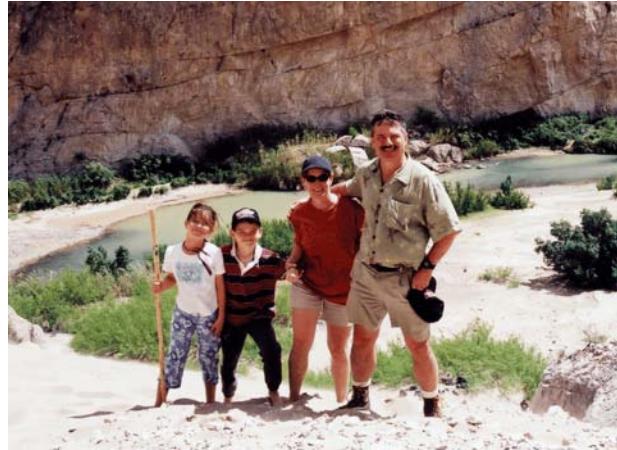


Mike & Jane's Annual Report

December 25, 2003

It's Christmas time once again, as our children grow older and wiser, while their parents grow correspondingly dumber. Late last year Maggie insightfully noted that "Some people at school say Santa is really your parents. But I don't believe them. You don't have that kind of money."

Early in 2003 Jane thought taking an actual "family" vacation would be a good idea for no particular reason other than the fact that the last one we took was when Maggie was an embryo. So we decided to do something in the Spring. Based upon the evidence of several *Girls Gone Wild* videos, Mike thought going to South Padre Island for Spring Break would be the bee's knees, but he was outvoted. So we trekked out to Big Bend National Park in far West Texas instead. This was about a six or seven hour drive, which is not even all the way across Texas. Anyway, we stayed at a dude ranch in Fort Davis for the first day, went to a star party at McDonald Observatory in the Davis Mountains that night, and came back for a round of *Happy Birthday* for Dave at dinner at the ranch. Fort Davis was built around an old cavalry outpost, which we toured the next day. At lunch, Dave got another *Happy Birthday*. Probably the most fun we had was visiting a roadside reptile zoo, where Maggie got to hold a snake named George and pet a gila monster whose name we disremember.



On top of the sand hill in Boquillas Canyon



...And coming down

Then we cruised on down to Terlingua, famed home of the annual World Chili Championship Cookoff but which only has around 500 people the rest of the year. Dave got his third rendition of *Happy Birthday* at the Starlight Inn, this time in a Gypsy-ish version done by the entertainers.

We have about had our fill of *Happy Birthday*.

Other stuff about Terlingua: at the Phoenix Café (a restaurant which had all of four tables – and *that* crowded the room) they gave us a deck of cards to pass the time while waiting for dinner. We saw a notice of a drum circle going on the next night, so did the dumb touristy thing and joined in with a bunch of locals, banging away on various percussive objects and hoping that we did not sound *too* white.

Big Bend itself was impressive and inspiring. Although part of the Chihuahua Desert, there are mountains in the middle, the Rio Grande on the southern border, and all sorts of nifty trails and things to see and do. What with farmers draining off all the water, the Rio is not all that Grande these days: in fact, you can skip rocks into Mexico pretty easily. We could have waded over to Mexico, but were told we would have to walk 50 miles to the nearest border crossing to come back, so figured knocking back a few Coronas later would be an easier way to have an authentic Mexican experience.

We then bounced on over to the town of Lajitas to stay for another couple of nights. That whole area is not what one would call densely populated. The local nurse explained why she liked living there: "the nearest traffic light is 90 miles away." We got to meet the town's mayor, Clay Henry, who was

very sociable, and Mike bought him a beer. He was not very talkative, but we kept a picture of him anyway.

Dave celebrated his First Communion shortly thereafter, after being duly cautioned that chugging the wine would be a big no-no. Then came Bar None, and Mike staying out at the cast party until 4:30 a.m. just to prove he is still as big a nitwit as he was in college. Jane's brother Jim, his wife Debby, and their



His Honor the goat



At least it's not the whole head... yet

kids Greg and Jenny popped in for a visit after then, wisely showing up before the Texas heat started blistering paint as per usual. We toured around town quite a bit and had an especially great time at the rodeo. We loved having them visit, not least because it gave us an excuse to organize Jane's scrapbooking supplies and photos, which have been steadily taking over the guest room like some festive variation of black mold.

We did manage a family trip down to Austin in August, to see the Capitol, Texas State History Museum, and Inner Space Cavern, but the highlight was watching over 1,000,000 bats emerge from the Congress Avenue bridge at twilight, out of over 1,000,000 tiny coffins.

Fall saw the St. Paul the Apostle Digimon take the soccer field for their fourth season, Mike getting to ride herd on sixteen rambunctious third graders while trying to blow the bean out of his whistle. Success came slowly. So slowly, in fact, that Coachemon promised he would shave his mustache off if the team

won the next game – and *half* if they won by two or more goals. Naturally, they beat the Mustangs 2-0, so Mike had half a mustache for a day, then shaved the rest off and now runs around naked. Or at least that is how it feels, after over 20 years with the thing.

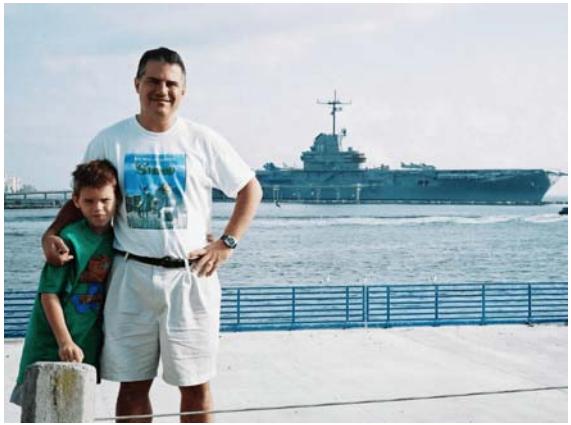
Back in the old days, Dave was bananas over Thomas the Tank Engine. Now that he is *far* more mature he has left behind such childishness. He obsesses over Sonic the Hedgehog instead. Maggie decided to spend Halloween as Harry Potter's owl (note the letter tied to her leg). Producing these costumes pretty much occupied our October free time.

Mike went with Maggie's fifth grade class as a chaperone in their camp out in East Texas, and also drove to Corpus Christi with Dave for an overnighter with his Cub Scout pack on the U.S.S. Lexington. Jane stayed home and put itching powder in their underwear.



Sonic the Hedgehog and Hedwig the Owl

And now we are traipsing off to Wisconsin for Christmas, which is an expensive way to show Maggie and Dave what snow looks like. Of course, seeing all their Cheesehead relatives is a fair side benefit.



Dave, Mike, and the Lexington

For the upcoming year, we will finally make the obligatory trip to Disney World® with the Rugrats® to see dozens of Licensed Characters® and spend ungodly amounts of Dollars®. In an annual bid for family stress-testing, we will drive up to Wisconsin in the summer, and hope as many of our friends and family as possible will be around. So let us know if you will be, okay? Merry Christmas, and a joyous New Year to you all.

Mike, Jane, Maggie & Dave