



News from the Blue Ridge



Claire & Lorin Cranford

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Family Events:

Greg is really enjoying his first year of teaching and coaching in College Station. Of course, who wouldn't, if you were on the coaching staff of a state champion football team your first year. He is teaching high school math and coaching in football, baseball etc. at the Allen Academy in College Station, Texas. The private academy is the oldest such school in the state of Texas, and one of the most prestigious. For some insight into the school check out their web site at <http://www.allenacademy.org>.

The second week-end of January, Donald, Hallie, and the kids came through on their way back home to VA from Texas. We enjoyed having them spend Sat. night with us; we are a convenient layover to give a break to the long trip between VA and Texas (17 + 7 hours of driving time). They became our first house guests in the new home, and it was so nice to have lots of room for everyone to spread out without feeling crowded. Now we're looking forward to Carrie and a friend coming out the middle of February to go skiing.

Gradually Claire and I are getting settled into the new home. The heavy demands of our jobs prevents us from being able to devote large chunks of time to getting everything unpacked and set up. But, little-by-little, we are getting things arranged. The neat thing is the abundant amount of space to put things. Neither of us had a sense of the freedom this would bring after the year in cramped quarters in the apartment. I've been amazed at the wonderful sense of interior openness achieved with windows only on the east and west sides of the house. The solid walls on the north and south sides block out noise and help insulate.

For those who know me, you would guess that I've already begun making some preliminary draft designs for a large office suite and a large entertainment room extended off the back side of the house -- and somewhere down the road a shop for wood working. This doesn't even consider the "fish pond" and landscaping of almost an acre of ground. There's enough to keep me busy on into retirement and beyond.

The house has that feeling of "fitting" for us. We are comfortable in it, and have marvelous neighbors. Already we have met quite a large number, many of them stopping by to welcome us into the neighborhood. Several are related to the university. The relaxing peacefulness of the area and the beauty of the surrounding scenery become the "icing on the cake." My work in the office at home in the afternoons is most relaxing and enjoyable. I'm significantly more productive, a goal I've been striving for.

We look forward to sharing all this with visitors and friends.

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University Happenings:

The beginning of the spring semester on Jan. 13 has been challenging. With six classes plus theological German, my teaching schedule is quite demanding, although only four preparations are involved. For those interested you can check out my schedule at Cranfordville, GWU classes, Office Hours. The very positive aspect is that the arrangement provides me most afternoons to spend quality time in the office at home doing research and writing. Beginning with this semester all course syllabi and class handout materials are posted on the internet and available to the students at any time. They are even making the term paper requests to me online. Nothing is printed out to be distributed in class -- much to the relief of our dept. print budget. The students are expressing delight in this structure since it provides continuous access to the materials they need for class assignments etc.

I'm working constantly to enhance the web site and make it more functional for the students. Look for some java apps and cgi pages to show up in the near future, as soon as I have time to develop the web skills a bit further. For the many professors who read this newsletter, I encourage you to take a look at this material and feel free to make use of any of it that's relevant to your teaching. Some of you have contacted me individually about this, so let me make the blanket statement to all giving my permission for its use.

When the winter issue of the journal *Review and Expositor* comes out, you may want to take a look at an article Sophia Steibel and I jointly authored proposing an alternative approach to doing serious Bible study for students and laity. We hope to encourage lay people in the churches to adopt some patterns of Bible study that make use of more substantive historical and literary based methods of getting into scripture texts. The procedures are being implemented on a test basis in the freshmen Bible courses at GWU -- an acid testing ground for anything. You may want to check it out by going to Cranfordville, GWU classes and the Analysis Paper section under the Bible intro courses.

Neither the old spiritualizing devotional approach nor the right-wing Bible thumping approach takes the scripture seriously and thus most often we fail to genuinely encounter the life-changing presence of God in interaction with scripture. Thus we Baptists have gotten ourselves into the terrible mess we're in. Our conviction is that an important avenue out of this is to begin digging deeply into what God can say to us out of the Bible. To that end we hope this article makes a contribution.

For all kinds of info about us as well as a PDF copy of this newsletter, check out our homepage [Cranfordville at http://www.shelby.net/cranford/index.htm](http://www.shelby.net/cranford/index.htm)

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☺ **Claire's Musings:**

January 30, 1999

Christmas was so exciting with Donald, Hallie and the kids stopping by on their way to Texas and then another quick stop on the way back. The second stop, they got to stay in our new home (we had been in it a whole week). Angie, Brian, and Clay were able to stay for several days during Christmas, which was marvelous. We were not in our new home at that time, so I guess they will have to come back. I don't know how I would have survived this Christmas, if it were not for the kids. Now we are looking forward to Carrie and a friend coming around the middle of February. I can't wait to see her, and I know that she will fall in love with our home.

A couple of students from Gardner-Webb helped us do the hardest part of the moving. I don't know what we would have done without them. They were so helpful and always smiling and laughing, no matter how tough things became. It was an extremely long day, and New Year's Eve. When Lorin and I returned that night from dropping off the rental truck, we pulled into the garage just as the count down finished for New Year's Eve. We just made it for New Year's. That gave me a few days to unpack before school started. Of course, we still have way too many boxes in the garage.

I think it's ridiculous to be as spoiled as I am now. It astounds me that all I have to do is push a button to open the garage door, and never have to get outside in bad weather. We now have a dining room for our special dining room furniture. The kitchen is spacious and fun to work in. Lots of windows give us some beautiful views. Our living room is large, with enough room for my armoire. I spend a lot of time at it working, and it's a pleasant place to work. On late cold nights I am able to enjoy the fireplace, too. Sometimes I feel as though I should pinch myself, it is the most beautiful home I could have ever dreamed of living in. Also, we are surrounded by the most beautiful countryside. As wonderful as it all is, though, I miss family and friends so much.

Children can challenge us with their honesty:

Dear God, Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

Norma

Dear God, Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you have now?

Jane

Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay?

Neil

Continued from Lorin's Musings

achieving students. My years of working with Texas Faculty Association taught me invaluable lessons about the critical importance of strong, aggressive teacher unions at all levels of education. Though this is not the single solution, my firm conviction is that strong teacher unions are a needed start toward it.



☺ **Lorin's Musings:**

Another visit to the issue of public school education. Early in January the Charlotte Observer carried a feature article entitled **Departing teachers spell trouble**. The overall teacher turn-over rate in NC rose to 12.3% in the 97-98 school year - up from 11.5% the previous year. To bring the issue closer to home, the Shelby City Schools district had a 16.2% rate, making them 27th in the state, while Cleveland County Schools had a 9.6% rate, ranking them 83rd in the state. Of course, teacher pay is a major issue with NC teachers ranked 38th in the nation at an average pay of \$33,383 -- below South Carolina at \$33, 608 and a 36th ranking. Both fall well below the national average of \$39,394.

From what I've observed, the pay issue is important but for the dedicated teacher it's not the most important aspect. The article emphasized that for many teachers the issues center on smaller classes and more authority in the classroom. The teacher must be able to better control the kids and be free from unnecessary interference¹ by administrators. These actions are critical if we're to trim down the 33% fallout rate within the first three years of teaching.

The Jan 10 issue of the *Parade Magazine* feature article "How Can We Make Our Schools Better?" reflected some of the confusion currently reigning in American public school education. Dr. Lorraine Monroe's summation of the responsibilities that parents, kids, and schools have effectively captured an idealistic picture of how things should be. Unfortunately, no one in the article -- kids or teachers -- advocated serious study and learning as a way to improve the educational experience. The students interviewed reflected the problem in their answers, more than any real solution.

Of course, the trendy thing now is standardized testing. This is often held up to be the way out of our morass. What happens? Despite all the protests to the contrary, the American education system has become paranoiac about good test scores. And teachers, at the insistence of administration who are pressured by school boards and state legislatures, "teach to the test," rather than teach humans and subject content. We have turned the classroom into a giant science lab and the students into Pavlovian dogs being conditioned to appropriately respond to bits of information dangled before them. Such is the kiss of death to meaningful educational experience.

Drastic action is needed to turn the situation around in the U.S. Teacher unions need to achieve major new power to force the addressing of these issues. From the national picture the states with strong unions have the smallest turn-over rates, best working conditions, and are producing the highest

Continued in left column

¹A concession to my good friend Joe Ross, retired associate superintendent of the Ft Worth ISD, who called my attention to the administrative side in his response to my initial musing on this subject last Nov. A principal can make or break the atmosphere in a local school. Too much politics and not enough native leadership skill way too often seem to serve as the basis for getting this job.