

2006 is the year when we, as a nation, have stopped and re-examined our priorities.

With that in mind, we bring you a glimpse of a screenplay we are working on.

It's generating a lot of Oscar buzz...

SCENE 1: *The curtains open to a dust filled room with a single table set up under a bare light bulb. There's debris everywhere; it looks like a war zone. In the low light, we can barely make out two figures, leaning over what appears to be an elaborate convoluted plan...*

#1: I don't care how much we've already spent, or what shape the place is in, we have to stop this insanity and pull out now! I vote to cut and run.

#2: No way! We made this mess, so we have a responsibility to finish the job. I vote to stay the course.

No, this isn't the opening scene of a new riveting drama about the war in Iraq.

It's a scene from the real world drama playing out in our house, called BATHROOM REMODEL

5 people. 6 months (so far). One toilet (not counting the "Blue-John" in the front yard).

Is it any wonder that it'll probably be after Christmas before you'll get

The 2006 Lefton-Steinbart Holiday Letter!

Let's flash back to an earlier simpler time, about 6 months BC (before construction) to January 2006.....

Hannah had her lucky birthday this year when she turned 13 on the 13th. Teenagehood was an easy transition since she's been practicing for awhile. She'll tell you herself once she wakes up and gets something to eat. Hannah now has braces, and she continued to play volleyball this fall. She's looking forward to getting out of middle school next year, even though she's doing very well there. Her electives are full year Spanish and full year band, where she is still blowing the alto sax. Hannah's time outside of school is filled with church youth group activities, babysitting, listening to popular rock radio, and advocating gay marriage.

Musical Monica began playing two instruments this year! Her weekly piano lessons and (almost) daily practicing have really paid off. She now plays so beautifully that we are considering getting a real piano. It would replace the Costco keyboard we now have, but we'll probably wait until the majority of the drywall dust leaves our system. In school band, Monica's playing the flute, just like Enid did! (It's even the same flute.) Monica's appearance went through some major changes this year, too. She's now wearing cute glasses, just like Enid does! (Not the same glasses.) She's also lost about a foot of hair, donating it to "locks of love."

Natalie really knows where it's at. Literally, since she placed third in the school wide geography bee. She enjoys reading almanacs along with novels, and she is one of the best Sudoku players in the house (which is no small feat in our house). She began band this year with the oboe. It's a difficult double reed woodwind, but hey, it's a pretty small case to carry. This is important since she still walks to school most days along with Monica, Madison, Lew, and other neighborhood kids as part of our local "walking school bus."

Enid's role at Georgia Tech continues to expand at what appears to be a rate which is asymptotically unbounded. As undergraduate adviser, she's involved in many new programs in the School of Mathematics, including the Undergraduate Research Program, International Education, the Honors Program, and more. She was recognized this year with the campus wide award for outstanding faculty adviser! Enid still likes teaching and working with students, but the administrative duties are heavy. Fortunately, the School created and filled a new position this year to help with her workload. In her nonexistent spare time, she still enjoys baking and playing games. Her favorite game these days is "Don't wake Mommy!"

Lew's job changed somewhat in February, when he began applying 20% of his time to the Dean's office in the College of Sciences. His new title of Director of Information Technology Services (yes, that's pronounced "ditz") has him working

with various aspects of computing in all the other units of the college (e.g., Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Psychology, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, etc.). He does things like provide advice, represent the college on campus wide committees, assist with interviews and hiring of technical staff, and evaluate high performance scientific computing platforms. This last bit fits nicely with Lew's book, with co-author Ron Shonkwiler, which finally appeared in print (<http://tinyurl.com/r5afz>). He taught from it for the first time this fall. This fall also marked Lew's return to doing straight stand-up, with several gigs at local bars and campuses.

Madison began the year as the only family pet, and it looks like she'll end it in the same way (the gerbils and fish who graced our family in the interim did not survive the construction). Of course she may not realize this since she spends most of her days locked in a crate in the kitchen while strange men tromp through the house with power tools (not her idea of a perfect day).

At the end of our remodel (cue angelic chorus and soft comforting beams of light), we will have popped up a dormer on the back and completely reshaped all bathrooms. There will be 5 sinks! Think about that for a minute. Five sinks. In the meantime, all three girls had an extended four month sleepover in the den without access to most of their things. Of course, they didn't fight or complain. And the additional stress was all taken with good humor and patience. Cough, cough, ahem.

We all spent some time away from home this year, too. In June, we took a big family trip to visit Lew's sister Irene who is temporarily working in Zurich, Switzerland. We can all now claim that we've hiked in the Rockies, the Andes, and the Alps! The beautiful art, the omnipresent sense of history, the world cup fever, the wonderful shops, the delicious food, and the warm hospitality all helped to make our first European vacation a huge success. Thanks Irene! We also traveled during our spring break, but we headed in many different directions. Lew had a great time in Southern California doing several math joke gigs at UC San Bernardino, Harvey Mudd, and an MAA meeting. He enjoyed seeing many friends including Shawnee McMurrin, Vic Shapiro, and Ken Jeong (who happened to be performing with former Brown! member Mike O'Connell at the Improv that weekend!). While Lew was off goofing with the geeks, Monica had taken a solo flight to San Francisco to enjoy her special 10 year old trip with Irene. She loved the Golden Gate bridge, Lombard street, and especially Ghiradelli square. Meanwhile, Hannah played beach bum at St. Simon's Island with her friend Amanda and her family, and Enid and Natalie spent some time in north Georgia near Dahlonega hiking up waterfalls and relaxing in the small towns. But wait, the trips don't stop there! Our daughters racked up even more frequent flyer miles this year. Natalie took her 10 year old trip with Aunt Irene to San Diego where she visited Sea World, the Zoo, and Tijuana, Mexico! Aye yi yi! Linda also treated the twins with trips to Albuquerque this fall. Monica got to crew at the Balloon Fiesta, and Natalie enjoyed the State Fair and managed to squeeze in a trip to both Mesa Verde and Four Corners. While the twins were away on their solo trips, Hannah had the opportunity to bicker with only one sister at a time.

You know, even if BATHROOM REMODEL isn't a huge hit, we're still likely to win some awards this year. Enid is a sure bet for most tolerant spouse after we went tent camping this fall during one of the coldest weekends of the year. All three girls surely deserve recognition for their outstanding performances during Drama camp this summer (as if they needed extra training in being dramatic...). Lew may end up with the coveted "girl scout cookie champion" prize (that's number eaten, not sold), and Madison continues to work toward her lifetime achievement recognition in squeaky toy destruction.

If you can, please come visit us after the first of February, at which point we hopefully will be done with construction. The house may be harder to find without the dumpster in the front yard, but once you get here, we'll let you use one of the FIVE bathroom sinks! We look forward to hearing from you!

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May you and your loved ones year have a new year full of health and joy.

Merry Christmas!

Happy New Year!

Happy Hanukkah!