

THE WALA STREET JOURNAL

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Welcome to another edition of the "Wala Street Journal", published whenever the public demands it. Apparently, the last edition kept the public satisfied for about three years — so here, at long last, is our long-awaited update.

And They Said it Wouldn't Last



Vonna and Phil
(looking a bit dazed)
on December 17, 1983

Phil and Vonna celebrated their 25th anniversary a month early with a trip to Europe in November 2008. The main purpose of the trip was to join an 11-person missions team from our church spending a week and a half teaching in bible schools, visiting small village churches, and working at orphanages in and around Krivoy Rog, Ukraine.

On the way to Ukraine, we spend an extra few days in England and Amsterdam, both to celebrate our anniversary, and to fulfill the promise made to Vonna eight years earlier, when passport woes cheated her out of a similar trip (see the "New Years 2001" edition of our newsletter on our website for the full, sad story.)

Our time included touring the sights of London, visiting the ancient city of Bath and the rural village of Lacock, seeing Stonehenge, and touring the streets and canals of Amsterdam, along with the Anne Frank House and Rembrandt museum.



Anniversary flowers
from the church in
Krivoy Rog, Ukraine



←
Near Tower
Bridge, Vonna
finally gets to
stand on the
spot where Phil
had a close en-
counter with
Queen Eliza-
beth eight years
earlier

Villagers gather
to meet their first
Americans and
be part of a new
church in the re-
mote village of
Motina Balka,
Ukraine



Yes, I Do Have a License to Do This



After many years of study, training, supervision hours, and client hours, and the four year gap when Vonna struggled with crippling multiple sclerosis and the dream was all but abandoned, Vonna finally fulfilled the requirements and passed the oral exam to become a fully licensed Marriage and Family Therapist this past June.

Shortly thereafter, she accepted a position on the staff of Nystrom and Associates (www.nystromcounseling.com), a Christian counseling agency in the Minneapolis area, where she is working at their newly opened office in Eden Prairie. Since this is just a couple miles from where Phil works (in Shakopee), this enables her to join the carpool a couple days a week (although we're still in the process of training her to abide by engineer carpool rules, which forbid certain improprieties — such as talking.)

Jeremiah Poised to Graduate from Ivy League

Jeremiah will be finishing his undergraduate studies as he graduates from the Engineering Physics program at Cornell University this coming May. He has pushed himself hard in one of the most difficult curricula at one of the toughest schools, and has excelled, doing research in nanotechnology, radiation physics, and other things that are already way over his Dad's head. As he finishes at Cornell, he's making plans to continue his studies in graduate and/or medical school.



Before heading back for his final semester at Cornell, Jeremiah poses at -31 °F to show off what a real winter is like.

Stephanie Graduates, Poses with Ivy

Stephanie graduated from high school in June 2008, and finished her first semester at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis) on the dean's list! She is investigating a number of career options, but isn't quite ready to announce a final choice. We think she has adjusted outstandingly well to college life. And she always knows how to make her Dad laugh.

We are proud of the good looks, brains and character of both our children! (Remarkable, considering the genetic material they were handed!)



One of a series of stunning graduation photos of our highly photogenic daughter.

Our Non-Biological Children

With both kids in college, Phil and Vonna are left with their two child replacements: Chip (the cat) and Mandy (the dog). At 15½, Mandy is still hanging in there.



In spite of blindness, partial deafness, and occasional confusion, she at least remains mostly continent — which does offer a modicum of hope for our own future (especially those of us who have already suffered the indignation of our first unsolicited “senior discounts”).

Thanks for shopping at Waseca Hy-Vee
507-835-8030

Grocery

SENIOR DISCOUNT	0.00	F
SENIOR CITIZEN DISC	-0.70	F

In Your Face

For people of our generation, Facebook has been some vague sort of something that the kids do online. Then we went to Ukraine, where instead of trading email addresses, everyone just said “Well, aren't you on Facebook?” (with an implied “Duh!”)

So we took the Facebook plunge, and are amazed at all the old, er, long-lost friends (only some of which are “old”) with whom we are once again in frequent contact, sharing news, posting pictures, etc. If you haven't checked it out yet, we'd encourage you to give it a shot ... unless you really prefer waiting three years between newsletters to find out if the Walas are still alive.



Time for Change

From the occupant of the White House to the state of the economy, this has been a season of change. For the Walas, this is a time of change too, as Stephanie begins college, Jeremiah heads for graduate school, and Phil and Vonna enter the “empty nest” phase of their lives.

With Phil's job, Vonna's job, and Stephanie's schooling all shifted from Waseca to the Minneapolis area, we face another big change, as we contemplate moving to a place that isn't 60 miles away from all those things — which ultimately means leaving Waseca, the only town we've ever lived in as a family.

Personally, we have been changing as well. While in Ukraine, Phil had the opportunity to teach eager students of the Bible that the study of God and study of science aren't just compatible with each other; they are really different aspects of the same quest: the search for truth — which means a continuous process of testing what we believe, embracing newly discovered truths, and discarding cherished beliefs that don't stand up to the test. As we continue to apply those principles, we find many of our understandings, opinions, and beliefs changing. Yet our *core* beliefs have stood up to even the most rigorous skepticism — that the God who instantaneously and completely healed Vonna of crippling multiple sclerosis at 10pm on June 8, 2003,¹ is real, and waiting for us to discover more about Him.

For those of you who don't — and for those who do — share our core beliefs, we hope this will be a year of questioning and testing what you think you believe, and searching for new truths yet to be discovered!

Love,

Phil & Vonna

¹see our website for the full story

