



*"On Christmas Day you can't get sore
Your fellow man you must adore
There's time to rob him all the more
The other three hundred and six-ty four..."*
— Tom Lehrer

The "Last Christmas of the Millennium!" Never mind that we're actually still stuck with another year of the 20th Century to go. By all accounts Y2K will be the End of Civilization As We Know It, so it's a good excuse to devote the last days of the year to improving your Windows Solitaire scores before your computer explodes.

So anyway, next year's letter will doubtless be hand lettered on parchment and sent out via carrier pigeon.

Neither Jane nor Mike won a Nobel prize, the Heisman Trophy, or the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes in 1999, which was something of a disappointment. We took some consolation in the fact that Megan ("Maggie") is now in first grade at St. Paul the Apostle school and has yet to be severely disciplined or arrested. She had a big dance recital in the Spring, attended by ourselves, Mike's parents, and various cousins. We had a nice time, but fear that Maggie will not be hearing from the Bolshoi Ballet any time soon. She has since decided to drop dance classes, perhaps because of the high probability of injuring innocent bystanders. She wants to take up gymnastics, providing they will let her wear a tutu on the parallel bars.

Maggie's alter ego is, of course, "Dancing Deer" of the mighty Passamaquoddy Tribe, in the Richardson Indian Princess Nation. This would be more impressive if the tribal councils did not involve so much Barbie-related activity. Mike ("Elusive Snipe") was elected by acclamation to be Chief of the tribe, and believes it was

due to his evident "wisdom, maturity, and superior leadership skills." However, the fact that nobody else wanted the job may have had something to do with it. They have gone on two camping trips and attended several meetings and events with the tribe this year.

One amazing thing about those camping trips is that, after untold thousands of children have climbed Johnson's Peak over the years, our Princesses are all so observant that *each one* of them manages to find an ancient Indian arrowhead every single time. We tell them it has something to do with eating lots of carrots.

It is very hard to stay focused on one's daily concerns when sitting at a campfire, gazing at the stars. The neighbors are starting to complain, though.

David turned 4 in March, and is looking forward to joining Maggie at St. Paul next year. His imagination is coming along nicely; so much so, that how to address him is becoming a daily guessing game: "Good morning, Dave!" "I'm not Dave." "Uh... good morning, Batman!" "No." Umm... Thomas the Tank Engine?" "No." "How 'bout 'Super Dave'?" "Yeah. I'm Super Dave. See the cape?" Call us cynics, but we rather think a bona fide super hero ought to be able to figure out which shoe goes on which foot all by himself.

For the Fourth of July weekend, we piled into Jane's Blazer and motored up to visit Grandma and Grandpa in Wisconsin. The highlight of the trip was when Jane's brother Paul alerted us to the appearance of a full-scale Thomas the Tank Engine at a railroad museum in nearby Green Bay. Since Dave ranks Thomas as one of the four greatest achievements of Western civilization, we had to go and experience the peak moment of his young life. Dave got to meet the "real" Thomas, and will

probably still be dragging around that picture of himself and his hero on his wedding night. We went through Minneapolis on the way back, so Mike could show Maggie and Dave where he grew up. We then moved on to visit Mike's great aunt and great uncle in St. Peter, then returned to the typical Texas summer oven, wishing we could bring the weather with us.

Mike got an unusual gift for his birthday in July: a whole day of NASCAR driving school at Texas Motor Speedway, which he attended in August. It was a really unique experience; five cars were on the track at once, and passing was allowed. Apart from a minor mishap involving running the first few laps in the wrong direction, Mike figured it out fairly well and was soon complaining about being limited to a top speed of 150.

The only down side to the experience was that he has developed some bad habits. The police are not sympathetic when you're trying not to "lose the draft" in a school zone.

In September, the whole family traveled down to the Guadalupe River Ranch in the Texas hill country, for a weekend celebration of Mike's parents' 40th wedding anniversary. Everyone, especially including all eight grandchildren, had a terrific time, and Mike's mother claimed it was even better than her wedding day. We all took this with a grain of salt: she cannot remember where she left her car keys, either.

On a sad note, Jane's mother lost her battle with cancer in October, so we're having to adjust to life without her. We will head up to Appleton for several days before Christmas to keep up the tradition of their big family gathering on Christmas Eve. Although it won't be quite the same, it will be nice to be all together.

We went all the way out to East Texas recently to cut our own Christmas tree. It was a setting straight out of Currier and Ives: the gently falling snow, the team of horses dragging

the tree back to a picturesque barn nestled in the woods, the eggnog and good cheer all around... We are lying, of course. The setting was not particularly charming and the kids got way too bored during the trip. But it was fun anyway, and we are hoping the tree lasts at least three days before all the needles fall off and we get another citation from the city for a "known fire hazard."

Dave is presently working on his very first letter to Santa, with spelling help from Jane. He insists "Pokémon" can really be spelled six different ways, and feels compelled to use them all. He often asks us to "play Pokémon" with him, which as far as we can tell involves little besides being told which bizarre creature you represent, then watching him tear around the house holding a miniature plastic figurine.

On Christmas Day we will return from a mob of Keslers in Appleton to a crowd of Koeneckes in Dallas. We'll eat too much while the kids careen through the hallways shrieking and breaking every toy they get from Santa, often before the things are actually unwrapped. This is pretty much the same as what happens in Wisconsin.

Recently we were having lunch at a place which had the Colts-Dolphins game playing on a number of televisions scattered around. Mike, being a guy, was necessarily riveted to the fortunes of two teams he otherwise couldn't give a rat's whisker about. It has something to do with hormones. Anyway, he mentioned "Good heavens; Miami is getting stomped." Pause. Maggie then piped up with "Daddy: what does your 'ami' mean?"

So Mike, Jane, Maggie, Dave, and all our collected ami's hope your Christmas and holiday season in general is a memorable one. For the right reasons, that is.

Mike & Jane