

December 14, 2002

Well Happy Holidays everyone! We have had another busy, eventful year. Of course, we don't do it for our sake, but for yours: this way I have an interesting letter to send out each Christmas. Let me start way back at December 28, 2001, where I wrote in my journal, "I hate my job. Something has to change." My skills are in human relations, communications, creativity. My job description is to sit in front of a series of computer screens all day long and manipulate codes and grids so a computer program can use the pixels to write a forecast. I no longer launch weather balloons, brief pilots, or take complete weather observations because they are now done by machines. A computer does the weather radio broadcast in a digital voice. I no longer carry a box full of neeto weather tools into a classroom of 5th graders and explain what it all means, or travel to mountain tops and distant valleys to explain to a weather volunteer how to feed a new roll of paper tape into their weather equipment, and then go share a cup of homemade cranberry juice with them by the woodstove. Our volunteers are numbers now, and instead of hearing a familiar voice say "Hi, this is Mrs. Pierce." She says "Hi, this is T27." Anyway, you get the point. I am sick of it.

I was in love with Victor Colborn by this time, and therefore listened to a lot of what he said. One thing he kept telling me was that if I was so unhappy at work, I should quit and go to school and do something I wanted to do. Yes, that seems simple and obvious, but I'm a very practical girl, and it's hard to make that choice. I slowly but surely began to envision myself free of the job, and off to school full time for the first time since high school. I was optimistic about my future for the first time in years. I told my boss recently that I was leaving. My last official day with the National Weather Service will be May 31st.

For New Year's, we piled into Vic's BMW and drove to Bear Valley Ski Resort. We had been invited by Vic's friends Mike and Kindra to stay in their family cabin over New Year's. There were the three of us, Mike, Kindra, Vic's brothers Mark and Eric, and Eric's girlfriend, Jackie, John and two other friends. Tara got to really Play in snow. We went up the mountain and at Tara's request, I rented her some itty bitty skis. She skied for about an hour. Then it began to snow great big flakes and we spent another hour trying to catch them on our tongues. The next day we found a different place on the mountain to sled and build a snow castle.

The end of January, Tara lost her first tooth! Then she lost another. And another. In November, she lost her 5th tooth, and two big teeth had grown in already. She is most impressed with the new teeth; she tells people they are her 'grown up' teeth. Apparently, the average age for kids to begin losing their teeth is 6. Tara's dentist says that if a child's teeth develop early, then so will the rest of them. Grrreat.

It was a good year for movies. After the bad Star Wars movies, Harry Potter and the Lord of the Rings happened. The first Harry Potter movie was magical, and very nearly what I envisioned as I read the books. We have the DVD, and it's one of Tara's favourites. Vic, Tara and I went to see the second Harry Potter last month, which was more delicious fun. The Lord of the Rings is brilliantly done (that's my opinion, Vlad). We bought the extended version which has 30 minutes more than the theatrical release, and also include two full DVDs about the making of the movie. I have become a fan of the director and cast. What Star Wars? I could care less if I see part III. There was also the grand arrival of the movie, The Majestic, which was filmed here. I thought the movie was kind of slow and sappy, but Vic liked it, proving that he is a sappy guy. It was fun picking out the buildings along the main street of Ferndale that I recognized, and trying to figure out which part of the cemetery they were standing in.

I took a class in January, called Jihad: Conflict in the Middle East and the War on Terrorism. It was excellent, though entirely too much material to cover in 4 weeks. Some great discussion among class members, along with an overview of the political and religious history of the Middle East and its relationship with America was insightful. I finally met with a throat specialist in January and found out I have a common condition in mature people who still have their tonsils. In other words, IT'S AN OLD PERSON'S DISEASE! The Spring semester at College of the Redwoods, I had to drive out to campus 4 days a week for my computer programming and digital electronics classes, while working 30 hours a week, rotating shifts, and being Mom. I had a big help this semester, when Vic decided he wanted to be in our lives forever, and decided to take on surrogate 'dad' duties. 2002 was the first year Tara has not had to stay the night at daycare since she was 1 year old. And no more late pick ups at 1:00am either.

....And then Vic started making some changes in our lives. He has the advantage of getting to know Tara at 4 & 5 years old. I see her as an advanced version of a baby, and sometimes I am not caught up with her current

maturity level. Vic can see it, because that's all he knows. He rearranged the cabinets and the refrigerator, so that Tara can get to what she needs to make herself cereal for breakfast. She gets out her bowl, pours the cereal and milk, and even puts it all away when she's done! She can make herself a peanut butter sandwich! She can dress herself of course. I'm a softie, and I'll usually accommodate her when she comes in early and wakes me up, but Vic doesn't allow it. "Leave your mom alone!" And she wanders off to find something else to entertain herself with. She can put in her own video tapes to watch. This is an accomplishment, because she has to control the TV, amp, DVD player and the VCR (because she has movies in both formats).

OH! MY GOSH! The Pats won the Superbowl! I will never forget the awesome game of the playoffs, though, when my two favourite teams, Patriots and Raiders, played in a snowstorm. It was a great game all the way through, and went into overtime before the Patriots won. By the end, there were at least 5 inches of snow on the field. They had to keep shoveling snow off the lines, so we could see where the field was.

In February, we hired a draftsman to take Vic's plans and make them into blueprints for a home addition. By the end of the month, we had an engineer working on the blueprints. After spending 9 months and almost two thousand dollars on the project, the contractor bid it at \$20 thousand over his original estimate. We couldn't afford the new price, and stopped plans. Mom came for a visit in March. During the week she was here, we registered Tara for Kindergarten. The highlight of the visit was a night at the Benbow Inn, which I have mentioned before. A Tudor style historic inn in southern Humboldt County. Vic and Tara took a net and went 'fishing' at the river, while Mom and I explored the gardens.

Vic won a pre-doctoral scholarship which provided him with several opportunities during the year. The first of which was a \$3000 grant to spend on his education. His first trip was in April, when he took Tara and I to a conference in Santa Cruz. Vic was busy schmoozing, attending meetings and workshops, so Tara and I played on the beach, in the sea, and watched the sea lions barking and lounging on the piers. Our hotel literally sat on the sand, and was a very easy walk from the famous Boardwalk. We went on rides and ate cotton candy, got sunburns and played in the hotel pools. It was an excellent time.

In May, Vic finally talked me into entering a race with him. At the Avenue of the Giants (in the Redwood National Park), he ran the half marathon, and I ran a 10K (6.2 miles)- my very first race ever. I ran the whole way! A week later, I entered the 5 mile Atalanta run. I improved my time on the last race by a minute a mile. The middle of the month, Vic, Tara and I all went to the Renaissance Faire in Willits. Fun and hot, as always. Tara fit her costume better this year, and was quite adorable. I was disappointed that there was no jousting this year.

Also in May, Vic had a conditional job offer from the National Security Agency to work in cryptology in Baltimore. If he passed the first stage, he would be sent there for a series of personal interviews. They also began a thorough background investigation. Vic did an Internet search for government mediation jobs worldwide, and came up with one, which was about 20 miles from the NSA complex in Baltimore. I took it as a sign, and applied for the job. I told Dennis about this as soon as I heard, so that he could have as much preparation time to deal with a change in visitation as we did. Dennis was angry. This began a very difficult summer between the two of us. The mistrust and lack of communication between us is as bad as its ever been. I'll make a long story short and say that with a lot of hard work, along with the feeling of desperation, and fear of losing time with our daughter, we are finally back on speaking terms. I did not get the mediation job, but it was a good catalyst to get us both thinking about the future and Tara.

The end of May, Vic had another trip funded by his scholarship. He went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for a math summer school, followed by a math conference. I wasn't interested in either (go figure). I went along on the trip, and explored Boston and Cambridge instead. The first day, Kimberly came up





from the Cape, and spent the day with me. The next day I bought a trolley tour of the city, which helped me get an idea of where the sights were, then I explored on foot. Did you know Paul Revere didn't really ride at all? He wasn't even present that night, probably hunkering safely away from the action instead. When the poet Longfellow came to town, he was commissioned to write an epic poem about the 'One if by land, two if by sea' event, giving Revere (a politician) the lead role. Politicians haven't changed, have they? After his conference, Vic and I went to see the Harvard campus, which is

also in Cambridge. I fell in love with the campus and the community, which felt very New England.

Vic left for the UC Berkeley campus June 3 and was gone till August 4. This summer internship was also part of the scholarship he won. He worked in a lab assisting the development of an on line voting system that controlled the movement of a tele-actor; a person wearing a camera, receiving voice commands. Viewers on the Internet could see what the tele-actor saw in real time, and vote where the person would go or what she would do, by placing a colored dot on the scene in front of her.

I received CPR and first aid training in June; something I've always wanted to do. I went on my first backpacking trip of the season. Up to Papoose Lake, the second highest lake in the Trinity Alps. It was another tough hike, all by myself. 28 miles total, the trail went up 1000 feet in the last mile – ouch! I almost sat on a rattlesnake, but got an awesome picture of it instead! Over the summer, Tara learned how to swim. She can go underwater as well as dog paddle. Tara and I went to visit Vic in Berkeley over the 4th of July. We stole the comforter off the hotel bed, and walked to the bay and wrapped up in it. We were able to see 5 different fireworks shows, all around the San Francisco Bay – pretty neat. Tara danced as the Hare Krishnas made their music. Tara turned 5 the 19th. Vic came up from Berkeley, and we had another big birthday party.

After Vic's internship, we flew to Baltimore so he could be interviewed by the NSA for two days. The first day was informative and fun. The second day, the polygraph test was administered for 3 grueling hours and then he was told he failed the test. He didn't get the job, but it probably wasn't due to the polygraph; there were 160 applicants for 3 positions. I spent a day each with my friends, Jeff and Khanna (while we waited fruitlessly for our friend Tyrone). Vic and I had arrived early so we could go sightseeing, and explored the Inner Harbor in Baltimore. We spent our last day in Washington, D.C., which Vic had never seen. We were able to see the Lincoln Memorial, the Roosevelt Memorial, the Vietnam Memorial, and other things down at that end of the Mall. Then we took the Metro to meet my friend Jim, the Director of the New Leader Program when I attended it. He and his wife, Ying, invited us to have dinner with them our last evening, and to stay with them that night. Ying was expecting their first, and was very proud to show us the 'photos' of the new little one from their sonograms. Jim is the best cook in the entire world, and served us walnuts & blue cheese on pears for appetizers, crab bisque, steak and potatoes, peas, and I'm probably forgetting something. I think I will never enjoy a crême brulee again unless he makes it.

I went hiking with Margaret and another group of women into the Eastern Trinity Alps. Always a good time and excellent food. Vladimir came for a visit the end of the month, and gave Tara a gift of a beautifully illustrated Russian folk tale. The book is in Russian, but Vlad translated it for us. Vic's brother Eric and his friend John showed up in town. Vlad, Vic, Eric, John, Kindra, Tara and I all went tubing on the Trinity River. Later that week, Vic proposed and I accepted. We chose at first not to tell anyone so we didn't overshadow Trav and Susan's wedding plans. They decided to wait, so we are telling you now that we are officially engaged. We chose the date to be the first Friday after the new moon in February. Like Easter, it will never occur on the same day, and there will be years when it doesn't happen at all. We wanted to buck the stereotypes. That makes our wedding day February 7th. Our anniversary next year will be the 20th. We will be married in the courthouse and are not inviting anyone to the ceremony. There will be a party afterwards though, and you are ALL invited, but

no pressure to attend. Vic's mom and younger brother, Jesse, arrived for a visit the next day, and we told them the news. We took them on a hike along Redwood Creek, and Tara caught about 30 frogs.

The third day of September was Tara's first day of Kindergarten. Dennis, Vic and I waited with her for the bus to pick her up. I went to pick her up after school, but she refused to go with me in order to ride the bus again! This year I organized the National Weather Service's involvement in the Maritime Expo at the marina. We had a dunking booth. That morning I took a college placement test, and then went straight to the dunk tank afterwards. I took my turn and got dunked several times. Afterwards, I was offered a free cup of coffee if I jumped into the bay. Some people must think I'm easy. The bay was much colder than the dunk tank...

I took a second college placement test in October, and a third one in November. I scored fairly well on them. I generally did better than 99 percent of others who took the test in English and Writing. And I scored better than 85 to 95 percent of others in math and science, which seems good, but unfortunately the schools I applied to are used to getting applicants with perfect scores in everything. On one test I was given a topic and then had to whip out an essay on it in 20 minutes – I scored nearly perfect! I completed applications to Harvard, MIT, Carnegie Mellon, University of Massachusetts, Brandeis, Berkeley, Georgia Tech and Emory. I also applied to Humboldt State, in case I am forced to stay here for custody reasons. Vic applied for most of the same schools. We are hoping to get to the Boston area.

Vic had been planning to begin his doctorate studies this Fall, but chose to remain here because I can't go. After our summer apart, we didn't want to be separate again. Vic put his school off for a year, while I try to arrange a different visitation schedule with Tara for when I leave the area. Dennis and I can't agree on anything so far, so we will be forced to go to court. I am filing the paperwork to begin the process this week. In the meantime, Vic found work teaching two classes (Algebra and Statistics) at the University. He also works in the tutoring labs at the University and at the College.

I faced several tragedies this year. My Grandpa Bolopue died from choking. His grandson, my cousin Mac, showed up as an EMT on the scene, but could not save his grandpa. A month later, cousin Ryan (Mac's brother) also died, at 26. My Grandpa Trulove died in Klamath Falls, and I was able to make it up there to be with Grandma and the rest of the family for the memorial service. The room we used for the service was so full that there was not enough room for all who wanted to attend, and several people had to sit outside.

In November, I had a parent-teacher conference, and I was the parent! Isn't that crazy! Tara can now read and write, which is so exciting for me. I had an interview with an alumni of Harvard, who said he was going to recommend me very highly. I got my hopes up for real. Of course, there was always a chance I could make it to Harvard, but I assumed it was a slim one. Now I started thinking about Harvard daily until December 13th, when I was told that I had not been selected for early admission, and would be put into the pile with the regular applicants and would find out the result in April. Rats! Then I had a grueling interview with an MIT alumni, who spent 40 minutes trying to talk me out of my interest in MIT. He told me my scores were too low, it would be too hard, they wouldn't want me, I couldn't do it with Tara, it's too far away, it's too expensive. At the end of the interview, he said he admired my resolve, that I was an inspiration, and that he was going to give me a good recommendation. I have a telephone interview with a Brandeis alumni the 16th.

We expect to have a simple Christmas when Tara comes home from her dad's the evening of the 25th. Then the 26th, we are flying to Mesa, to visit with Travis and Susan. Sandi and Terry will also be there, so we'll have another Christmas. Travis and Tara have NEVER met – it's completely unacceptable. Vic is hoping to be able to go back to Mike's cabin for New Year's like we did last year. I have to work, so Tara and I will stay home this time.

Happy Holidays and the best of New Years to you. I send my love.