

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 third First Annual Holiday Letter from the Langs. As you may by now recall, 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. (Yes, that was last year's intro. Remember that repetition is the soul of wit.)

Well, it was once again a fantastic year at the Lang household! The highlight was definitely building the enormous in-ground pool with all the built in lights, heating, cooling, jet sprays, slides, and diving boards; as we watch the kids sputtering for their lives, we know they're not just drowning – they're drowning *with style*. OK, it's not so much an in-ground pool as an in-house pool, but it does have lights and HVAC... OK, the basement leaks. A lot. It's a pool with a Chesterfield and a floating coffee table. What more could you want?

One of the larger events at our house this year was the party. If you were there, we're glad you made it. If you weren't there, we're sorry you missed it. If you can't actually remember, well, you're in good company. The party was on Cinco de Mayo, but that wasn't why we roasted a whole pig. The party was to celebrate Kate's First Holy Communion, but that wasn't why we stuffed that pig with potatoes, onions, and garlic. The party was also because I finished grad school with two Master's degrees, including an MBA, but that wasn't why we rubbed that pig with Hawaiian sea salt inside and out. We roasted that pig for 9 hours next to a slow fire because pig tastes good that way.

You know, they call it "Holy Communion," but doesn't that qualifier imply there are other kinds of communion? Don't hear much about those others, do ya? By the way, please don't let my folks find out I got an MBA. They still think I'm working in the adult film industry. I'm glad I'm done with school, though - more time to devote recreational medication.

Speaking of working, I have a new job. (It was time for me to leave the Department of Education, since I finally reached the last level on the Blackberry game Brick Breaker.) Still with CSC, I went to the US Department of Homeland Security. Yeah, there's a hoot. I left that gig and started working for the US Army. Now I'm being all I can be, helping them with computer security. ("Commander, the General is calling – Server Nine is down!" "It's not down, it's just, umm, in secure mode.")

The Army is also the only organization I've ever worked for that barcodes their urinals for inventory control. So far, I've peed in V/P-BEW001868, V/P-BEW001869, and V/P-BEW001342 through V/P-BEW001347, inclusive. Which seems odd, 'cause we all know how guys and dogs manage property rights – I peed in it, it's mine. Why bother keeping track?

This was another big year for Harry Potter – not only did we see the 5th installment in the movie series, but the concluding book was released, Harry Potter and the Shakespearian Ending. I'm not going to tell you who dies, because that would be wrong, but it was pretty much everyone except Albus Dumbledore, since he died last year. (Oh, stop!) We also found out that Fawkes the Phoenix wasn't the only thing flaming in the old headmaster's office – although why anyone was surprised to hear that Dumbledore liked to putt from the rough is beyond me. Purple velvet robes?

And did you *see* his window treatments in the movies?
 Yep, stay tuned for the 8th book in the series – Harry Potter and the Closet of Secrets.



Also this year my grandmother, who is a great grandmother in all senses of the word, turned 90. On the occasion of her birthday, she was seen sporting a tee-shirt that read: **"90 is the new 70!"**

I'll take a moment to mention the neighbors again – do you have neighbors who borrow your tools without even asking? We do. A great example is the wheelbarrow: one of the

neighbors needed it, took it from our backyard, and returned it two days later. In the process, they put air in the tire, replaced the entire wheel housing, and repaired the two loose bolts in the barrow. I don't even know for sure who did it. We have great neighbors.

The kids had another arrest-free year, just a few traffic stops on the playground. We're also helping boost their vocabularies through the magic of Broadway music – they listen to “Rent” and “Spring Awakening” all the time. There's nothing quite like listening to a 5-year-old singing “La Vie Boheme” and mixing up the lyrics with those for “The Bitch of Living”... Plus, Annalise's favorite show was the new remake, “Barbie as Barbarella.” Very, um, educational.

Kate did pretty well on her local swim team this year, and because she likes to try many different things, she's also taken up fencing. Her ripostes are getting better all around, both with steel and with words. She's thinking about taking up competitive bitching in 2008, if she can find the right coach.

Connor stays on the topic of death fairly often, which is a little disconcerting in a 7-year old. He had a good birthday party this year, with a chess cake. That would be a cake on which one could play chess, and then eat the pieces as they're taken off the field, you know, like rugby players do. Anyway, he told me that when he died, I could have his toys, and seemed a little put out when I told him that I expect him to outlive me. Now, he walks around telling people that Daddy's going to die first. I think he expects me to go next week. After all, I could go at any time.



In addition to playing chess, Connor's doing well both in 1st grade and in CCD class. We're putting him through Catholic Indoctrination so that he, too, can grow up to wonder what we were thinking – it's like a rite of passage. I came home one day and asked him

how his day was, and how was CCD. “Daddy, all we talk about in Ms. Soandso's class is God, God, God, God, God.” Great, 7 years old and already he's weary of mono-thematic dogma. Just wait 'til he studies Kant.

Holiday letters are sent to people whom you otherwise mostly ignore all year. They serve to provide updates on the only real news that matters as we get older, which is wondering what or who we've outlived, not that there's a damn thing you can do about it. This is why we're careful to ensure a cathartic story of loss in every letter! This year, we were able to solve two problems at once – Annalise's ever expanding list of allergies requires really expensive hypo-allergenic food, so we outsourced her to India! We're saving money **and** we have grief! Our new daughter is named Ashiwara Gupta and eats nothing but rice curry and Kraft Macaroni & Cheese.



Annalise had been playing chess as well, and she was getting a better handle on the point of the game. She used to play tea party chess – all the pieces would meet in the middle of the board and be nice to each other, and no one ever lost. Now, she uses an army of the undead to remove all your pieces, so at least there was a clear winner. I assume she's still playing, and she'll be fine – we've just heard she's being adopted by Angelina Jolie.

Julie had a good year also, and the medication is wearing off. Julie and I are also starting our own fragrance company. The flagship product is called “SLM” (Smells Like Money). You can't afford it, but if you scratch this letter, you'll get a whiff. Scratch hard. Harder. A little lower – ahhhhh. Thank you.

While Julie and I feel strongly that two pages is not only less painful to read but cheaper to mail, upon careful consideration we decided, dear friend, fond relation, and Gentle Reader, that while you're worth three pages, you're not the one paying shipping. So, in accordance with the dictates of the Annual Holiday Letter, I will conclude by wishing everyone a wonderful year in 2008. I was going to include something like whatever I wrote for the ending thingamabob last year, but these days my thingy's like a whatchamacallit. Besides, repetition is the soul of wit.

With Lots of Love and Holiday Whatchamacallit,

- Doug, Julie, Kate, Connor, Ashiwara Gupta (nee Annalise), Flitwick, and Albus the Gay
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