

# 2007 YEAR OF GRIEF YEAR OF GRACE

NEWS FROM JIM, SUE AND MATTHEW HOLMES  
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Many friends will know that 2007 has been a year of considerable challenge; we began on a note of joy—the conception of Rebecca, and a sense that nothing is too hard for the Lord (Genesis 18:14). For some time, we had been wondering about, and praying about, the possibility of a sibling for Matthew, and the answer came in the form of confirmation from our local medical practice: 'Yes, Mrs Holmes, I can confirm that the test has come back positive; congratulations!'

The excitement was, of course, tempered with a measure of apprehension; nobody takes the success of a pregnancy for granted, and it is our view that God had different purposes in mind as he worked the situation out for his glory and for our good.

News of the problems came in an incremental and cumulative manner; a cystic hygroma was observed at the twelve-week scan. This subsequently resolved, but then a heart defect became apparent, one of a severe magnitude. Tests eventually confirmed Down's Syndrome, and Rebecca ultimately developed hydrops—a condition whereby her body cavities filled with fluid which her heart was unable to cope with. The rather clinical sounding term—foetal death—meant that we had a stillbirth situation, just around the time Matthew was to start 'big' school. The delivery was fraught with complications, and Sue ended up having to have an emergency Caesarean section, having lost copious quantities of blood after attempting natural birth. Rebecca was buried in Darlington.



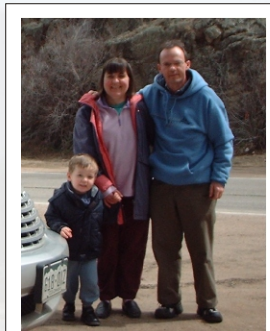
## CELEBRATING TWO DECADES



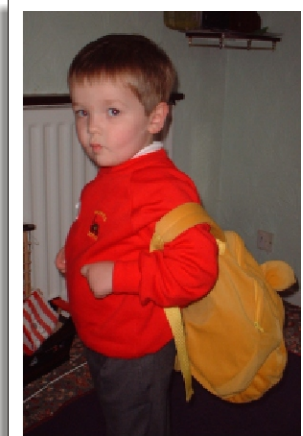
Of course, we must hasten to add that 2007 has had many positive aspects to it. On January 3rd, we celebrated twenty years of marriage. It seems just such a short time ago that we were covenanting together in holy matrimony in South Africa.

To celebrate the occasion, it was opportune for us to travel together as a family to the USA. Although the reason for the visit was mostly for business—Day One has opened an office in Greenville South Carolina, and I had a sales conference to participate in in Loveland, Colorado—it did give us a break together for a few days between locations. The travels did not commence in the best of ways: KLM was running behind schedule, so we were routed through Montreal instead of Minneapolis, lost our cases, had a night unexpectedly in Canada, and finally Matthew became unwell.

However, with the preliminaries out of the way, we enjoyed the majestic splendour of the Rocky Mountains, the cosiness of a condo nestled in Estes Park, and the warm American spirit of hospitality and friendship.



## NEW SCHOOL, NEW FRIENDS



Choices, changes... The term sums up so much of life. Last year, we wrote of Matthew's first day at pre-primary school. Now he has graduated from that, and attends 'big' school—Whinfield Primary School (its logo is Stevenson's 'Rocket'—the first ever railway locomotive) just a few minutes' walk away from where we live. So, this year, we write of this new event.

It's been a big adjustment for him, but he is settling in gradually, and, despite battling some particularly nasty bugs (no, not schoolmates, the ones that need antibiotics), he enjoys life and lets everyone know about it.

May 8th, his fourth birthday, came and went with rapid speed. He has reached the age, now, where he can appreciate birthdays in a comprehensive way. The look of excitement and delight when he saw his main present—a bicycle—was something that any parent would treasure for a lifetime!





## AROUND AND ABOUT



Matthew loves going places. In August, it was opportune for me to take him on a business trip to Scotland. In his terms, it was clearly a 'Dad-and-Son' time. At the beginning of the trip, I intended to drop Sue at the local supermarket, just a short distance away from our house, where she was to buy a few goods and then walk home. When she got into the car, Matthew protested vehemently, 'No, Mummy, don't get in, don't get in.' It was a great adventure—a long ride to Inverness, eating evening meal in a restaurant, staying in a hotel, and a long drive back the next day. We found it interesting to note his taste in choice of music for the journey: part male and female vocal (The Carpenters), part male vocal (Michael Bublé) and part Latin Jazz. Our visitors have been fewer than usual this year, largely owing to the complications in the pregnancy. We were delighted to have Brian and Judy Stone with us for a short while. Brian is pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church, Florida, near Johannesburg, our home church for many years when we lived in South Africa. We also had our good friend, Raymond Zulu, spend time with us after Rebecca's passing.

The challenge of publishing good books continues, and there is a strong sense of the goodness of God in the work I do. My travel schedule has been necessarily curtailed this year. Find out more about Day One and the books we are involved in publishing by looking at this link: [www.dayone.co.uk](http://www.dayone.co.uk).



## FAMILY, FRIENDS AND FUN



MATTHEW AND CARS—He just loves this DVD!

Christmas lights, birthdays, outings for the day... New words to learn, new friends to make. So many things to do... Sue has written the following about Matthew, and some of the highlights from his world: 'Matthew started primary school in September and has made the adjustments reasonably well. Suddenly to find himself in a much bigger class, and having to do things like eat his lunch at a table with several other children were just some of the changes that he faced. Now he loves school and is looking forward to all the Christmas events which take place over the next weeks. At home, he is his usual self, full of beans, but still asks a lot of questions about Rebecca and why she had to die. In his own four-year-old way, he has felt the situation keenly and has his own set of questions as to why it had to work out that way.'



Illustrations: Over: Left panel, Jim and Sue at Rebecca's memorial service; Middle panel, USA visit: Top, Rocky Mountain panorama; Colorado, South Carolina and Ford Explorer; Right panel, Birthday bike, Off to school and Birthday pirate. This page: Top strip image, Forth Road Bridge, Philadelphia skyline, UK autumn scene; Left panel, Judy and Brian Stone, Raymond Zulu, Middle panel, Matthew and cars, Matthew asleep with Big Ears

## SEASONS COME AND SEASONS GO



### MUG-SHOTS ON THE MUG?

I have a large ornamental coffee mug with portraits of 42 presidents of the USA. I was looking at it earlier this evening and I was struck that in my lifetime, there have been eight presidencies. It's not that I am particularly old; it's that time goes by quickly. In fact, when I saw my age on a medical form the other day, I found myself somewhat taken aback; am I really 47? It was a powerful reminder to consider again the words of Moses in Psalm 90:12: 'So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.'

### REALITY CHECK

We want Matthew to grow into a man of strong character and grace. We endeavour to teach him the gospel, and he has begun to understand many of the concepts in the Bible. Over a meal the other day, I asked him this: 'Matthew, how can a person live for ever?' I was hopeful of the right theological answer, but he retorted immediately, 'By keeping healthy.'

I had anticipated a far more theologically apt answer. After all, doesn't he get daily Bible instruction? Don't we enact the story of Jonah in the bath and talk about repentance? When a young man once asked Jesus a similar question—'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' (Mark 10:17), he was pointed back to God's holy law, the Ten Commandments. This was not so much to make him keep them, and somehow earn his salvation, as it was to make him see his need of a Saviour who had kept the law perfectly.

At this time of the year, we do well to think again of the active obedience of Jesus Christ to all of God's law. Not only did he die as a Substitute in the place of ordinary people like us, but he lived a life pleasing to God in order that his obedience may be imputed to all who trust him as the Christ—Prophet to teach us, Priest to intercede for us and bless us, and King to rule over us and defend us from our enemies.

