

Mike & Jane's
Annual Report



December 25,
1995

"Fred and Rita drove from Harlingen / Can't remember how I'm kin to them / And when they tried to plug their motor home in / It blew out our Christmas lights... Hallelujah everybody say cheese; Merry Christmas from the fa-muh-ly..."
— Robert Earl Keene

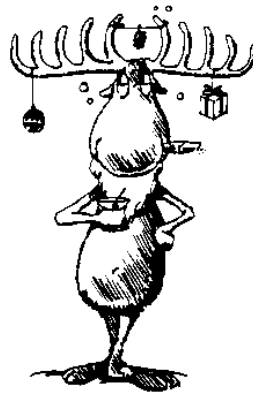
Jane's review of the events of 1995 went like this: "Sold a car, bought a car. Added a second kid. Sold a house, bought a house. Escaped to Wisconsin. Adopted a third dog. Rented a lot of movies. Home for the holidays." This from someone who lists her occupation as "Writer." That pretty well sums it up anyway, but would leave a lot of blank paper. So.

Around the first of the year, Jane was heaving her rotund pregnant self determinedly in and out of her little Honda del Sol, and scouring dozens of auto magazines in search of a child's car seat that would fit on a roof rack. Alas, it was to no avail, and we had to sell the little convertible and buy something practical. Mike tried to talk Jane into a mini-van, preferably with fake wood siding and a "Baby on Board" sticker, but Jane would have none of it, as she is not yet ready to forfeit all claims to Babe-dom. (Ever hear anyone say "Check out that babe in the mini-van?" Me neither.) So we got her a Blazer instead, because the Hummer she *really* wanted would not fit in our garage.

On March 16, the Big Guy entered our lives, through the side door just like his sister. ("I was born by Caesarean section. You can't really tell. Except that every time I leave the house I go out through the window...") David Anthony was a bit above average-sized newborn, but by now, at nine months of age, he's

almost got our two-and-a-half year old Megan outweighed. He's a pretty fun little guy, whose main goal in life is looking for openings to scoot into the utility room and tump over the dogs' water dish. And putting things in his mouth. Life can be a joy if one is satisfied with the simpler things. Maggie was actually thrilled with her little brother from the start, until she discovered that he was actually coming home to live with us. It was all downhill from there.

No, really, Megan is quite enamored of Charlie Brown, which is an appropriate nickname since David's head looks like a big fuzzy cue ball. She calls him "My Pal," which is pretty cute. In fact, she says lots of really cute things, but in the spirit of Christmas charity, we have decided not to bore you with them.



We figured we might as well go for the whole enchilada, so we put our house on the market around April, after storing half our stuff at Mike's parents' house to make it look bigger (our house, that is; not the stuff). The house took a couple of months to sell, during which by dint of Herculean effort we managed to keep it vaguely presentable, which must be some kind of record with two kids under the age of two running around. Eventually someone with impeccable taste decided he could not live without Mike's train tracks running around the living room (really!), and we found ourselves having to locate a new house in a week or two or wind up living under the Interstate 45 overpass in a cardboard box. And all our boxes were already full of stuff. We decided upon a house about a mile south of where we used to live, figuring we could save money by hauling everything over the sidewalks on hand trucks.

You might guess that the move took a bit longer than expected...

Now, every so often we look around in befuddlement, as we realize we are actually living in a *grown-up* house. With a consistent color scheme yet, and curtains that match. Of course, this will all go by the wayside in no time, as the world-renowned Ugly Sculpture Exhibit finds a home and the chandeliers are replaced by lava lamps, but for the time being it looks okay. Anyway, make a note of the return address, because we are likely to stay here for quite a while. Or at least until we have to sell the house to finance Maggie's college education. Or earlier, if she goes to a private school.

We flew up to Wisconsin around the end of July, so that Big Dave could meet his cousins and learn how to water-ski. No wait; that was Maggie. Dave wanted to drive the boat. We attended Jane's fifteenth high school reunion, though the details are a little blurry, and her brother Pat's thirtieth birthday party. The details are fuzzy for that party, too, but we have it on reliable authority that we were singing along enthusiastically to the greatest hits of the Village People on the back of the boat. We're pretty sure we will be allowed back on the *Queen O' the Lakes* someday, though we would not want to bet on it.

Shortly after that we decided to adopt our dogs' mother, Pooh Bear, who was getting lonely living at Mike's parents' house after his sister Betsy and her husband Cary returned from their year in Okinawa, and took back *their* dog Truly. Pooh is not much trouble and little extra expense, with the major exception that she is so blind we had to buy her a seeing-eye human.

So we have a larger house, and an extra rugrat roaring around the house in his walker. David has been clocked at over 75 miles per hour on radar, and Mike can hardly wait for him to learn to write so he can sign his own dang speeding tickets. Dr. Spock does not prepare you for these expenses. Our idea of excitement these days is viewing any non-animated movie and finding a pair of matching socks. We like to think that we could still go out and party like wild animals, but we generally wind up yawning uncontrollably after 8:30 or so.

Halloween was the first occasion we had to get excited about our new location. For some reason, each year on Lomita we would get around nine trick-or-treaters, who averaged seventeen years of age and had nose rings for costumes. This was discouraging, and we looked forward to Halloween in a new neighborhood, as we decorated like mad and had spooky music blaring all night. Regrettably, we were the *only* house on our street to do anything for Halloween, as everyone on either side of us kept the lights doused and hid under their beds. This may say something about the neighborhood. Undaunted, we have resigned ourselves to having to hire our own trick-or-treaters next year.

Now the holiday season is upon us, with several grave matters to ponder. The most serious problem concerns what to do about decorating for Christmas. We had it easy in our last house, as the hooks had been installed by a thoughtful resident back in the Sixties. We would throw up some lights, and for the crowning touch of good taste and refinement, place a plastic "Noel" candle on top of the chimney. But our present house has the chimney in back. When the neighbors found out about Mike's plan to install a motorized Santa in the front yard turning Rudolph on a spit, it was amazing



how quickly they rounded up a petition. So the decorations are pretty standard this year. We also decided, for the first time ever, that we would not be able to make it up to Wisconsin for Christmas, which is quite an adjustment. But for some reason, this year it feels more like home than it ever has for us. We feel unbelievably lucky and blessed, and are thankful for our wonderful families and wonderful friends. To quote a current commercial: "We're in Texas. Life is good. *BRRAAAAP!* 'Scuse me." (Well, it *is* a beer commercial.) We miss our friends and family all year, but particularly during this season. We hope everyone has a fun and safe Christmas season, and hope to hear how all are doing.

Mike and Jane