

Dear Friends and Family,

Dec. 15, 2003

I'm sitting at the computer, dog curled up on the floor next to me. I've got my annual December cold/sinus infection and my head feels like it could explode. I'm trying to be productive today without expending too much energy, and drinking lots of Russian tea. The President's press conference to announce the capture of Saddam Hussein is going on (and on) in the background. This afternoon we have an opportunity to meet the President and have our picture taken with him - there is a reception for OMB staff and their spouses at the White House. I am supposed to meet Phil downtown, but even at this noontime

I am in no shape to go anywhere. The congestion affects my voice and I can hardly talk. I don't think that's going to change in the next few hours. I suppose if I really wanted to meet the President and have my picture taken with him, nothing could keep me from it (wink).

I hate to disappoint those of you who were expecting another dog story this Christmas, but the creative juices just aren't flowing in that direction. I did write a song about the Okapi this year, and hope to follow that up with songs about the Naked Mole Rat, the Yapok and the Babirousa. (If you don't know what those are, you'll have to ask my wild animal consultants, Ben and Emily Rush.) And we composed a simple song about the Doofus (ie, Rushmore) to the tune of "Mother," but it's not worth relating here. (If you haven't read the previous years' dog stories, I'm still trying to get Phil to post them on our website.) I have to say, I surprised even myself - after two and a half years of having Rushmore, I am finally claiming co-ownership and referring to him as "our dog." However, I am still afraid of dogs, and Rushmore is still neurotic and still barks a lot.

This year's highlights: Phil FINALLY took a sleep test that showed what he suspected all along - he has severe sleep apnea, and is scheduled for an overnight in the hospital on Dec. 23 for CPAP machine adjustments. We anticipate less headaches and more energy for Phil, and fewer peaceful evenings for me with Phil and the dog sacked out on the couch and floor while I crochet. Oh, well. I'll exchange that simple pleasure for longer life for Phil in a heartbeat!

Since September I've actually been working (and getting paid) with the Neighborhood Learning Center in their after-school program. I work two days a week, 3:00 to 6:00, which sounds pretty cushy but I must tell

you, I'm not having fun yet. I don't enjoy being a disciplinarian, but the children, for the most part, are not well behaved. It's hard to get anything done and have fun doing it when you're constantly telling kids to stop it, sit down, listen to the instructions, keep your hands to yourself, etc. (Teachers deal with this big-time, I know.) Let's just say I wouldn't be doing it if I wasn't getting paid. I'm not THAT self-sacrificing. My particular niche for the first semester has been doing drumming with 5-10 kids for about an hour while the rest work on computers. I started with a small arsenal of hand drums and fruit shakers, and acquired several more drums (mostly through ebay) so now I have quite a cool collection. Where they will go when I have to bring them all home is a question I avoid thinking about. But if you come to our house and want to try them out, we can have a drum circle on the spot! THAT would be fun!

Our church, Peace Fellowship, has been meeting at the Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center in their gymnasium since the summer. We're grateful to the LORD for the space, praying that GOD will draw people from the surrounding community to come join us, and exploring ways to be more involved with the rec center during the week.

Those are just the main highlights that I can think of. There are many more, and they all make us mindful that GOD is good. We are thankful for His grace and mercy, and for redeeming our lives through His son Jesus Christ. We are grateful that our redemption doesn't hinge on what we do, but on what Christ has done for us. That's what we celebrate this Christmas...

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself
and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...
So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.
We beseech you on behalf of Christ:
Be reconciled to God.
(2 Cor. 5:17-21 RSV)

Endnote: After the cold medication kicked in, I actually felt okay except for the fact that I couldn't talk. So I got dressed up in appropriate holiday party attire and went downtown to meet Phil and go to the White House reception. As Phil said, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I shouldn't miss it just because I can't talk. (It WAS kind of fun to be there with the ropes down, for a change. We got a better look at the gingerbread house, and I met Laura Bush! That was cool!) Needless to say, the President was in a good mood.



On Wednesday I went to the doctor's and she said I've got sinusitis, laryngitis and some bronchitis. Sure is a good thing I did all my Christmas shopping early, because I've been in no shape this past week to do anything, let alone finish this letter. And I still can't talk! That's a record-setting five days of laryngitis! If the antibiotics work like they're supposed to, I should be healthy by the time we travel to Ohio and Canada over the holiday.

On that note, we want to wish you, our family and friends, both near and far—

Happiness, Health and Peace in the New Year

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(whatever is easiest for you to remember –
they all go to the same place!)