



*“On the first day of Christmas
My true love gave to me: beer.”*

— Bob and Doug Mackenzie

Thinking about the past year makes us realize that we really do not have much to report that does not revolve around the two very short people who invaded our house a few years ago and started demanding things like candy and Barbie dolls. Kind of an Invasion of the Pod People in miniature is what it is.

So, we’re getting the hang of projects for science fairs (which, Mike was disappointed to discover, frown upon high voltage and explosives), book reports, and soccer games now. We have still successfully resisted acquiring a minivan with fake wood on the fenders.

Maggie is now in second grade and is doing pretty well. She likes math, science and reading best, and penmanship probably least. So, by deduction, she will probably wind up in medical school. If not that, at least we’re hoping for something a tad more ambitious than what she *used* to want to be: a “sock sewer.” She started piano lessons in February, and just performed at her second recital. She seems to enjoy it, and is doing fairly well, but it may be a while before she masters *Great Balls of Fire* or *Good Golly Miss Molly*.

Dave finally got to go to St. Paul the Apostle with Megan, and is in Kindergarten. He really loves it: to him it is one big party with his pals all day. No trace of the quiet two-year-old who always would go off and play by himself remains: we now have a regular Dale Carnegie on our hands, who knows more people than we do. He likes the school part, too, but tends to do the work without bothering to wait for instructions, thus producing fairly unusual results at times. He is a pretty cooperative fellow, but drew the line at Jane’s request to “stay five years old forever.” Anyway, it’s been wonderful to have Magatola and the Big Guy at the same place, and we like the other people there, too.



This Fall, Dave commenced “organized” soccer, playing in the inaugural season for the “St. Paul Pokémon,” Lord help us. The picture of him is his “trading card” photo. Mike had the idea of improving the games by adding a couple of border collies to herd the five-year-olds around the field; but it turned out that the dogs scored all the goals, which disappointed the two kids who were actually paying attention to the game. Dave’s competitive fire at this point is somewhere in the pilot light range.



The mighty Passamaquoddy Tribe attended their second Indian Princess Sweetheart Banquet in February, during which Elusive Snipe tried to instruct Dancing Deer on how she should be treated when she goes on a *real* date someday. Except that, in the latter case, the idea will be to stay *out* of the back seat — air bags or no air bags. Mike and Maggie also competed in the Pinewood Derby, fashioning a car that looked like a canoe, complete with little Daddy and Maggie figurines holding paddles. Unfortunately, the thing raced like a canoe, too: one going upstream and listing to one side.

With the arrival of Fall came Dave’s eagerly-awaited chance to join Indian Guides. Showing a real flair for authentic Native American culture, he already had a name picked out: “Flying Peacock.” So, the Mighty — and really, really *loud* — Bayougoula Tribe came into being, and attended its first camp out in November. The temperature was predicted to peak at 36°, with freezing rain, but the Great Spirit cut them a break and they had a grand time. Mike explained to Dave how his sister had had to be carried part of the way up Johnson’s Peak, which proved to be an effective motivator: the only trouble they had on the climb was keeping the boys from running the whole way.

Both tribes combined for a float in the Richardson Christmas Parade, carrying Indian Princesses on one end, Indian Guides on the other, and a big fat load of **cooties** in between. “Boys go to college to get more knowledge; girls go to Jupiter to get more stupider.” The girls could not come up with a good counter for that one all day long.

Maggie was inquiring about the ins and outs of Santa Claus-ology with Jane the other day, and was dismayed to discover he doesn't bring presents to anyone over the age of, say, twelve: “You mean there's an *age limit*? I've only got *five more years*?”

Mike had a couple of nice trips this year. In late January he and his Dad flew off to Las Vegas for a few days, arriving just in time to pay twelve bucks for a six-pack of cheap beer so they could watch the Super Bowl in their hotel room. It got better from there, except at the gaming tables, where Mike proved conclusively that he does not have a drop of Irish blood in him.

In May, Mike's brother in law Cary invited him along for a reunion of his squadron. As can well be imagined, the idea of hanging around with a bunch of Marine fighter pilots smoking cigars, drinking, and swapping stories in a castle in Scotland held little appeal for him. But he manfully owned up to his family duties and went along anyway. They wound up in a fairly remote part of County Argyll among pastures, hills, and lochs, with the odd local pub or two scattered here and there. Mike got to go clay pigeon shooting, toured old castles, and now wears a kilt and calls Jane “lassie” every chance he gets.

He also got to join Jane in Nashville at the Interstate Batteries semi-annual convention. We did get to take a day trip to the Stones River Civil War battlefield, but mainly occupied our time getting lost wandering around the enormous Opryland hotel. (The picture at the end of this letter is us stylin' at the big Saturday night party.) Mike was actually pretty thrilled to get the chance to chat with Bobby Labonte and Jimmy Makar, the driver and crew chief for the NASCAR champion Interstate Batteries race team. He was pleased to discover that we are not rooting for a couple of jerks.

Bar None, the Dallas Bar's annual comedy revue, had a very successful run in June. Mike wrote and acted in a couple of skits as per usual, but Jane wishes he would stop borrowing her rouge and lipstick.

Finally, Mike has been looking into a bit of a career change, as after over fourteen years of solo

practice he has concluded he is tired of working all by himself, no matter *how* much money he has saved on Secretaries' Day over the years. So he has been nosing around for opportunities for an experienced business attorney who also happens to be a major computer geek. One would think Bill Gates could use some good attorneys about now, but he hasn't called yet.

Jane was pretty pleased that she managed to pull off a surprise party for Mike's 40th in July. It wasn't quite as spectacular as Dave's gift, which involved going to see *Thomas and the Magic Railroad* with him earlier in the day. But it went off pretty well, and kept Mike from buying a convertible or doing something else mid-life crisis-y.

Jane attended her 20th high school class reunion in Appleton in July, and had a great time hobnobbing with her classmates who showed up. She was amazed at just how terrific everyone looked, until she sobered up and looked at the photos later.

In September Jane joined her friends Judy and Marleen down in San Antonio for a couple of days. They toured some Texas wineries, and found the products pretty good once one got past the armadillos on the labels.

The rest of the time, Jane spends most of her evenings doing laundry, it seems, with the occasional sojourn scrapbooking.

So, 'till later on, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah, Roaring' Ramadan, Jammin' Winter Solstice, Kool Kwanzaa, Happy New Year, and may 2001 bring wonderful things for you and for all of us.

