

Hello Everyone!

Christmas
2011



Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Thornfield, of Thornfield Manor. Thornfield Manor is in the Duchy of Cornwall; and I inherited the title when my great-uncle, the fourteenth Earl of Thornfield passed away without leaving an heir. I've included a picture of our ancestral home;



as you can see it needs a bit of fixing-up. For now, I am staying with my very dear friends George and Louise, who live at Schloss Grenlik-sen in California. To be honest, I much prefer the sunny California weather to the dampness of an English castle or the cold snowy mountains of Idaho, where I was born. But more on that anon.

Lolo is the usual scribe for the annual ursine Christmas missive, but he is off on a great adventure, to Save Redfish Lake Lodge from the predations of Evil Developers. Lolo and Stanley have ventured North, to the wilds of the Sawtooth Mountains, land of their birth, to defend their ancestral homelands. It has therefore fallen to me, a cousin of their great clan, to draft this year's summary of events. I've included the picture from a post-card they sent back to us. Aren't those Idaho mountains lovely?



We bears have had a busy year, starting with berry-picking in the spring, and then getting honey, and the big salmon run, too. This past year we got so many berries that Louise made jam. Everyone says it's the best in the world, so be sure to ask her for a jar!

A few new animals have come into our lives here at the castle. We have two lions now, and Red the Moose got married to Molly, and now has a little girl. But the best new girl now is little Leah Kathleen, also known as the World's Happiest Baby. Leah Kathleen is our grand-niece. That's her with Elroy on the left. We bears sent Elroy to live with Leah and watch over her, as only a bear can do. Elroy adopted a rabbit named Jessie to help -



There's a new little boy, too - Samuel. Samuel is Leah's cousin, and is keeping his brothers, Jonathan and Timothy, company. He's also keeping Gayla and Brian busy. Here are the two cousins together, exploring fingers and toes. ----- >



Leah has been very active on the farm. She's learning to tend the cattle, and as you can see, the cattle find her quite interesting:



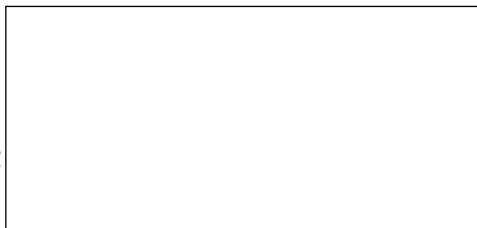
That's her Dad, Neil. He's probably the hardest-working farmer in all of Idaho. You go, Neil!



Amy, Leah's Mom, works hard too. We bears can't wait until George and Louise retire and move to the farm. It looks like so much fun!

You probably want to hear more about Mom & Dad and their friends, huh? Well, they did have a few adventures. There was this company called Solyndra. They were famous, and then they died. Dad said they were "paws up in the cage". We bears are not altogether happy with this term. It has.... dark overtones. Anyway, Dad lost a bundle on it, so we don't mention it much.

Louise has been working, cooking, gardening, arranging flowers, and learning the principles of excavation. There was a huge pile of dirt in the back yard, and she got it all shoveled up and hauled away, all by herself. I've included a picture of the dirt that isn't there anymore.



There was some sad news this year. Louise's sister Ruth Ann passed away after a long illness. Louise spent a lot of time in North Carolina helping to take care of her sister. Louise is rather nice that way. We miss Ruth Ann; she was a very nice Aunt and she always sent us fruit and berries at Christmas. Ruth Ann earned a PhD in biochemistry and did a lot of important research on how blood works. She also left a lot of money to a university to help other students learn about science. Thanks, Ruth Ann!

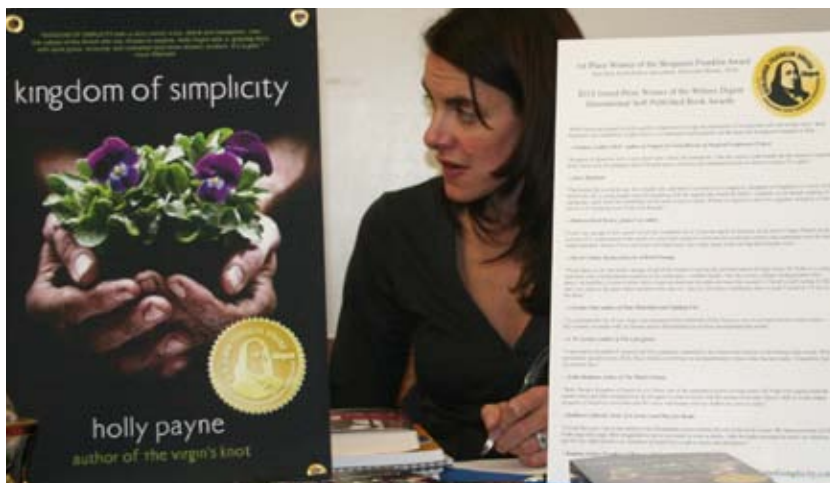
George has been busy working this year. Ever since Solyndra collapsed, he's been developing new clients and working hard to get us enough honey and salmon. Despite that, he passed a milestone of sorts - 500 games of Solitaire. I guess he hasn't been that busy.



Wobie was crew-chief on a motorcycle racing team. They went to a place called Mojave. The goal was to go 200 MPH on a motorcycle. They went 199.2 MPH. Close does not really count. Anyway, here's a picture of Wobie, and George, and Louise, and Cheryl, and Daveeed, whose job was to sit on the bike & not fall off even when it went fast.



Speaking of competition, George's niece, Chelsea, is becoming a championship dressage rider. I'm a little confused; it looks like a horse to me, but they say it's dressage.



Our famous author friend, Holly Payne, has won more awards for her book, the Kingdom of Simplicity. Here's a picture of her at a book-signing event for famous authors. You should buy her book! It's really good, and sometimes she sends us bears really nice things. Go, Holly!

<http://www.kingdomofsimplicity.com/>

Lawrence, our world-traveling bear, got to meet some nice people in Germany, and this year two of them came to visit him. Till is a famous rock-and-roll dude, and his friend Sanni is a psychologist. I guess when you are a famous R'n'R star you have to travel with a shrink to stay normal. They sure were nice!



Louise is getting pretty good at photography. She took the beach shots, above, and the dahlia blossom, below. She was lucky to have her niece, Sara, and little Mykal to be photo-models for her. Mykal sure is smart! She read about jellyfish and wanted to come see the ones at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. We bears did not even know you could make fish from jelly, or jelly from fish, either. It's all quite confusing.

The flowers aren't confusing, though - at least not to Bert, Louise's brother. He is an expert on dahlias. He and his wife, Cheryl, came to California so he could be a judge in big national dahlia contest. I don't know; I guess they race them or something. Anyway, Louise went with him, and they visited a bunch of greenhouses and flower farms. Bears, of course, are very pro-flower. Flowers cause bees, and bees cause honey.





Louise likes birds, and the birds seem to like her, too. She takes a lot of very nice pictures of them. I picked out a few to show you. We get hummingbirds, finches, sparrows, and lots of other little birds. We get geese, too. You sure can here them honking!

Louise and George went back to Midland, Michigan, to the woods where Dad was born. Here's a picture of the woods, and also of the cave he was born in. George said the trees were a lot bigger than he'd remembered. Doh!



They also went to the Dow Gardens, which were filled with beautiful flowers, and the Boulevard Lounge, which still has the best hamburgers, ever! Thanks to their friends Mike and Monica for playing host for them. It was a great trip!

Before I close this letter, all of us bears want to say thanks to the many friends who have shown us kindnesses in the past year, who have forgiven our sins and blessed us with the pleasure of their company, and an extra-special thanks to those who gave us honey. I've added a few pictures from our Christmas - all the bears in front of the tree, and me with my gift from Santa. (It was a jar of honey. I am so happy.) There's George's brother-in-law, enjoying the festivities, and Louise opening a gift. There's also "the kids" - Dave, Susan, and George.



As I mentioned at the beginning, it is usually Lolo who write this letter, and I am most afraid that I may have overlooked some event in the past year, or failed to mention a dear friend or relative. If I did, please don't blame Lolo, or Louise or George; the fault is entirely mine. So, on behalf of Brown Eyes the Senior Bear, Scotty, Wobie, Red the Moose, Lolo the scribe, Stanley, Buttercup, Malusek, Mary-Margaret Elizabeth, Johnson, Oscar and Junior, Solvang, Ginger, Alexander Antler Elk, Hadley, the twins Helter and Skelter, and all the other animals here at Schloss Grenliksen, our best wishes to you for a very Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year. With Honey. And Salmon. And Berries. And especially Hugs. They're the most important!

Love & Hugs,

Thornfield and the whole gang at Schloss Grenliksen

p.s. I just have to add two more pictures of that cute little Leah Kathleen. Isn't she adorable? The world's happiest baby. And that Elroy is such a.... distinguished bear.

p.p.s. Check out our new blog:

<http://plans2reality.typepad.com/thebears/>

