

The Menningen Times Frequently Asked Questions

- ☞ **Why didn't I get a Christmas letter from you last year?** As it turns out, nobody did. A new arrival in our family (see below) and a course that Ken taught during Winterim removed most every opportunity to write and distribute the letter. We began our Christmas letter but it kept getting put on the back burner. We thought maybe it could become a New Years letter... then maybe a Valentines letter... then maybe a St. Patty's Day letter... then maybe a Christmas in July letter...you get the picture!
- ☞ **If you had a whole extra year to write this year's letter, why did you wait until three days after Christmas to begin writing it?** This question would be more appropriately included in the Never Ask Questions column.
- ☞ **Who was the new arrival in your family?** It was Merrilee Hope Menningen, born November 2, 2008. She was our first planned home birth. Laura was attended by two midwives and her husband, and everything went really well.



- ☞ **Well, what does she look like?** Here are some photos of what she looked like last year and recently. She is a happy little girl, adored by all. The other side of her shirt says, "Life is but a dream". Thanks, aunt Kathy!

- ☞ **What do the rest of you look like these days?** Here's a family photo from August 2009. Someday we'd like to get a professional portrait done, but that hasn't bubbled up very high yet on our list of priorities.



- ☞ **Are all of these kids yours?** Yep, every child is a blessing from God!

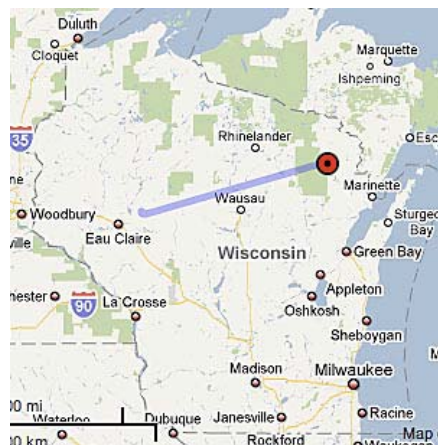
- ☞ **What are their ages?** Alex (15), Nathan (12), Carolyn (10), Susie (8), Jamison (6), Donovan (3), Merrilee (1)



- ☞ **Is Alex, like, in the military?** Not exactly, but he is a very active member of the local squadron of the Civil Air Patrol since April 2008. He has been promoted six times and is now Cadet Master Sergeant. This is a fuzzy photo from his last promotion (12/7/09)... it wasn't a very good night photographically but was a terrific celebration of Alex's accomplishments!

- ☞ **What kinds of things do those Civil Air Patrol cadets do, anyways?** They learn about aviation and rocketry, including orientation flights and building model rockets, and about search and rescue operations. Alex is on the ground team that would be mobilized in the event of an actual emergency. They participate in aviation events such as the EAA AirVenture. They have camp experiences and many other cool and fun activities. For instance, recently Alex was involved in a balloon launch.

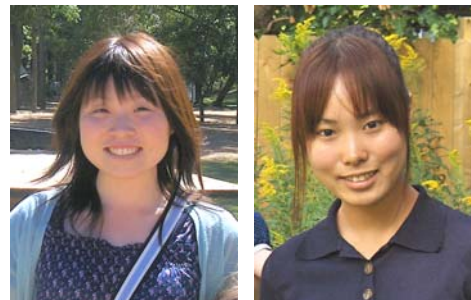
- ☞ **At 15 years of age, isn't Alex too old to play with balloons?** This was no ordinary balloon. It was a weather balloon that carried a GPS-enabled Blackberry and a camera to nearly 100,000 feet, at the edge of outer space! Launch team photo (Alex at far left), a map of balloon's path, and a photo it took from the edge of space:



☞ **Your family life must be pretty busy. Do you get any work done at all?** Yes, our tax return shows four different sources of self-employment income in addition to Ken's university income. Ken and Alex are saving for college by delivering newspapers early in the morning, Ken scores AP physics exams for a week each summer in Ft Collins, CO, he prepares physics homework questions for delivery on the web for a company called WebAssign, and Laura has earned income by watching children (six children from 3 different families) before and after school. Laura is training to become a childbirth instructor through Birthworks Int'l., and Ken is gearing up for another round of edits on a solution manual he wrote for a physics textbook.

☞ **Besides all that work, you probably just take care of the kids, right?** Actually, we're also involved in church activities (Laura serves on the missionary care and support team and helps out in the nursery, Ken runs the sound board once or twice a month and leads the Bible quiz team, Alex serves at AWANA and attends youth group, everybody pitches in for special events like Vacation Bible School and concerts of prayer), and we shuttle children to music lessons, Civil Air Patrol, birthday parties, shopping, etc. We've also hosted students from Japan in our home during the month of August.

☞ **Students from Japan? How did you get connected to them?** UW-Stevens Point runs a program with Dokkyo University in Japan to bring students here each summer to learn English and stay in area homes. We really enjoyed hosting Ai Komatsu (at the left) in 2008 and Moemi Arai in 2009.



☞ **Are your children embracing all that life has to offer?** Yes, both Alex and Carolyn are now in braces. The orthodontist now sports a Rolex watch and drives a Cadillac Escalade.

☞ **Has Ken remained unwavering in his commitment to a pet-free home?** Of course, that's why our pet-free home now has a dog, a cat, four rabbits, a gerbil, and some fish.

☞ **Do you keep your children in cages?** No, but the kids do have primary responsibility in keeping their pets caged (when appropriate) and well nurtured. They team up to walk and feed Kasey our dog, and care for Baxter the cat. Nathan cares for a rabbit named Tag, Carolyn cares for the fish, a rabbit named Jasper, and her gerbil Scarlet, Susie has a rabbit named Pumpkin, and Jamie cares for a rabbit named Bink.

☞ **What do your kids do when you let them out of their cages?** I said, they are *not* kept in cages! Anyway, they love to ride bikes (sometimes with dad), read books, battle with swords/light sabers/bows and arrows/rubber bands/any conceivable weapon, make art projects, build with legos/cardboard/construction paper/play dough/any conceivable material, play in the park, make forts, wrestle, jump on the furniture 😡, play football, and oh yeah, watch movies.

☞ **What was all that noise?** Nathan has been taking drum lessons! He's rapidly improving and getting us all "in the groove."

☞ **What was that blue streak?** It was Ken on his new moped! Thanks, Kevin!

☞ **What's all this I've been hearing about Carolyn's art gallery?** She really enjoys drawing, has been reading books about how to improve her drawing skills, and has become more detailed and diverse in her art work!



☞ **Have you taken any vacations?** We haven't gone on any real big trips, but we've had short escapes... We went to the homeschool family retreat in 2008, a weekend away at the Gibbs family "cabin" on a lake, a trip to a friend's wedding in Illinois, etc. Laura went to Florida to help her mother move to Wisconsin, and also to northern Wisconsin for a BirthWorks workshop. Ken went to Phoenix, AZ for a science conference in May 2008, to Colorado to grade the AP physics exams both summers, and to the Lifest music festival with Nathan in 2009. Alex went to a youth conference, a Civil Air Patrol camp in Minnesota, and a youth missions trip to Savannah, GA.

☞ **What if I have more questions?** You can contact us by email (menningens@charter.net), Facebook, phone (715) 295-0076, or write to us at 3740 Robert St, Stevens Point, WI 54481.