

## 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 fourth<sup>1</sup> First Annual Holiday Letter™ from the Langs.

Well, it was another pretty good year here at the Lang household; our hair is growing back nicely after the surgeries, and most of the pets are doing fine. Oh, and in case you didn't notice, we've sent this year's letter using the Islamic EID stamps, in honor of our first Muslim president, Barack Obama.

You probably know we moved into a new house this year, since we bought it at auction after your bank foreclosed on your mortgage. On the one hand yes, it's a shame, but honestly if you'd put as much into equity as you did in that damn wallpaper, maybe you'd still be there. I'm just saying, is all. And you'll love what we've done with the place!

Usually we all go on vacation together, but it just didn't work out for that whole "family togetherness" thing this year. Mostly we all managed to go on vacation at the same time, and called it good – we were at least all out of the house at the same time, even if we were miles apart. Close enough. Julie and I went with Connor and Annalise to New York and Chicago, Connor and Annalise got out to West Virginia, and Kate went to Chicago, New York, Amman, Ankara, Asiago, Bangalore, Barcelona, Berne, Cairo, Calcutta, Cashel, Damascus, Dublin, Düsseldorf, Elbe, Emmental, Exmoor, Florence, Fontainebleau, Frankfurt, Geneva, Glasgow, Gloucester, Havarti, Helsinki, Hong Kong, Innsbruck, Inverness, Istanbul, Jamestown, Jarlsberg, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kandersteg, Krakow, Lausanne, Limburg, Liverpool, Madrid, Muenster, Munich, Nanjing, Naples, Neufchatel, Odessa, Osaka, Oslo, Paris, Parmigiano, Pisa, Qingdao, Quebec, Quincy, Raclette, Reggiano, Roquefort, Salzburg, Sapporo, Stilton, Taleggio, Tbilisi, Tillamook, Ulan Bator, Ulster, Utica, Valencia, Venice, Vienna, Wardensville, Wensleydale, Wind Gap, Xenia, Xiamen, Xochimilco, Yerevan, Yokohama, Yorba Linda, Zanzibar, Zhengzhou, and Zurich. The only place she really didn't enjoy was Paris – oddly enough, the cheese was substandard.

And yes, you saw that correctly – Annalise is back with us. Since last year's letter, we learned an important lesson in globalization; namely, don't outsource your kids. It only looks like a good idea on paper – you know, like Universal life insurance. Our surrogate daughter wasn't as inexpensive as we'd hoped (largely due to the need to read her bedtime stories at international phone rates), and anytime she woke up with a bad dream she called us collect. At the same time, Angelina Jolie became pregnant and needed to downsize her brood, so we just took Annalise back. She's adjusting well to the lack of money, and she's almost entirely over her allergies.



Speaking of allergies... Yes, Annalise is mostly over hers. Therefore, Julie has become allergic to cinnamon<sup>2</sup>. Since cinnamon is found in every processed food from peanuts to milk, Julie has managed to go into full anaphylactic shock more times than Sarah Palin said "maverick" during the campaign. We don't even stop the car anymore: "You OK?" "Yeah, just some stray cinnamon causing cardiac arrest. Kids, reach up and hand Mommy

the defibrillators again." The only mass-market manufactured product that doesn't have cinnamon in it is actually Cinnamon, which is made in New Jersey out of cassia, allspice, and recycled pizzabox shavings. Julie's decided to die from it anyway, just for good measure.

<sup>1</sup> Back issues available at reduced prices – order today, while supplies last!

<sup>2</sup> Thus proving Lang's Law of Conservation of Allergies<sup>2.a</sup>.

<sup>2.a</sup> In a closed system.

In a twist of fate so odd as to rival a vice presidential selection, we got a new pet hamster this year, named, of course, Cinnamon. By mid-year, it was clearly a question of Julie or the hamster (we'd burned out the first two sets of defibrillators, and she was going through epi-pens the way Sarah Palin went through Neiman Marcus<sup>3</sup>), so in the spirit of the election we put it to a vote.

Julie lost by a narrow margin, triggering an automatic recount – which is when we discovered that the cats had voted twice. Long story short, Cinnamon the Hamster delivered a graceful and moving concession speech, and then I killed him with my bare hands.

Of course, the kids were devastated, allowing for our annual outpouring of grief and subsequent catharsis in this letter<sup>4</sup>. If you weren't reading this, I'd have to pay a shrink. Oh, wait – I am paying a shrink. Never mind. Speaking of kids, do you know where yours are right now? Don't you think it's time you talked to them about sex, drugs, and rock music? Make it a priority this year – or Rahm Emanuel will do it for you.

Why do we call them shrinks? I'm not getting any smaller; in fact, I think I've gained weight since I started this "food therapy" program. I've gone from having "minor weight fluctuations" to experiencing light tides. This sort of weight gain is a real problem for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the number of pulled muscles I get when I try to scratch my ass while wearing a suit jacket. I can't reach anymore. (Hint for X-Mas presents: long-handled back scratchers. And, um, a mirror would help, too.)

In other news, I have a CPAP machine. I know "that which does not kill me makes me stronger," but it turns out that doesn't really apply to sleep apnea-induced oxygen deprivation. I evidentially hold the world's record for holding my breath, and didn't even know it! I've composed a short poem for the acceptance ceremony:

Now I don my nightly mask,  
My breathing's now my CPAP's task.  
Should I expire while I snooze,  
Let no one else my CPAP use.  
For somewhere in that mask and hose,  
May chance my soul there to repose!  
Should reincarnation find me yet  
Foreclosing on my karmic debt,  
I will not risk such low of lows:  
Reborn inside some fat guy's nose!



In other medical news, we're trying to determine an appropriate, proportional response to finding that Annalise has misplaced a kidney. She had both of them a few years ago, last time we checked – now she's down to one. I know kids lose stuff, but major organs? I'm making her look under the bed. Eventually, we'll either locate it or sue Angelina Jolie.

Kate's only got one kidney also, but that's because the other one was harvested in a Hong Kong hotel on one of her vacations. She says waking up in the tub of ice was the worst part. Aside from that, she's getting past

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<sup>3</sup> Expensive and tacky.

<sup>4</sup> We all know that the primary purpose of holiday letters is to provide updates on the only real news that matters as we get older, which is wondering what or whom you'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!

her post-vacation blues and got straight A's in school. She's also active in swimming, track, violin, theater, chess, and WebKinz, and she makes all her own clothes.

Connor has developed great new skills this year – he's learned the fine art of Lying For The Sake Of Self-Preservation, which is an important life lesson (in that it tends to extend one's life). He also learned to pee standing up, while operating a foot-pedal-opening trash can, and into same (see note about lying). He's been offered early membership in three national fraternities.

Have you ever noticed the banality of the vocabulary used in most of these holiday letters? When was the last time you picked up one of these Merry Mistletoe Missives and came across words like nipple, or moist, or supple? Adjectives, that's what today's economy needs, by gum!

Speaking of today's economy, I'm glad I'm still working with the US Army (motto: "Be All You Can Be While Staying Under Budget"), but sometimes working on a military base is confusing. Last year I noted the barcodes on the urinals; signage on base this year has **not** improved. Case in point: There is a sign on a corner near – but out of sight of – one of the golf courses on base that advertises "Free Range Balls." There is nothing to indicate that this has anything to do with golf. Anyone not turning right on that corner is left to their imagination – I guess "free range" ones would taste better than balls raised in conditions of captivity and confinement. Maybe that's where the whole "going commando" thing started.

I also want to take another moment to mention our neighbors. You may recall from last year that our neighbors "borrow" things. This year, I came home to find my car had been stolen. And washed. And waxed. I might not have noticed, but it was raining lightly and I thought the car had a fever – it was sweating. You can keep your good fences – we have **great** neighbors. They're also all organ donors – which is good, considering we've got five people and only seven kidneys<sup>5</sup> in this family.

Julie had a good year too, and the handcuff marks are fading.

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 paying for mailing all three pages will constitute "doing our part" for stimulating the economy this year. So, in accordance with the dictates of the Annual Holiday Letter, I will once again conclude by wishing everyone a wonderful 2009. Barack Obama has proved that change is inevitable, except from vending machines, and that Adlai Stevenson was right<sup>6</sup>. Sarah Palin has proved that while you can put lipstick on pigs and pitbulls, they still can't sing worth a damn. Let us together prove that 2009 can be better than 2008, or at least more memorable.

With Lots of Love and Holiday Memorables,

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

P.S. Just when you thought it was safe to get back in the water, it is our pleasure to announce the Return of the Doug & Julie Show! We are once again making the precious memories of our lives available for download (while you wait) at <http://www.dougandjulie.com/>. Plus, back issues of this letter!

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<sup>5</sup> I lost one of mine in college, playing poker unwisely. Very, very unwisely. With a Tarot deck.

<sup>6</sup> "In America, anyone can become president. That's one of the risks you take."

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