

Decision 2004: Reading the Holiday Letters

Can't decide which holiday letter you will read first? Hope is on the way!

Only one holiday letter this year has the experience, the determination, and the moral clarity to be read first. My opponents can't seem to make up their mind! They start with a broad, disorganized sampling of personal news. Next thing you know, they have a feeble attempt at humor; then, suddenly, they flip-flop back to personal news again! I can assure you that I will not flip-flop unless I am at the bottom of a page. And while my opponents are written on paper made by cutting down large healthy trees in Alaska, I am printed on 100% recycled paper! Uhhh.....actually...I'm not sure about that. But even if I and my opponent are both made of the same kind of paper, why would you read any other letter before me? If you read me first, I will stay the course and stick to my message, presenting only a single, narrow, focused selection of personal news and absolutely no humor. I am

The Lefton Steinbart Holiday Letter

And I approve this introductory paragraph.

Greetings from a the great (red) state of Georgia. We hope that this year was a healthy, happy year for you and your loved ones. And we hope that your enemies had really bad gas.

On February 29th this year, we leaped into serious pet ownership and adopted Madison into our family. She is a shepherd-hound mix who was about a year old when we took her home from the Humane Society. Madison is very cute, but she still has some annoying puppy behaviors, like chewing. Ever optimistic, we have decided that this habit is actually helpful with keeping our house picked up. We only had to lose a few pairs of shoes before they stopped getting left on the living room floor! Toys and stuffed animals aren't carelessly strewn about the house anymore! A lot of the things Madison has chewed up, we probably should have thrown away anyway. Notable exceptions were Enid's wallet and one of our kitchen cabinets. Nevertheless, we are happy to have Madison around to play with, take for walks, and theoretically frighten away prowlers. Having a squirrel free fenced yard is just icing on the cake...

This summer, the whole family got high. Like, really high, dude. Like, Bolivia. That's right, we visited Lew's sister Charna who lives in La Paz and worked as the deputy country director for the Peace Corps. We spent time in the Andes petting llama and alpaca and sailing a catamaran on Lake Titicaca (the world's highest navigable body of water). We walked through a working mine at over 14,000 feet in Potosi, and we also spent some time in the beautiful jungles of the lowlands, fishing for (and catching and eating) pirahna in the Amazon basin! It was a great trip for everyone, and Charna was a wonderful host and tourguide. Natalie had a bit of altitude sickness, but she was a trooper. After a couple trips in and out of La Paz by plane, she was reaching for the bag, and she told Enid, "Don't worry Mom, this *always* happens to me when I fly into La Paz." Hannah was almost kidnapped by a cute boat captain. Monica developed a severe addiction to *Maracuya Clyde* (a fruit juice flavored soft drink). And although we all enjoyed the Bolivian cuisine, there was still something special about those chocolate chip cookies baked by Charna's housekeeper Dominga.

Later in the summer we all went up to Port Townsend, WA in the Olympic peninsula. Enid's family reunion there was great fun and included kayaking, hiking, and playing on the beach. There may have been margaritas involved, too, but nobody can quite remember. It was really nice to see everyone and enjoy a week in such a beautiful place.

What else, what else... Oh yes! A tree fell on our house. We were actually pretty lucky since it was a large one (over 80 feet tall), but it only grazed the corner. It fell between us and our neighbor, taking out most of its gravitational wrath on the fence.

Hannah finished fifth grade with a 3 day field trip to Skidaway Island on the Georgia coast. She also school wide math award. Nature or nurture? You decide. She is now a sixth grader, and she played on the middle school girl's volleyball team.... must be nurture. She is also taking band and getting really good at the saxophone.

Natalie continues to play soccer and excel at... math! She can sometimes be quite contrary, but if you point it out to her, she will, of course, disagree. Like Enid, Natalie is a morning person. In fact, she often gets up at 6:30 AM and reads for 45 minutes before school! Her early bird habits will work out well when she starts those 7:30 AM chess club meetings next month.

Monica is enjoying third grade a lot, and she does well in.... math! She likes to design things and then build them so this summer's architecture camp was great fun for her. Monica has also taken an interest in the little electronic keyboard we have. On top of that, she attended a special Saturday science camp for several weeks this year!

There are many things that all three girls enjoy doing. They are each involved in girl scouting, and both their troops managed to schedule their campouts and tubing trips on some of the coldest weekends of the year. They all like doing projects down in our basement/art studio. But of course, nothing is better than screaming at the top of your lungs at your other sisters who get everything they want and you NEVER get anything you want. I'm sure they will all calm down and act more maturely once they are all teenagers.....

Enid has established a unique niche in the Georgia Tech Math Department as an important person in the undergraduate program. She still teaches, but she helps a lot of math majors with advising, etc., too. She is not as active in mathematical research as she would like, but she is still doing some work. Outside of her professional life, Enid is an after-school-run-errands-drop-off-kids-at-soccer-PTA-meeting-cook-clean-shop-mend-paint-the-house whirling-dervish-disguised-as-a-woman mom. She falls asleep around 10:15 PM and goes to bed around 11.

Lew continues to be a valuable asset to the GT Math Department, too, since he keeps all the computers going. And you know how cranky mathematicians can get when their computers don't work. He is still collaborating with a colleague on a textbook which, early reviews indicate, may be one of the top ten parallel and vector scientific computing textbooks published this year! Lew still tells math jokes at the occasional professional conference, but other than that, his "career" as a stand up and improv comedian has all but stalled. Fortunately, his frequently juvenile sense of humor will soon be moving to the forefront again, as he begins his important parental duty of embarrassing his preteen daughters.

Our long lived goldfish Coco and his bowlmate Pepe died this year shortly after the presidential election. We are blaming a right wing conspiracy. We also buried several hermit crabs this year. Hannah's gerbil Willy is still alive and spends most of the day, like Madison, alternately eating and sleeping. We are all quite jealous.

We must have hired a good architect for our remodeling last year, because the Decatur Historical Preservation Society awarded our house a design award, complete with bronze plaque to place on the front of our house! They obviously never looked inside. Our award-winning house attracted several visitors this year including Lew's sisters Irene (for Thanksgiving) and Charna (in the states for a short trip).

Other memorable events this year: we had a big restructuring of the local school system so Natalie and Monica are suddenly in their last year (3rd grade) at the local Winnona Park Elementary School. They will go to a systemwide 4-5 academy next fall. It was a big issue locally, and although we didn't agree with the school board, we are making the best of the situation.

If, after reading this, you are still interested in talking to us, you now have a new way to contact us! We finally entered the world of the late twentieth century and purchased cell phones this fall. We use Verizon so we can walk around saying "Can you hear me now? Good." You can call Enid at 404-290-4891 or Lew at 404-290-4609. Our other contact information remains the same: 404-377-5631, 141 Shadowmoor Dr, Decatur, GA 30030. We all have email now, too. Lew: lefton@math.gatech.edu, Enid: steinbart@math.gatech.edu, Hannah: hannah.lefton@gmail.com, Natalie: natalie.lefton@gmail.com, Monica: monica.lefton@gmail.com and Madison: chewing_up_everything_in_sight@dogcrate.kitchen.leftonfamily.org

Merry Christmas!

Happy New Year!

Happy Hannukkah!