

## The Bērzkalns family Top 10 - 2009

The annual tradition of the Bērzkalns family Top 10 was not an easy task this year - worldwide economic crises, Latvian political and social crises, familial crises all around. And yet, the effort itself was cause for reflection, with the reminder that we have a good life and a lot to be thankful for. So, without further delay, our Top 10 in 2009:

1. In this crisis-ridden world, we start with **the basics** - we both have jobs (Pauls at the International School of Riga, Ilga at the Latvian State Forests) and our roof doesn't leak. This second point has been a challenge, with several attempts at resolving the problem - but for 2 months now we have had a dry interior!

2. Unfortunately, the first hours of the year were a stomach flu nightmare, and our family health basics went downhill from there. With a few new scars, we have made it almost intact to the end of this up-and-down health year, having gained a respectful (and positive) appreciation for Latvia's **medical system and facilities**.



3. In spite of our limitations, we had a great opportunity to celebrate Pauls' 50<sup>th</sup> with friends and family and several of Pauls' godkids for an entire week in an **Italian villa in Tuscany**. Wine, Tuscan treats, hill towns, sun & swimming - a great way to mark Pauls' achievement!

4. Paul's 50<sup>th</sup> **birthday celebration** didn't end with Tuscany - but included a dinner party at home that was a cross between a crazy 20-something celebration and a gourmet 4-course Italian dinner!

5. The entire family enjoyed our first-ever participation in a week-long summer camp for families called **Īkšķīši (Little Thumbs)** - complete with sleeping on the floor in a classroom with 2 other families, campfires, games and arts & crafts.

6. An October trip to **Stockholm** via overnight ferry with the family and Grandma and Grandpa was fun for all - with trips to the Astrid Lindgren museum, the Armory, Coin Museum and Vaasa museum. A Chinese restaurant completed the cultural extravaganza.

7. Ilga's rejuvenating 72-hour trip to **Cape Cod** to meet with old MIT friends Kathy, Gayle, Patty and Julie provided a wonderful walk down memory lane, lots of laughter and strategy games, and a spark for development ideas back home.

8. Ilga joined the Board of **Delna, Transparency International** Latvia, whose mission is to promote a democratic society that is free of corruption in politics, business and mutual relations.

9. Ēriks has befriended several of the boys in his **pre-school** class at ISR, and is speaking in full sentences in English. Raivis, who started ISR preschool in September, is a model student - patient, caring, and attentive.

10. Raivis and Ēriks continue their **love for the outdoors** - with active yard work (guided by Grandma), a first overnight canoe trip, biking expeditions in Jūrmala, the summer seaside, and winter sledding and snowmen.



May your 2010 bring health and happiness for you and yours!

Ilga and Pauls, Ēriks (5) and Raivis (4)  
Sīpeles 15A, Rīga, LV-1058, LATVIJA