

November 30, 2001

Hi Everybody! Happy Holidays!

I turned 31 in Molokai'i this year. What a beautiful little rural island. I got the idea from my friends Pete and Amber in Vermont. There are two small towns with shops, and several little villages consisting of a cluster of houses and a few quaint churches. One side of the 38-mile long island was stark, windy and desolate. I thought of Africa while looking at the cracked red dirt and silver grey trees. The other side of the island is a lush tropical rainforest, dripping vines, trees with blossoms 35 feet above my head. I saw the leper colony at Kalaupapa, coffee plantations, fish ponds built in the ocean to serve ancient royalty, ruins of times when a king lived there, including a trail built of stone for traders to climb 1000 feet from the sea. On Oahu I visited my friend Connie, who lived in Colorado Springs when I did.

Tara attended 8 weeks of ballet classes at the local community center. She blossoms as a dancer. An excuse to put on leotards and tights, a tutu, and twirl around for an hour. The teacher tried to teach them movements for the kiddie songs they listened to (I'm A Little Teapot, Little Bunny Fu Fu, and other classy ballet tunes), but Tara usually did her own thing. She would move off to the side, and dance her own dance. One thing she liked to do was stand in the middle of everybody, on all fours with her head also resting on the ground, then lift one leg high into the air behind her. She would just stay there, motionless. And for some unexplained reason, the other kids would start doing it too. The teacher would say, "Hop! Everyone hop like a bunny!" and five of them would be balanced on their heads in the middle of the floor with one leg up. Tara's dad said she practiced "Freeform Ballet."

In March I flew down to visit my good friend, Vladimir, just north of Los Angeles. I tasked Vlad with destroying my stereotypes of southern California. We spent an entire day just roaming around a public garden. It had sections according to a climate or region where the plants were native. We also toured the neat town of Ojai, and its cemetery, then wound up into the mountains. We parked and hiked higher, until we were forced to turn back because the snow was too deep. Snow! The next day I drove to Santa Barbara. It's lovely, but I wouldn't want to live there. I could tell everyone was dressed, coiffed, accessorized and scented for the occasion. I just had on jeans and a sweatshirt, I'm surprised no one tossed me coins. I walked along the waterfront, and on the beach. I strolled through all the local artisans' displays. I listened to Marston Smith performing on an electric cello mounted to a suit of golden armor.

In April I went to my very first wine tasting. There were 400 people there, and about 25 vendors. I learned a lot. I learned how to dump out the rest of my wine after the first taste! In true Humboldt County spirit, there were actually marijuana cookies at the tables. In November I went to my second wine tasting, with my friend Lizzie. It was just as packed, though with fewer vendors. The best thing about wine tasting is the food!

Tara and I were able to drive up to Portland to visit Jim and Larry for Uncle Jim's birthday in May. We also got to see Eireanne, Larry and Corey. Tara is now a big Corey fan, after finding out that he likes cartoons AND cats. In June we went to Portland again, to visit Grandpa Waterbury in the hospital, battling cancer again. Tara sat right on the bed next to him and held his hand for our brief visit. He was too weak for us to stay long.

I traveled south to visit Amie, whom I graduated high school with. It was a cool visit, especially when we watched her husband play guitar at a little shop in Lakeport. I left the next morning for the renaissance faire in Willits. The next day I took Tara to the faire, in her new renaissance costume that my Moma made for her. She was so taken with the role playing that when we sat to have a picnic in the shade, which was in view of Mary, Queen of Scots, Tara asked if we could move behind the tree so we wouldn't bother the queen. We watched jousting and black smithing, and even got a lesson in archery.

There was a raptor show, with eagles and falcons performing.

I had been planning all winter for my first hike of the season. I got a cold the day before, but I went anyway!! I hiked 7 miles to camp beside a river at 5000 feet. That practically did me in. I coughed all night long and was completely miserable. In the morning I took my fanny pack for a day hike. I went up another 1000 feet to Boulder Creek Lakes. Simply gorgeous. I was certain I had strep throat by the time I got there, so I parked myself beside a lake and lounged all day by myself. On the trail back to camp, I cut a willow branch. I recalled that willow bark is good for your throat. So I stripped the bark off and filled my camp cup with it, then filled the cup with boiling water. Egad! That's the most horrible flavor in the world! I wondered who drank it often enough to discover that it had medicinal qualities. I kept forcing it down, the hot liquid soothed my throat. I slept like a baby and felt great in the morning. What exactly was the reason, I don't know, but I won't give up on nasty willow bark just yet.

In June I went to Kansas City for Weather Service training. It was needed and appreciated training. In all the time you've heard me mention the weather radio system/digital voice program that I've been in charge of since I got here, this is the first time I received training on how to use it. Ha! I had a marvelous visit in KC, as usual. I LOVE that city. Went to a little blues bar to eat delicious music one night.

Tara's growing "like a weed" as they say. I took her to the doctor in June, and she was 40" tall and 37 pounds. I took in October, and she was 42" tall, and 38 pounds! Tall, slender and graceful. Tara and I went camping the beginning of July. She enjoys that especially if we can camp near a swimming hole. We drove out to Willow Creek several times during the summer to "Go Find the Sun" as we affectionately call our ritual of getting out of the fog before we go crazy. We've got a favourite little swim spot there, where it's always in the 90's and it's only 45 minutes away. Fourth of July in Eureka is always a date to go watch coloured fog. Tara and I skipped the occasion this year, and went inland on the 7th. We watched 50 minutes of fireworks put on by the folks that own the fireworks company in Hayfork. They do the Eureka show every year, and then put on a special presentation for their hometown.

Tara's birthday party included the ever-present Jolly Jump that we filled with sock-footed children and forced them all to jump wildly and shriek loudly for an hour. Or, at least that's what it seemed like. Tara received wonderful gifts as she always does. Between Christmas and birthday, she gets way more than she needs. We sit down a couple of times a year, and choose which toys stay, and which ones go to children who don't have new toys. Tara is very generous, and would enthusiastically give away everything she owned, if I didn't make her keep some of it.

My Best Friend In The Whole World, April, got married in July. She asked me to be a part of the lovely ceremony, which was a pleasure and an honor for me.

My friend Jeff came out for a visit from his home near Washington, D.C. We went to an outdoor play of Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors, at Benbow Lake. Only...this one was set in Havana, and the characters wore bright shirts and straw hats. It was a refreshing creation! We stayed that night at the Benbow Inn, which is a perfectly maintained historical inn. The food, the room full of solid mahogany antiques, and the service are all first class. The next day we rented a canoe and paddled around the lake, and toured the redwoods. Jeff bought a redwood burl and took it home, where it is now growing into a tree!

In August I returned the favour, and went back to visit Jeff. We went to Busch Gardens, my very first theme park ever. Jeff was determined to get me onto the roller coasters. I was frightened out of my wits on the first ride, which included a 160 foot drop while leaving your stomach at the ticket counter. Then a humongous thunderstorm hit the park and all rides were stopped. There was nothing left for us to do, but travel from Oktoberfest in Germany to the pubs in Ireland, and sample the wares. Six hours and many beers later, the rides started up again. I went on every single roller coaster, some more than once, and for some reason, wasn't scared at all. Later, I rendezvoused with Khanna and Tyrone (and their spouses),

team members from the New Leader Program I was in last year. We toured a brain exhibit in the Smithsonian Museum of Arts & Industries, and then saw the Hirshhorn Museum.

Tara and I went to Half Moon Bay to watch our friend Vic compete in a triathlon. We explored the beach at the famed Maverick's surf spot, and gazed at a totally flat sea, where surfable waves can get to 50 feet high. I soaked up the atmosphere for my surfer buddy Ice, who secretly wishes he could surf the Pacific. I am in awe of triathletes. These people went swimming in the ocean, so cold that wetsuits were mandatory. After a swim that would wipe out most people, they jog up the beach and change into their bike gear and jump on their bikes to go traverse the rugged mountain terrain for hours. Finally they arrive back again, caked in dirt stuck on with seawater, bloodied from a crash or two, put down their bikes, take off their helmets, change their shoes, and take off running in SAND! I wondered what motivates them to move on to the next stage. While Vic was absent, Tara got harnessed up and climbed her second climbing wall this year. The kid has no fear!



The next weekend I went on a hike with a group of women. It's so nice to do outdoors stuff without a guy, because then no one tries to impress the others with how much they know, and no one feels they're better suited for any task than someone else. We all pitched in and hiked our fannies off. Margaret did most of the cooking, which is the reason I love her hikes. She organizes the hikes, and also prepares gourmet meals with crab linguine or sourdough with baked brie dip. I swam in every body of water I could get myself to, and they started calling me fish. I apparently woke the camp one night by snoring. Now THAT's a fun thing to find out in the morning.

After that trip, Tara and I flew up to visit my mom in northern Idaho for a week. I had hoped to go hiking in Glacier Natl Park and it didn't work out. That turned out to be a good thing, because a fire started in the park that week. We had a nice stay in the little cabin on the top of the mountain. We visited with friends and relatives and Tara was a social charmer as always. I was ready to get back home after that week though!

In the spring I had studied Electronics at the College of the Redwoods. It was tough, and the lab class was even tougher, but I enjoyed it. In the meantime I continued to work on my correspondence course in Electricity. The Fall semester began while we were in Idaho. I'm taking a basic computer class and a networking class with a lab. I like computer study better than electronics. p.s. Travis- I am a subnet god! I had a poem selected in a contest for writers at school. The 10 winners had to perform their pieces for an audience. It was the first time I had read my own stuff in public, and it made me uneasy. It was my own guts, exposed for everyone to lick up. I was not able to separate myself from the poem, but the emotion had a desirable impact.

On September 11th I heard the news when Jeff called me on the telephone. He was at work, watching the Pentagon burn from his 17th floor window. I was deeply affected by this tragedy as many others were, and Tara was touched more deeply than the media psychiatrists said she would be. I spent much of the week trying to help her work through her feelings, which helped me to deal with my own.

The 22nd of September is Bilbo's birthday, which reminds me that the first part of the Lord of the Rings is due in theatres anytime, and I can barely contain my excitement. I saw Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone twice. I hope I am as pleased with Lord of the Rings.

In October I finally acquiesced to having a backpacking partner, and invited Vic along. We were saved from the incorrigible male ego the very first night. He expressed disappointment at having forgotten his Leatherman Tool, and began to explain to me what it was. I interrupted him with, "Would you like to use mine?" We had no trouble after that. This was the hardest hike I've ever done. We went up 3200 feet in 5 miles. I thought I was going to die a couple of times, but I wasn't about to quit in front of the triathlete! It ended up being a great trip, even with all the hard work, and running out of water, and the hunter who managed to wound a bear, but hadn't killed it by the time he saw us. Yikes!

Made a long-overdue trip to southern Oregon the end of October. Tara continues to amaze me with her appetite for visiting relatives. She adored every set of grandparents she saw. We first stopped to see Grandma and Grandpa Trulove in Klamath Falls. Then off to the Sailboat Ranch for a visit with Grandpa and Grandma Waterbury. Tara was delighted with the museum of a house they have, and promptly explored all the rooms. She discovered a second floor bathroom at the far end of the house and declared it HER bathroom. After that, we weren't allowed to escort her anywhere. "I know this house!" she announced. She was too scared to get on a horse, and spent most of her time trying to catch the cat. Grandpa was looking so good I couldn't believe he was the same person I visited in the hospital in the summer. Our last stop was to visit more cat lovers in Chiloquin. Tara would have stayed with Pa and Chelle if I let her.

Jim and Larry stopped in Eureka on Halloween, as they made their way south. Tara was with her dad that week, but we picked her up for a short visit, and got to see her dressed as a Glitter Fairy! The Uncles brought homegrown gourds, homemade blackberry jam and salsa, a bottle of Blue Moon wine (because it was a blue moon), and a photo story of one turkey's journey from hatchling to kitchen table. Morbid and hilarious!

I took this week off to get ready for Christmas, but instead I emptied my living room and kitchen, and started "fixing." Vic and I retextured all the walls and I painted the entire living room, and the adjoining walls in the kitchen. It is now SO beautiful, I was struck by how much I can't stand the carpet, or the mismatched linoleum. I want to have a wood floor from the living room to the kitchen. Mom reminded me that my furniture will look shabby now, but I'm about as in debt as I intend to get for a while. Speaking of debt, I just closed on a refinance of my home the day before yesterday! The mortgage no longer includes Dennis's name. I have a 6% interest rate on a 15 year loan. At \$1032 a month, it will be painful, but I will OWN this home before my 45th birthday!

