

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year.


It is that time of year again. I know we can hardly believe it around here. The weather is a bit dirty but doesn't feel like winter at all. We just bought a couple Christmas trees and most of the Thanksgiving turkey is gone, so it must be time to write the annual letter.

I am going to refuse the urge to give a chronological recap of the year. It would probably bore you to tears. But I am going to tell you about those things that Christmas reminds me to be thankful for and take a look at the year ahead. For the most part, 2003 has not been a great year and the end of it will bring much more joy than grief.

I am thankful for my family and I miss those that are no longer near. The Viks, Gustafsons, Larsons, Sarraccos, Stones and the rest are spread across this country. E-mail and phone calls are poor substitutes even when they are used. We tried electronic video over the internet but I think there are a few technical issues to work out. Yet I wish we could still live in that small town in my mind where family and friends are just a bicycle ride away.

I am thankful that my parents are still in good health and I give special thanks for my mom who continues to get chattier every day. I recognize what a disaster dialysis can be for somebody, but it has returned Sally to us. At the same time I call to mind my father-in-law Jim who was lost to us this year. Our family misses him. It reminds us that life and breath are such a gift. We would all do well to remember that every day.

It has been a year of adjusting to the new house and some new things. As we get more things, the pendulum swings and we realize that 'stuff' tarnishes. For example, I love our boat. But really, I love the time the boat gives us as a family. It is a platform for us to entertain our friends. My job is pretty hectic at times. Work is not an end unto itself, it just provides the money I need to do things that are more satisfying. For example, Katie and I went to Work Camp together in July. It is kinda like Habitat for Humanity where kids team up with sponsors to repair homes and lives. (No, I was not one of the kids!) It seemed like a turning point in our relationship. I accept the fact that teen age girls want their Dad's around just marginally more than they want really fat thighs and uncontrollable nose hairs. But I think she saw that I wasn't so bad and probably would help her if she could just control me the right way. I think the progress we have made since July is the highlight of my year.



Lars has had a very interesting year thinking about college. We should have it settled soon but there are still some test results to come back. There have been a few bumps along the way. I was serious enough that I did not think we would be able to consider college. I had set my mind on the fact that he would turn 18, graduate high school and get kicked out of the house all at the same time. Here is another example of where I have been blessed. My eyes were opened to the fact that people make mistakes. I know that I made plenty as a kid and continue to goof up today. Time does heal all wounds and Lars has worked very hard to make amends, probably doing more on his own than I would have asked of him. I am still very proud of him. My kids are not perfect, but they are my kids. I love them more each day and that may be the best gift of all this year.

Finally, I need to say a few words about Cindy. She is a pillar of strength. She is able to temper my bad moods and make me see things more clearly. She is there for the kids and takes them to doctors, work, horse, nutritionist, school, etc. She is also their confidant much more than I am. She is the glue that keeps this family together. She continues to get more sophisticated and beautiful each day.

So what are my predictions? We will continue to have ups and downs. That is called Life. We will think about our friends and wish them all the best. We will look for ways to spend time celebrating life with those friends. We might even use computers to do so, but we will value touch over technology.

Finally, we will wish all of our friends and family the very best. We hope that God blesses each of you whether you live in California, Florida, Illinois or Connecticut.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Marty, Cindy, Lars and Kate