



December 13, 2003

Well...nothing interesting happened to the three of us this year. HA!!!

Right after Christmas last year, we went to visit Travis and Susan in Mesa. Sandi and Terry were also there, and we met up with Sandi's dad as well. Our hosts were wonderful. Susan worked her magic and despite having no dinner reservations got our whole party seated in moments. Sandi's sense of adventure led us to a candy factory and the Heard Museum. We also went to the Mormon temple and saw an incredible walk-through Christmas light display. The highlight of the trip was Out of Africa, which has many animals but most exciting were the tiger performances.

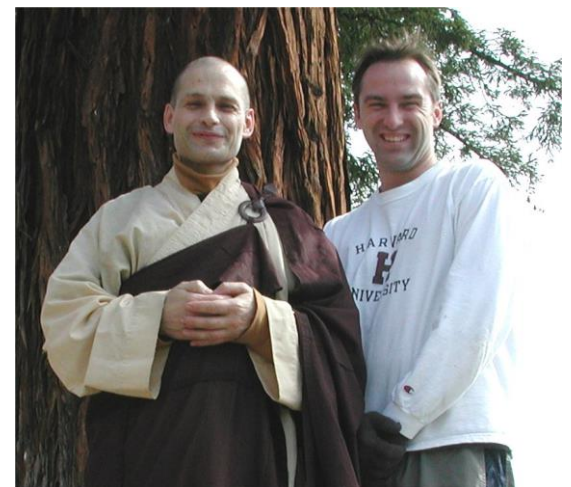
While in Mesa, we scheduled a visit for Tara with Dennis's mom. She misunderstood when I said I would bring Tara by, and I was rewarded for my trouble by a verbal attack over the telephone. Ah yes, the struggle between Tara's two families continues. This year's Christmas letter does not contain the usual glossing over of my contact with Tara's dad. It hasn't been any worse this year, I am simply too fed up to protect him anymore. Or his girlfriend, who also screamed at me in front of her daughter and Tara. I wanted Tara to have a safe grownup to dump her problems onto if she needed that, and suggested a family counselor. After initial resistance and suspicion from Dennis, he began to think the counselor idea was his own, and agreed to let Tara see Laura. She visited Laura once a week this entire year.

Vic took us to see the Romanian National Gymnastics team perform—they were brilliant. We asked Tara, "Would you like to try gymnastics?" She replied that she prefers ballet. Vic made it his mission to find the very best for her. He found Virginia Niekrasz-Laurent. With excitement, we told Dennis about it. He felt that we had intentionally excluded him in the process, and rejected the idea. He said the dates wouldn't work, so we offered to get Tara to every class and to pay for it. But then he complained about the teacher, and insisted on a different studio. Vic asked Virginia what to do, and she said to bring Tara twice a week on our weeks with her. Once we started that, Dennis began taking her to class. Tara absolutely loves ballet and has resolved to become a "famous" ballerina. She danced in the spring performance of Alice In Wonderland, with Destinee.

Vic's brother Mark, and his family Trish and Destinee, threw a party for us, then Margaret created a beautiful bridal shower. Yes, Vic and I got married! We asked Bob and Maria to meet us at the courthouse as witnesses, since they have always been there for us. Two days later, Mom arrived to help get my family and me through surgery. I had a hysterectomy by my friend, Dr. Kim Ervin. I now have so much energy and no more ruined clothes!!

Vic spent a weekend at a Buddhist monastery south of here, just for the experience. He enjoyed it immensely. He ate with them, meditated with them, and learned from them. He even gave one of the monks a ride home at the end of his visit.

I completed my resignation paperwork in January (with plans to leave in the summer), prepared to sell the house, found a realtor back East, and got my paperwork in to the court to change our visitation schedule with Tara. In April, college news started trickling in. Brandeis University, near Boston, offered me \$31,000 in grants! Vic was offered a great package to the University of California Berkeley. East coast or west coast? Well, Dennis helped decide for us. He begged me not to get an attorney, and swore to tell me if his plans changed. I agreed. Two days before our next court date, I got a whole stack of papers from his new attorney. After four years, Dennis suddenly demanded child support from me, claiming that I was leaving my job to avoid child support payments. I stood alone trying to defend myself against his attorney. I was lectured by the judge, and told to expect to make child support payments based on my old paycheck. I realized we were in for a real battle. Vic and I went to Plan B. We decided he should start his PhD program in Berkeley, and we could go to Boston the following fall. We'd buy a house in the Bay Area, and I could bring Tara back to Humboldt to see her dad, since I wasn't working.



I sent a deposit to Brandeis to hold a place for me for a year. In the meantime, Vic and I began interviewing attorneys.

Tara and I went to Oregon, which is always a good trip. We visited OMSI with Eireanne and Corey, and saw the world's coolest movie theatre which wraps onto a dome all the way around the audience, and toured a submarine. We spent some good time with Jim and Larry, who are forever going to be Tara's favorite uncles.

In June, for our honeymoon, Vic and I went to France!! What an experience. It was Vic's idea to go over there and do volunteer work rebuilding a medieval castle. We showed up early to explore the lovely city of Avignon, which was so charming it was like a dream. Neither of us speaks French, which was a challenge at the train station, where we accidentally got onto the wrong train and explored more of the countryside than we had originally planned for. We were treated wonderfully everywhere we went, which made me feel ashamed for the French bad-mouthing rampant in the US at the time. In the tiny rural village, we stayed in the stone rooms of a restored medieval village. We ate like royalty for two weeks while we worked our butts off, and made some unforgettable friends. I wrote a short story about my experience, which won second place in a writing contest. Vic and I have resolved to go there again this summer.

No more National Weather Service for me!! Though it's an odd feeling, I am very happy to be gone. I don't miss the rock bottom morale, the overnight shifts, or missing Tara's school events because of work. I probably just extended my life by a decade. We had expected a family reunion with the Waterburys, but Grandpa got too sick this year, and he and Barbara made the decision to sell their ranch and move closer to Laurel and DaleAnna and families. Vic and I traveled anyway, taking Tara to Boise to visit Pa, Michelle, Gramilda and Rex—all of them newly Idahoan. We then went north to drop Tara off at Mom and Jim's cabin for awhile. Vic and I returned to Cali via Canada. Canada was stunningly beautiful as always. We drove west through the wine region and then dropped south into the Puget Sound area. We rolled through Portland well after dark and stopped by Jim and Larry's place. Convinced that no one was home, we went in to leave a note, and scared the bejeebers out of Jerry who woke up to Vic's unfamiliar face.

In July and August, I went on two more splendid girls-only backpacking trips with Margaret into the Trinity Alps with the best group of women I've been with so far. We made plans to get together for martinis after the hike. It was so much fun it evolved into a martini club. We meet at a different tremendously rich woman's house each month, and gab and have martinis. I've met some of the who's who of Humboldt this way, which has been a great experience for me. Vic planned a family trip to Great America, where we found out that Tara is a roller coaster fiend! She has no fear at all, and enjoys the wildest roller coasters the best. Tara and Vic closed the park, running in between rides to get in as many as possible before they stopped operating.

We found a buyer for the house, and started touring houses for sale in Berkeley. We found an attorney. Her first news for us was, "You aren't going anywhere for awhile." So, with two weeks to be out of our house, we had to find a place in Humboldt County for Tara and me to live, and a place in Berkeley for Vic to live. I was so lucky to find an apartment right around the corner from the house. It was very small, ugly and smelled of mold and dogs, but at least it was a place to live. At Berkeley, we were so late that there wasn't a room available on campus, but by some grace, a room came open a couple days before he was due to leave. Then he was gone. By the time we caught our breath at the end of August, we realized that we didn't know where we would live in the future, how our future with Tara would look, and that our family had been split. With Vic gone, I was back at court without him, and sending Tara to daycare again.

Ballet class started up after the summer with no problems from Dennis besides his complaints that it is "ballet boot camp." Virginia will only accept the utmost in effort and professionalism from her girls. If they get out of line, she hollers, and they shape up. One day the girls were goofing off while they were supposed to





be practicing for the Christmas performance. “Ladies!” said Virginia, “I put you in the performance, and I can take you back out.” Since I wasn’t able to leave the area, I signed up at College of the Redwoods. I took a pre-calculus class, an English class, and a speech class. I got A’s in all classes and found that I still love going to school. I am now signed up to take a Winter course as well as a heavy load of classes in the Spring. I’ll get an Associates Degree in the Spring as well—if I can handle all seven of these classes. I took on a couple of small jobs at the school. I took notes for a disabled student in one class, and modeled for the Life Drawing art class. The students and the teacher loved my modeling (I have “great energy”), and it helped me to love my body. Vic started teaching me to surf this summer, and then one of the guys from the art class offered to surf with me. After my third time in the sea, I STOOD UP on the surfboard!! Now, I’m a REAL California girl.

At Berkeley, Vic was in Math heaven. He called me one day, thrilled to find that some professors there were the authors of the textbooks he had been using at HSU. Vic was in the International House dorm, and I stayed there when I visited. He drank up the diversity there. Someone thought he was from Norway, “Because Norwegians speak perfect English.” Parking on campus at Berkeley is costly, so Vic stored the BMW at his brother Eric’s. We found out that Mark and Trish were expecting a baby, and in the midst of a move, with no jobs, and no car. Vic gave his car to them to solve two problems at once. That meant if Vic and I wanted to see each other, I had to drive to Berkeley. On our first trip down, Tara and I drove down there to pick Vic up to go camping. It was such a long drive; we changed our plans mid-trip, and went to the Mendocino coast instead. Once word got back to Dennis, he charged me with violating the court order not to take Tara out of the county. All my trips after that were solo, so Tara hasn’t seen Vic since August.

On April’s suggestion, I signed up for a facilitator’s training course for Humboldt Adventures, run by her employer, Camp Fire USA. Along with facilitating groups through team- and trust-building games, I also learned the “high ropes course” in the redwood trees. Ropes and cables are strung 60 feet in the air, and the games involve more risk. I learned how to keep it safe, how to properly harness up for the ropes course, and how to belay. Really exciting stuff!

Nothing was getting decided at court at all, just a bunch of whining and delays. At our first pre-trial date, Dennis’s attorney, Elaine, didn’t show up. We had to re-schedule, and I had to miss yet another day of classes. My attorney, Judith, had suggested that we get an evaluator, a third party to make a recommendation to the judge about what is best for Tara. I was open to that, and the judge promptly ordered us to get an evaluator. “Well, my client doesn’t have any money,” whined Elaine (whose bill Dennis is demanding I pay). I was told to pay the entire \$6000 fee (in addition to the \$5000 I paid my attorney). The judge said she would possibly have Dennis refund me a portion of that fee in the future. Judith found a psychiatrist evaluator and began trying to contact him. For some reason, he would not return her calls for a full month. One day the psychiatrist called Judith on a different matter, they got the fee details worked out, and I mailed his check immediately. At court the next day, Elaine claimed that she saw paperwork saying Judith was no longer working with me, and had contacted the psychiatrist to tell him not to speak to my attorney on my behalf. “My mistake. Sorry,” she said. I had been looking forward to the end of my exile from Vic. However, because of the delay with the evaluator, we had to reschedule. My attorney reminded the judge that I was living apart from my husband, and that we should schedule something soon. Elaine pipes up, “Well! Ms. Trulove obviously isn’t interested in expediting this case. We settled on an evaluator over a month ago, and she didn’t bother to make a payment till yesterday.” Grrrr.

I was able to take Tara trick-or-treating for the first time this year. It was very exciting for both of us. We dressed up, went to a Halloween party, then hit the streets! Gosh, Tara just gulps up life. She is bubbling with adventure always—seeking to get the most out of everything. I returned her to her dad’s and made my first night trip to Berkeley. I didn’t have the usual freeway jam problems and I made the whole trip in FOUR HOURS! I saw my first ever dead elk on the highway, geez, might as well be buffalo, they were so big.

I believe that every experience is what one makes of it, so I decided to make my English course a big-time university course. Our final project was an assignment to write a researched argument. I chose the topic of clearcuts, and



to base my research primarily on interviews. I took care of an English assignment as well as began to educate myself so I could discuss it better with my Pa. Well, it got HUGE. I interviewed six people from national forests, private forestry companies, environmentalists and even a professional forestry consultant who was an original founder of Greenpeace. I read tons of material. I knew enough to know that I didn't know enough yet. I still don't. I turned in my 20-page report (10 page requirement!) with the guilty feeling of not having read even more. My teacher said it was "a masterpiece!" Whoo. My angle was to expose that clearcuts don't have to be as bad as they are, and that other methods of harvesting trees are not necessarily less destructive. It was a non-PC topic to bring up in this overwhelmingly "green" community, and I got a hard time for it. But I have to share something with you: I wasn't the only one who tackled an unpopular topic! In my speech class, I heard a speech on why people should own guns, why it shouldn't be a felony when a parent takes their children from the other parent, why disease is good because it helps control population, and why mass-producing food is bad because it feeds our overpopulation. Some of us in sheep-land are still thinkers, and it warms my heart.

Tara is still waiting for the next Harry Potter movie. She asked me to teach her to play chess, since Harry Potter plays chess. "Yeah, right," I thought to myself, "I can barely play chess." Sceptically, I began explaining the movements of each piece. She not only remembered them all, but insisted we play a game. A couple days later we played again, and the little rascal took my Bishop! I couldn't believe it. "You can't take my Bishop, you're six!" What a great kid. I am jonesing for the final Lord of the Rings movie. Peter Jackson does some Lucas-esque indulgence with his diversions and drama, but what storytelling!! Around September, Dennis claimed to be Tara's custodial parent and placed a court-order on me for a child support payment of \$0 per month, which didn't require me or my attorney even knowing about it. I now receive weekly hate-mail from the Child Support Collection Agency stating that they have no record of me making a payment and that ignoring payments is in violation of the law. I called the agency and was told there wasn't anything I could do about it, and since the order was \$0, there was no reason to complain.

Another one of Vic's diversions is diving. He can scuba, and is rescue diver certified, but his preference is freediving. He has this badass gun that uses rubberbands to fling darts out and stick fish, while he's holding his breath underwater. Vic is basically a big kid with big toys. (I don't complain when he brings me home fresh abalone though.) Anyway, he talked me into going on my first dive trip ever to Catalina Island off southern California. I already had the wetsuit and booties for surfing, and we borrowed a mask and snorkel. I definitely don't take to snorkeling. The idea of breathing underwater kept making me panic. However, the experience was the closest thing to Jacques Cousteau I've ever been. Giant orange dayglo Garibaldi and big white spotted Calico Bass and magical schools of purple and gold Half Moons...all hovering just beyond my fingertips. Brown-grey fish with bright blue stripes and bright blue fish with yellow lips, the variety of fish and plants was astonishing.

Right now, the big news is that Vic is coming home! He's done with finals and will be home for a couple weeks. Tara said she is more excited about Vic coming home than about Christmas. Tara wants us to go into the mountains and cut our own tree again, so I purchased a tree tag and we'll go as soon as he gets here. It will be an adjustment to have him with us, but I welcome it. It has occurred to me several times that our obstacles in 2003 might have ruined other newlyweds, but somehow Vic and I have remained strong and very much in love, and our relationship with Tara is better than ever. We are told that I'll have to stay here till Tara is out of school, which will be June, so we're in it for the long haul. I know now that we can make it through, if we just hang in there and keep up the phone calls! Challenges are beautiful, because without them life would be dull and we would become spoiled and complacent. As things stand now, I realize how valuable a loving partner is, how valuable it is to be able to spend time with my child, how much a paycheck really means, how taking risks is necessary, and how change can have the same delicious effect on the mind as a good workout does on the body. With this perspective, I find myself in pure happiness, and sincerely wish that each of you finds a way to smile at your own challenges.