

Dear Friends and Relations!

Merry Holidays and a Wonderful Winter Solstice To You All!

Well, here it is, that time of year again. Welcome dear friend, fond relation, and Gentle Reader to the second First Annual Holiday Letter from the Langs. As you may recall from last year's First Annual letter, we keep each year's letter fresh and new by ensuring that each one is, really, the First one. Think of it as mental recycling and you'll be fine.



We took a fantastic vacation this year – it was a three-week cruise on the biggest ocean liner in the water. We saw dozens of islands, hundreds of foreign people, and thousands and thousands of miles of nothing but water. If the ocean has a motto, it must be something like: “Damn, that’s a lot of water.” OK, it wasn’t really so much a cruise as it was a nice long, relaxing spin in the big new Jacuzzi. OK, it’s not so much a Jacuzzi as... OK, we cleaned the tub. It did take three weeks, but it seemed like a vacation. You know, from the dirt.

This year, the Department of Education went to the trouble of granting me a clearance. This entailed me filling out forty-seven different forms and submitting my fingerprints and DNA for analysis and profiling. It also meant that a public investigator came around and talked to all sorts of people who know me. Luckily, they all lied, except for my good friend Jim, who defended me staunchly: "Those hookers were asking for it." The clearance from the Department is very important; we're working closely with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta to monitor and control a virus that affects the port-side buttocks of people under 18. Yep – No Child's Left Behind!

I think last year I mentioned that no one ever swears in these holiday letters. I've noticed that very few jokes are included, either. Do people think that just because it's Christmas we don't want to hear about the blind nun who walked into the bar with two alligators? (You don't want to know. Besides, it's Christmas.)



It was a bad year for trees. Notable events this year included taking down the big fir tree in the corner of the yard. It came down in the wind, landing on and being supported by the power line that runs from the street to the house. Julie had the insurance company on the phone as I was standing on the metal ladder with my electric chainsaw. I told her not to worry about filing a claim, since I had the situation under control. She gave me The Look, and coolly informed me that she wasn't discussing the homeowner policy... Once the neighbors helped me get the tree off the power lines, she called back and cancelled the extra life insurance.

The neighbors, to take a moment to digress, continue to be wonderful. We noticed the tree on the power line as we were leaving for a party. The neighbors later indicated that if they had not had pressing engagements, it would have been down before we got home. As it was, two of them helped me take it down and a third expressed his regret that family obligations prevented him from pitching in, but he sent over dinner – complete with plates, utensils, napkins, and hot kielbasa. One bite of that spicy, juicy Polish goodness and I wished that he couldn't help more often! Damn, it's good to have great neighbors.

The next tree to die belonged to one of the “other” neighbors. You know the “Others” from the show “Lost?” Well, we have two of them in our 'hood as well. One of their trees died. They planted a new one. It died. Some say fate, which in the Washington DC area is just another term for blaming it on the events of 9/11. Some invoke voodoo, others claim Feng Shui. Me, I like Epsom salts for it, but what do I know? (Of course, if you tell anyone about this, I'll have to kill you. And the fact that you are once again reading this is proof that I still know where you live.)

Speaking of death... As you'll recall from last year, something always dies in these letters. After the outcry over what many readers described as my “heartless murder” of poor Sam the Santa Kat last year (We're SORRY already! Please stop the PETA subscriptions!), we were compelled to ensure continued growth in our core family area, and we bought a NEW cat. From Texas. He's a beautiful grey spotted Savannah kitten, named Albus. (He was named in honor of the

great Albus Dumbledore, who died on page 517 of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. What? What?!? If you haven't read it yet, you're not going to.) Anyway, Savannah cats are bred from African Servals, Burmese leopards, and Shetland ponies. Also, as I mentioned, we got him from Texas, so you know he's big. He's about 75 pounds of spotted furry cuteness – and still growing!



So, to atone for the (OK, yes, heartless, OK, yes, premeditated) murder of last year's cat, we concentrated on making sure that this year all the Holiday Letter deaths were of a more humane nature. We have so far this year been devastated by the premature demise of twelve "Dancing Barbies," eleven DVDs that got scratched-up as if by magic, ten plastic horses that were left in the middle of the damn floor at night, nine "Happy Meals" toys (ibid), eight personal computers of various ages, seven Barbies "of Swan Lake," six human teeth, five mounted light fixtures, four pots and pans that weren't going to come clean anyway, three cheap blenders, two good-sized trees, and our furnace, along with the AC. All of which is hereby recorded and therefore purged in this Solstice Missive. I feel a little better having written to you about it, but I'll feel better yet if Santa brings about \$12K to cover the new furnace and HVAC system.

The kids are doing pretty well. (There was Connor's one arrest, but my attorney got him off on a technicality. Besides, those hookers were asking for it.) Kate turned 8 this year, and recently picked up a copy of John Gardner's Jason and Medea, a ~~740 page epic prose poem about love, death, and betrayal~~ delightful romp through history with a cute couple. She's also still working on math – her favorite joke this year was the one about the number of mathematicians it takes to change a light bulb¹. She prepared for the holiday season by writing out her wish list, which she read to us. Before starting this recitation, she asked us to please hold our questions until she was done speaking. We're doomed.

Connor had a big year; in addition to his interest in GameCube (I get motion sick just watching him, but he's really good at it), he seems to be developing a new hobby of pulling his teeth out with his bare hands. He yanked out the last four, this year, as soon as they were even a little loose. ("Mommy, here's my tooth," he says as we're doing 75 mph down I70. Blood everywhere, and he sounds like he's talking about the weather.) I had to explain that he had to wait for the tooth fairy, since the national currency was no longer measured in human teeth. His shining moment was his induction into the Savage Literalist Society, which coincided with his last visit to the doctor's office. The doctor asked Connor what he'd like to be when he grows up. Connor replied, "A teenager. Or, maybe a grownup."

Annalise turned four (how time flies when you're bitching up a storm!), and is getting over her allergies. These days she's only allergic to potato starch, cement, the spores from mold, preservatives, roast peanuts with corn flour, dairy, eggs, raw fish, all food that's cold, polysorbates, low electric power, drinks with 7-Up or lemon-lime, the month of January, red shampoo, parsley, sage, that other spice, and thyme, her supper dish, the flag, the morning dew, Tylenol and Motrin, alcohol, Formaldehyde, soft leather, rice with soy, dander from the cat, and sorbitol, adhesive tape, deep sleep, the paper boy, republicans, the internet, stained glass – in the end, she is allergic to her ass. But, we're doing much better with the diet! If she starts rashing up with Barbies, she's in trouble. At this point, Julie and I are ready to start rashing up at the sight of a new Barbie ourselves. Particularly the movies...

Julie had a good year also – all the surgeries were minor! Anyway, Julie and I feel strongly that three pages is sufficient pain to put you through, dear friend, fond relation, and Gentle Reader, and two pages is not only less painful to read but cheaper to mail. So, in accordance with the dictates of the Annual Holiday Letter, I will conclude by wishing everyone a wonderful year in 2007. I was going to include something like whatever I wrote for the ending last year, but these days my memory is like a whatchamacallit. It must be the Scotch.

With Lots of Love and Holiday Whatchamacallit,

-Doug, Julie, Kate, Connor, Annalise, Flitwick, and Albus
<http://dougandjulie.smugmug.com> Password: Bailey

¹ One. She delegates the task to four blondes, thereby simplifying the problem to a previous question.