima University, and is there now with Kaylyn (10 years old) and Miriam (8 years old). They are enrolled in a local elementary school, doing well and learning Japanese. Ethan, Zachary and I join them just before Christmas, staying until the beginning of February. The girls return in mid-March, and Eric makes his way back to Colorado Springs and his work at the Academy at the beginning of April. We are very fortunate and blessed that 19-year old cousins Joel and Elsbeth Martens have joined Eric and the girls. They will travel around Japan in January, and stay with friends in the nearby towns of Akitsu and Fukuyama, returning to our small apartment in East Hiroshima when the boys and I return to the States. Phew!

For Ethan, this is a return trip to Japan after a 17 day ministry trip to Okinawa, Yokohama, and Tokyo, with about 25 other young members of Mountain Springs Church. Eric and Ethan have a great affection for Japan, a connection I expect will grow in me as well. My heart continues to hold tight to the Haitians since our visit there 5 years ago. I must admit that the myriad of tasks involved in learning the language and putting together such a trip have distracted me from the actual experiences to come. Now that Eric and the girls have left, I have found time to rest and look towards the future.

The transition for the girls to a Japanese school was one they were not looking forward to, but they have seemed to have adjusted to it. Miriam's



teacher wrote home the first two days of school in broken English, "It (she) had many tears," but on the second day "It (she) came to school vigorously." They seem to like the tofu, rice, soup and fish that makes up their daily lunch, which is something of a relief, and as one might expect, their classmates are very friendly.

We already have a close connection with and Eric and the girls and Martens have begun attending Midorino Makiba Christ Church near the university, a Baptist-affiliated church that is vibrant and is partly bilingual. The Martens have

also made a strong connection with an international Bible study group at the university.

Back home, the boys complete their last weeks of school here for awhile; Ethan, a freshman at Pine Creek H.S., active in soccer, Young Life, youth group, the Colorado Springs Youth Symphony, Boy Scouts, and continuing piano and viola lessons. Zachary is a 6th grader at Mountain Ridge Middle School in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme, busy with youth group, Youth Symphony, piano and violin. When home, the girls are in two separate schools; Kaylyn at Mountainview School in 5th grade, involved in gymnastics, Children's Church, piano, and some cello. Miriam is at a charter school, The Classical Academy in 3rd grade, enjoying gymnastics, Children's Church, Brownies, and piano. They miss their dear friends, though will make some new ones in Japan. I have been challenged in these past six months as a Medical Social Worker at Memorial Hospital in the Springs, joining the work force after eight years at home with the kids. I hold a part time position, averaging about three workdays a week, and find this work to be intense, mentally challenging, and a good fit for me. Sometimes I am amazed at the opportunities that face me. I also spend time practicing in a Gospel Ensemble, hanging out with church and neighbor friends and families, journaling, decorating, walking, and telling our family story in scrapbook form. The kids, their schooling and activities remain our biggest focus. Eric continues to run when he can, and has been successful this past year at the Air Force Academy winning several research grants from NSF, though with perhaps not the best timing in the world as he takes a sabbatical overseas. In Hiroshima he is at the Center for International Cooperation in Education (CICE). CICE is primarily involved in evaluating Japanese educational aid programs in developing Africa. He has learned some Japanese, but most of CICE's work is in English, a common language for the countries it works with.

Life is full, The mountains are glorious, bringing me to Him over and over again. Thank you dear family and friends who have and will continue to imprint our lives. May God bring you through life's hills and valleys and be a special grace to you at Christmas. We will keep a log of our journey and some more photos at erichamilton.net/japan. We welcome email at kristylhamilton@aol.com & erichamilton@aol.com.



With much affection, Kristy and Eric