

Wednesday December 31, 2003

Dear friends and family,

Belated Season's Greetings from here in Holly Springs! We're having a wonderful time. Wish you were here. (Unless you're someplace nicer, that is.)

Right off the bat, we need to apologize for getting this letter out a bit late. Not just because we missed Christmas, but because we've rarely, if ever, written any of you in all our fourteen years of marriage. We propose to remedy that by at least sending an annual holiday newsletter from now on. Of course, we won't blame you if you don't start holding your collective breath just yet, especially since we've already fouled up on our first try. Of course, we do have a good excuse, but we'll save that for later.



**Just hanging around**

Life is as hectic as you might imagine around here. Between getting four kids to bed every night and them getting us up every morning, it seems we're constantly on the go. Megan is nine now, and enjoying her third year of dance classes here in town and her first year of children's choir at church. Christopher, turning eight this month, just started his second season of Upward Basketball at church and can't wait for his fourth baseball season in the spring. Cameron will be four in March. He loves to watch – and be – The Lone Ranger and play with his horsies. He also loves to talk. And talk and talk and talk and... Patrick will be two in April. He also talks a great deal, but we have no idea what he's saying because he flatly refuses to learn the English language. His great love though is playing the guitar. He sits on the floor with Steve's old expired dreadnought and strums and sings, or

else he gets Cameron's toy ukulele so he can play while standing up and stomping his foot with surprisingly good rhythm. Just like his Dad, only better. What a hoot!

And for all of this, Mindy is the ringmaster. In addition to the chores of being married to me (an insurmountable challenge in itself) and transforming house into home, she plays the role of schoolteacher for the older children while somehow entertaining the younger ones at the same time. Remarkably enough, the school year is going well so far. Megan is in the fourth grade and Christopher in the second. Megan has had some struggles with

her reading in the past, but vision therapy seems to be helping. She's shown some improvement already and is certainly becoming more enthusiastic about it.

In her spare time (?), Mindy continues to work at her Creative Memories scrapbooking business. It has been a real blessing for her. Her customer base is strong enough that she has been able to take two or three months off, when necessary, from teaching classes without having a significant drop in revenue. And that's a good thing. We like revenue!

Our special event for the year was high school reunions. It's been thirty years for me and twenty for Mindy, although we're both pretty sure there's been a mathematical error somewhere. However, since I went to school in Georgia and Mindy in Illinois, and since both were summer reunions, and allowing as how I had seniority, Mindy insisted on forgoing hers in June to avoid an extra long trip. She returned the RSVP card with her declination. Meanwhile, I got involved in trying to contact some of the missing alumni for my reunion and wound up getting rather over-excited about the whole thing. It was worthwhile though, as I have now happily reestablished connections with several <sup>old</sup> long-lost misplaced-but-not-forgotten friends from high school and beyond.

The fun of it was that my reunion was held in Atlanta the third weekend of July, while my annual family reunion was the following weekend in Terre Haute, Indiana, as always. And I, in a rare adventurous moment – since repented of – decided we could do both. So we drove to Atlanta and spent three days there before migrating north. We stopped in Louisville, Kentucky to visit Mindy's cousin and tour Mammoth cave with them, spending two nights at the hotel in the park. Then we proceeded to St. Joseph, Illinois to surprise Mindy's folks with a four-day visit.

Saturday afternoon Mindy's good friend Tim saw our car in the driveway and stopped to chat. He said he figured we were in town for Mindy's reunion.

Mindy told him, "No, I missed that. It was back in June sometime."

"Uh... no," he said, "it's tonight."

"No, I got the invitation and I'm sure it said it was in June," she insisted.

"Well, that's funny, because I just bumped into a dozen of your classmates last night, and they told me it's tonight at the Holiday Inn. I figured they ought to know."

Mindy was speechless. I burst out laughing.

We already had plans to double date that night with another friend that Mindy hadn't seen in nearly twenty years, but we called and told them what was up. They agreed to a quick modification so we scrambled to upgrade our attire for the evening, had a great but too-short dinner with Scott and Beth and then raced over to catch the tail of the reunion. Mindy had protested the whole time that she had spent more time with her upper-classmen, wasn't very close with many people, wouldn't really know anybody, and so forth. When we arrived, we no sooner darkened the door than someone popped out of a seat hollering, "It's Mindy! Mindy came! Hey Mindy, over here!" I burst out laughing again, and then tagged along as Mindy worked her way around the room talking to all those people that she "didn't really know." We left two and a half hours later.

The next day we drove over to Terre Haute for the reunion of my mother's family. It was a nice afternoon, but by then we were tired of traveling and overflowing with reunions.

Unfortunately, we fear we didn't treat my family as well as we should have, for which we apologize. But at least we know that won't happen again for another ten years!

After all that we stuck pretty close to home for a while. We did make a trip to Wilmington for my birthday in August. We stayed at a beachfront hotel near the marina where our friends Rich and Charlotte live on their sailboat. They took us out for a short cruise and on a behind-the-scenes tour of the North Carolina Aquarium where they work and volunteer as divers. We got to watch Charlotte dive in the big tank and we fed the fish afterwards. Now I have a stack of sailing books, another stack of scuba diving books and am scheming to learn both!



**Miss Charlotte on display!**

At the end of October we headed to the Outer Banks for the week we'd had scheduled for months. We stayed at a condo in Kill Devil Hills, about half a mile from the Wright Brothers Memorial. We took a driving tour to see the wild horses at the north end of the island, and along the way observed many missing dunes and smashed or overturned houses from Isabelle's visit several weeks earlier. Then I accompanied Megan and Christopher to the top of the Currituck lighthouse before driving back south. Later in the week the



**A museum that teaches pirating?**

kids made kites out of drinking straws and wrapping tissue. They took them to Jockey's ridge and flew them from the dunes. We also visited a museum on Roanoke Island, home of the "Lost Colony". Finally, on the morning we left, we toured the Memorial. The kids had been studying boats and airplanes, and Orville and Wilber specifically, in school so this was a great way for them to connect their studies with reality. That's the great thing about home schooling. It wasn't a vacation; it was a field trip!

Just before that trip, a coworker of mine left the company, vacating a management position that I had an interest in filling. Once we got back, I updated my resume, interviewed with seemingly every member of upper management – not that many really, in a company of 65 employees – and finally received the promotion to Network Administrator in mid-November. I was confronted with a steep learning curve, but thrilled to be out of Software Development after almost twenty years.

Then in early December, it was announced that the company was being sold to a company in California that wanted our software and our development staff, but didn't really have any use for anything – or anyone – else. Apparently, I had just gotten myself promoted out of a job! Fortunately, the buyers seem to be honest and above-board, working quickly to let everyone know their status. As it turns out I am being allowed to

return to development so I can stay on, and I'm even getting to keep the new title and salary. Of course I'll also get to keep the new headaches alongside all the old development headaches, and get to shoulder the burden of integrating the two networks as a bonus. (All of which, by the way, comprises the aforementioned excuse for the tardiness of this letter. Ok, maybe it's not that great after all.)

Ah, well. At least I still have a reason to get out of bed every morning!

So as you can see, the Lord has certainly been blessing our household this past year. We can't wait to see what he has in store for 2004. And we pray that the coming year will see His blessings falling richly on each of you as well.

As we were traveling back to Illinois for Christmas last week, with everyone asleep but me, I was thinking about Christmas cards and how hard it was to find one that seemed special enough to send. (Yes, I did find one and bought four boxes of them. You know, the very pretty ones you didn't get!) It occurred to me that what I really want to see is a Christmas card that goes deeper than baby Jesus laying in a manger. Something unexpected. Something that gets one thinking about *why* He came. I think a perfect verse for a card – one that I've never seen used – is Philippians 2:6-7, “although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.” Put that alongside a watercolor of His hands washing Peter's foot. Now *that* would be a great Christmas card. Why can't I ever find one like that? Maybe I'll create them myself and send them out next Christmas. Or, then again, maybe I'll just send the ones I already have in the attic.

Reveling in the glow of Christ's infinite mercy and love,

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P.S. I want to encourage everyone to seriously consider seeing Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, which is scheduled for release on Ash Wednesday – Friday February 25<sup>th</sup>. I say “consider” because it is going to be a very traumatic film to watch, at least for the born again Christian who views it in the full knowledge that, “it was for *my* sin that he suffered so.” I have seen the two-or-so minute trailer and I wept through most of it. I wept again later, just thinking about it. This is a film that I await with both eagerness and dread. I fully expect to be unable to rise from my seat for several minutes afterward. You will have to decide for yourselves if you are up to it.

Below is a link you can paste into your web browser to read about some people who got to see a private screening recently. I felt tears on my cheek while reading this too.

[www.pkfans.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/ikonboard.cgi?s=3ff737d42510ffff;act=ST;f=6;t=3](http://www.pkfans.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/ikonboard.cgi?s=3ff737d42510ffff;act=ST;f=6;t=3)