

The 2005 Lefton-Steinbart *(just a minute!)* Holiday Letter!

As I sit here writing the introduction for this year's letter, I, ...(No Hannah, you have to finish practicing your sax before you can call your friend)... I'm thinking about all the highs and lows of the...(Natalie and Monica! please turn off the TV, you have to finish your chores before any screen time)... of the past year. Talking to friends and family, I have come to realize that our lives are filled with ...(I last saw your car keys on the dining room table next to that stack of unread magazines, Enid)... filled with something that we all seem to have in common. Of course I'm talking about ...(Will one of you girls please get the dog out of the hamper before Mom sees her!)... about interruptions. If you can sit and read this entire letter without interruption, you win! So, let's get start... (hang on, there's the phone)....

It should come as no surprise to you, that the members of the Lefton-Steinbart household, when not tucked away, sleeping through a peaceful (albeit short) night in their comfortable Decatur bungalow, have been *mind-numbingly* busy. Of course if we didn't fill every waking moment of our increasingly achey life with frenetic activity, our holiday letters would degenerate into the kind of response we get from 12 year old Hannah when we ask her about what she did at school: "nothing". (Note: it is important for you to have an exasperated look on your face when you say this word.) So, since you don't really want to read a *bone-crushingly* dull holiday letter from us, we must continue our highly caffeinated lives for your reading pleasure.

The AMS-MAA annual January meetings were conveniently held in Atlanta this year, so Enid and Lew both attended and enjoyed catching up with friends and colleagues. Nothing like a big MATH conference to kick the year off right, eh? EH? (Cue exasperated look from kids, but this time all three girls have mastered it).

In March we all headed out to Anaheim, California where Lew was booked to do a comedy gig at... (wait for it...) a MATH Conference! The organizers of the California Math Council Community Colleges South (www.cmc3s.org) wanted a Mathematician/stand-up comic to perform at their 20th annual conference. Google led them to Lew, and we decided to make it into a long weekend at Disneyland for us all. Lew's sister Irene flew down from the Bay area to give us an extra adult, 'cause you know how overstimulated Enid gets at Disneyland. Lew had slipped and broken his ankle just a week before, so we rented a wheelchair and jumped to the front of every Disney-line, too!

Summer brought more fun trips and family get-togethers. We flew to Chicago in June for a wonderful wedding. Enid's uncle Reinhardt Steinbart (I did NOT make name that up) and his new wife Joan had a full blown wedding celebration and all of Enid's siblings attended. I would name all the wonderful cousins there, but it would significantly increase the postage of this letter. We also had a chance on our brief stop in the Chicago area, to visit Ram and Roni Ben-David and their adorable kids Tamara and Golan.

But wait! We're not done with the plane trips to visit relatives yet. In August, we enjoyed visiting Lew's sister Linda for her ~~<milestone_deleted_to_preserve_national_security>~~th birthday celebration. The long weekend gave us all a chance to catch up with more cousins and friends. And overeat, especially New Mexican food. We got to see first hand how Linda's new dog Cinnamon interacted with Charna's cat Kantuta (who, like Charna, had recently returned from Bolivia and was giddy with "all this oxygen!"). One hyperactive "alpha" dog + one paranoid disoriented cat = fun for all ages!

Of course, we all watched in horror as "Katrina and the Waves" became more than just a one-hit-wonder band from the 80's. Our friends Ralph and Kasia Saxton, mathematicians from UNO and Loyola respectively, stayed with us for a couple months. Lew went back with them at the end of September, before the city officially re-opened, to inspect, clean, and salvage. Unfortunately, their house had a significant amount of water and mold so they lost nearly everything. We have wrestled with many feelings as the storm's devastation unfolded: sympathy for our many friends and colleagues who lost so much, relief at having moved away before the flood, anger at government response, shock, sadness, etc. And like so many of you, we are watching and wondering what the great City of New Orleans will look like, come next hurricane season.

Fall fell, and the hum of the school year routine filled the air with an incessant, obnoxious, buzzing... wait a sec, that's just the dryer, (Madison! NO! BRB.... OK). Irene may be spending the better part of 2006 in Zürich for work, so that made her traditional Thanksgiving visit even more special. We also got a brief visit from brother-in-law Dick Rortvedt this fall.

Despite being told that we are the worst parents in the world (and we sometimes believe it), we still love our daughters very much and we're *chest-puffingly* proud of them. In the next three paragraphs, we will shamelessly commit the holiday letter sin of offspring hubris. You have been forewarned.

Seventh grader Hannah continues play alto saxophone and she achieved second chair this year. She enjoyed playing middle school volleyball, too. Hannah is active in the church youth group, going on several trips with them, and getting officially confirmed this fall. She participates in a NASA sponsored science camp and has already taken the SAT (yes, the real one) as part of a Duke University program. She still wants to be president when she grows up, so please register to vote if you haven't already done so.

Monica and Natalie both turned the big "one-oh" this year, and they now attend Glennwood Academy, which has all 4th and 5th graders in the Decatur City school system. They both take the 15 minute walk to school every morning with a group of 5 to 10 other neighborhood kids. Lew, Madison, and a handful of other parents usually walk with them. Both twins have started practicing for an academic bowl team, and both are quite active in their Junior girl scout troop.

Lest you get the mistaken impression from that last paragraph that Natalie and Monica's lives are stuck in lockstep, let me point out a few differences, too. Natalie continues her interest in soccer. She is still an early riser, like her mother, and she placed into the geography bee this fall. Natalie loves to play board games (Steinbart genes), but she doesn't always win (Lefton genes). Monica would prefer to stay up late and sleep in, like her father. She continued her NASA science camp this year, and went all by herself to a girl scout sleep away camp in the summer. Monica's passion still seems to lie in the area of art and design and it shows in the 4 shelf bookcase she hand painted this year. Unfortunately, we can't tell you anything else about our daughters, because, as we are reminded almost daily: "Mom and Dad, you just don't get it."

At work, Enid is doing fine, enjoying the flexible academic schedule of a faculty member. All the math majors at Georgia Tech, know that Dr. Steinbart is the "go-to" person to help them out of a tight spot. Enid's year included a trip to a conference in Madison, and a couple visits to see her friend Julie Hoff in Boston and Washington, DC. The latter, of course, also gave her a chance to see her sisters Sylvia and Stephanie. On the home front, Enid and our dog Madison have decided to call a truce: Madison won't chew up the dirty laundry, and Enid won't kill her.

That reminds me, we are leaving the year 2005 with no living pets other than Madison. We should emphasize that this has nothing to do with Enid or the laundry. It's just a coincidence. Really.

Lew is still a combo geek: mathematics and computers. His book, "Parallel and Vector Scientific Computing" with co-author Ron Shonkwiler should appear published by Cambridge University Press next year. He understands if you don't rush out and buy a copy until Oprah recommends it.

Atlanta welcomed the world's largest aquarium and an IKEA store this year so you now have fewer excuses not to visit. Our screen porch alone is worth the stop. Have a healthy, happy, safe and prosperous 2006. We're not always the best correspondents (OK, Lew isn't) but we sure love you and think of you often. And next year, we will keep in touch bet... DING DONG!... that's the pizza, gotta go.

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Merry Christmas!

Happy New Year!

Happy Hanukkah!