

Holiday 2002

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(Past Holiday Letters ONLINE!)

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My, what a year it has been. This year started as one of the more traumatic years on record for us personally, and thankfully evened out and finished on a high note. In February we lost Trisch's Dad during his cancer therapy. It was a shock to everyone and we all miss him very dearly. Within a month or so after that, we also had to put Kyoto down due to bloat. She was getting on in years and while it wasn't entirely unexpected, it nonetheless was a shock to the system. She was a great pet and is also missed. From there, things picked up and we finished out the year on a general up note. For those of you new to our little bit of journalism, this is a somewhat campy (and very late) review of what we've been up to during the past year. Read on and enjoy (hopefully).

Kiley Learns to Communicate

Kiley's first form of communication was learning to shake her head "No". Well, actually it was a whole body thing with her head moving one direction and the rest of her body moving the other. She quickly learned to identify questions and respond with "No" regardless of the subject. The boys had great fun in asking questions like "Kiley, do you like Nicholas?" and then rolling on the floor laughing when she said "No". I decided to strike while the iron was hot and had a small session with Kiley where I got some basics out of the way. Things like "Kiley are you going to make mommy and daddy pay for a big, expensive wedding?" -

"No" (Nice!). Actually, I don't have anything against her having a big wedding or even an expensive wedding, but I'd prefer to have that bill sent somewhere else. I know Trisch would disagree with the extravagance, but as far as I'm concerned, when the time comes I'd like to give her three crisp Ben Franklins and she can pocket whatever she doesn't use! After all, she is my little girl. Other topics covered were: "Kiley, are you going to spend all your time shopping? And "Kiley, are you going to date before you go to college?" The entire session was dutifully recorded to digital video and safely archived for later.



The Transitive Property Comes to Town

Quick, without looking at a textbook or using Google (THE Internet search engine), what is the Transitive Property of Equality? Uh-huh. Wipe that stupid look off your face. I'm a Stat Major by degree (not trade), and even I had to ask my Braniac wife for a refresher. Anyway, we try to use the video game ratings (Everyone, Teen, Mature) at least as a barometer for what the kids do and don't get to play. One general exception for "T's" is the Star Wars universe. The kids do have a T-rated Xbox game that they play from time to time. One day while strolling through Costco, Nicholas

spied a collection of Star Wars PC games and immediately latched on to them. When he asked about them, I

surveyed the pile looking for some quick, painless "out" that would end the discussion. Ah, they were all "T" rated, cool! "Sorry Nicholas, all these are Teen-rated, so you'll have to wait. Let's go". Nicholas thought for a moment and then said "Our Star Wars Xbox Game is 'T', so why can't I get one of these?" Arrghh! Busted by a 7-year old! So, I fell back to the time-honored out "Look Nicholas, there's Scooby Doo!" (Readers on top of their game will recall this little tidbit of deception from last year). If you're about to reach for that keyboard and troll through Google for "Transitive Property of Equality", the answer is: If A=B and B=C, then A=C. Elementary, but I was a lot older than Nicholas when I learned it!

Santa Now Hails from Redmond

Tyler has become utterly fascinated with Microsoft's Age of Empires computer game (a game targeted toward teenagers and adults due to the requirements for managing the socio-economic and technological development of a world through the building and management of houses, farms, docks, and armies; and the advancing through the various feudal, castle, etc. ages); or as Tyler puts it: make that builder-guy collect wood and make more bow-and-arrow guys. This started when his uncle was playing the game during Labor Day and Tyler sat down to watch. From there, he has spent hours at a time playing the game. It has gotten to the point where when asked what he wanted from Santa, he replied "The knight game without the monks and wolves". Right - I'm sure my buddy Bill in Redmond is going to get right on

that. That fascination has even eclipsed his fascination with Spiderman. Although he has never seen the movie, he nonetheless spent considerable time developing his web swinging skills via the Xbox game (another Microsoft special), and he would wander the house for

weeks jumping from couch to chair and throwing pretend webs with his hands.



Of Vodka and Sledgehammers

Outside of taking care of the herd (of kids), Trisch has spent the year turning her pursuits from the typical HGTV arts and crafts nambypamby things to more of the "hangin' with the boys" kinds of things. Specifically tending bar for the Martini bars we've had at a couple of parties we've hosted and proving herself in the outdoor construction trade by jumping in front of my sledgehammer and getting 5 stitches (IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!). For the bartending, it all started earlier this year when Trisch had a Lemon Drop Martini at a local restaurant. From there, she decided we could make our own Lemon Drops and that prompted a mad dash to acquire various bits of barware and liquor, including breaking out a very nice polar bear shaped shaker she had gotten me for a previous Christmas. Over the year we've hosted a few parties and informal "Waddaya doin tonight" affairs and have on occasion broken out the "Martini Bar" where Trisch has manned the shaker and has been "callin' the shots" so to speak. So, our parties have been spiked with conversations such as: "Anyone want some Glass Cleaner" or "I'll take a Cocaine Lady (this one is great but wicked)". Trisch hasn't gotten into the "Bottle Twirlin'" nor has she started dancing on the counters, but give her time. On the construction side, Trisch decided to dabble in civil engineering when she announced one weekend that we should fill in a sinkhole that had developed under our driveway. So, we got out the shovels and started opening up the side of the driveway so we could see what we would have to do to fill the thing in so that we wouldn't see part of the driveway freeze over like a bridge and we wouldn't lose anymore baseballs (this was of particular interest to Ray.... Yeah right. It was actually Nicholas). To make a long story short, we wound up literally shoving 1900 pounds of

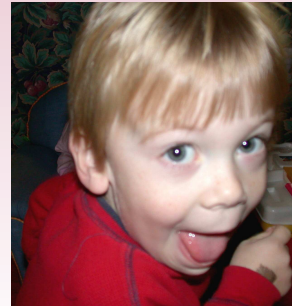
stone under the driveway and finished it all by creating a makeshift tamper and "tamping" it from the side of the driveway with a sledgehammer. Trisch was manning the tamper and I was swinging the sledgehammer (a full length handle topped off by 10-pounds of cold-forged steel which was last put into service knocking out a cement wall when we lived in Virginia). To set the stage: Trisch is holding the tamper; I'm swinging the sledge. (For those of you keeping score at home, "Ping" is a successful hit on the tamper; "Swish" is a clean miss; and "Are you alright" is a miss on the tamper followed by an ACCIDENTAL strike to Trisch's head). So, to continue, the scene played out as follows: "Ping", (tamper jiggles a little, Trisch moves it while I'm starting my next swing). "Swish", "Don't move it while I'm swinging!" Trisch says "Sorry". "Ping" (tamper jiggles a little again, Trisch moves it AGAIN while I'm starting my swing), "uhhg" "Are you alright" and ... curtain closes. Trisch caught the hammer just above her left eye, and after assessing the situation (I won't bore you with the (literally) gory details), we immediately dropped the kids with a neighbor and rushed off to the ER. Three hours and 5 stitches later, Trisch was back at home practically good as new. She now proudly displays the small scar at family get-togethers and Bunko nights. Curiously, I can't get her to hold anything for me when I have a hammer in my hand.

Flight 961 to Chicago Now Boarding at Gate 30

To say that the year has been busy for me would be somewhat of an understatement. The year kicked off with my starting a new job with Cerner, a healthcare IT company. Cerner is one of the few companies in the Healthcare systems market that provides an integrated electronic medical record for hospitals, doctors, clinics, etc. The system provides everything from drug interaction checking to storing radiology images to electronic Q-tips that monitor ear-wax buildup in real-time and transmit it to your medical record for analysis (well, maybe not that last part, but don't put it past us, we're a wild bunch!) The new job has been an absolute trip! I mean that literally, since I have a single client in Chicago and have been

generally going to Chicago two nights out of each week. The remaining days, I work out of the house, which is fantastic! Of course, working out of the house brings a whole new meaning to the term "Business Casual", where you have the constitutional right to sit on a conference call with various bigwigs in your jammies (actually, I'm the only one in my jammies, the bigwigs are on the conference call; of course they may be in their jammies as well, you never know). So, work has kept me busier than I've been in the last five years, but so much happier. Outside of the new job, I've been following the kids around and hitting Trisch in the head with a sledgehammer (IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!)

The Goofy Gallery



Here are some nice little pictures we are keeping around for first-dates, Proms and that sort of thing.

What's Under Your Dining Room Table?

One afternoon, Trisch was working on a school project and I had assumed my regular role of managing (i.e. standing around with my hands in my pockets saying "uh-huh", "right honey", and "that looks good"). Meanwhile, Nicholas was crawling around on the floor under the dining room table playing with a toy soldier or something. As I was dutifully helping my wife with her project, we hear from under the table "Oh man" ... pause ... "Mom, Should I eat this or throw it away". Using the lightning fast analytical skills of parents of two boys and a girl, Trisch and I independently, silently, reviewed the available evidence in a split second: 1) Last time anyone ate anything in the dining room - weeks ago, 2) Who discovered the supposedly tasty morsel - Nicholas (thankfully not Kiley - being one year old, she knows better than to ask, she follows the "put everything in your mouth and let Mom or Dad sort it out" rule); 3) What was the last thing eaten in the dining room - doesn't matter. Following this split second analysis, we answered in unison: "Throw it away!" Ahh, the joys of Parenthood.

