

December, 2002

**Holiday Greetings** to all, with wishes that this finds you and your loved ones happy, safe, and well. And we hope you also survive the shock of an early (or on time?) Christmas card from us. It truly is the season of miracles.

Life is much the same here, but with just enough change to keep life interesting. **Linda** continues to softly tread the minefields of Child Support Enforcement working for the Texas Attorney General Office. She figures she can last another two years or so before "retiring" to a home-based business. **Chad** continues his county tax office duties, playing with computer stuff and occasionally crunching the tax numbers. He remains active locally in neighborhood organizations and served on a citizen facility advisory group for the local school board. One's motivation to get involved increases in proportion to the dramatic increases in property taxes hitting Central Texas! Closely related, the threat of sprawling development into the beautiful hill country and the decreasing availability of ground water also demand our attention and involvement.

After years of discussing and "cussing" it, we are close to starting some **remodeling on the house**. After architectural advice, it appears we may do more "space management" and less "remodeling." New carpeting, a more open master bath, upgraded utility room and pantry, built-in bookcases for Linda's books!, and, *finally*, a dedicated guest room. So no excuses! Come back and visit soon! Now or later, depending on the bids, we'll also build a home office for the time when Linda leaves the State. We expect to start this work in January, and hope to stay out of divorce court for the remainder of the project. Wish us well!

**Pets.** Sadly, our big, orange, lovable cat Bartlett, passed quietly but suddenly one night this year. And after years of gallantly fighting a genetic, chronic arthritic knee, in early November, Linda's special horse Bingo was put down at our request. Despite surgery and a heroic effort on his part, the quality of his life was gone. As with all of our pets who have passed, we greatly miss Bartlett and Bingo.

The year brought other changes to "**the herd.**" Our two Nubian goats, Maxx and Goldie, got too big/rambunctious so we traded them for one smaller, but pregnant, Nubian. We were expecting one kid, perhaps two, but Maggie Mae surprised us Thanksgiving night with two boys and a girl! Three for a first time birth is unusual and very hard on both mom and kids (and us!); we had some very concerned moments, but all appears to be well now.

Two more newbies: Shiner, a year old Lab (and Great Dane?! ) mix, still pretty much a pup who loves to chew. The litany of his victims ranges from pillows to shoes to cell phones to drivers' licenses to . . . . On the other hand, he loves to mother the cats, especially our new kitten Tequila, another orange tabby about 4 months old. Shiner has also proven to be a great pal to our other big dog, Solomon; not so to Taco, our Chihuahua-terrier mix, who looks on Shiner as

having all the positive qualities of the Hound of the Baskervilles. Cats Fargo and TK remain the senior, aloof, and mostly dignified animals of the household.

Back in the pasture, we still have thoroughbred horse Jet and donkey Lupita. Despite an impressive girth, Lupita's much ballyhooed pregnancy was false; everyone, including the vets, are scratching their heads on that one. Linda has started some refresher training for Jet with plans to start trail riding in 2003. We're looking for a second horse as well so both of us perhaps will be riding soon. Look for us at the bottom of the field of prickly pear cactus.

Travels this year included a reunion in **Colorado Springs** for Chad's pilot training class, with a stop over in Denver to visit nephew David and bride Tammy, and to see their new home. Also a short visit with area friends. It was a great trip: good friends, good fun, and a very well done reunion. Of course it didn't hurt that our small class included the local 4-star commander and another 3-star general! We all got the royal treatment, but the best part was reminiscing a very short but intense time in our lives and the common experiences shared by long time friends.

In order to keep from being fired by opening mouth and inserting foot, Linda took a long-weekend sabbatical away from work in July, to **Key West** with good friend and co-worker Carolyn. Literally swam with the sharks and ate key lime pie when not in the water. Also visited Hemingway's home. Great fun.

In September we spent a super weekend in **Chicago** for a reunion with Chad's siblings with nephew Nathan as guide extraordinaire. Linda fell in love with Chicago's architecture and skyline and looked quite the country hick with her head usually turned up, mouth open, looking at all the buildings. Autumn also brought the always good-to-see-old-Raven-friends reunion, and several visitors: family from Illinois and Florida and a surprise/fun visit from friends Chalky and Cathy Lutz, both of whom look great and are doing wonderfully well in life.

And finally, the reason you are getting this letter earlier than normal, we are off to **Costa Rica** over the Christmas holidays. We'll be traveling with longtime friends and travelmates, Paul and Kathy, and are looking forward to almost two weeks of adventure--hiking the rain forests, white-water rafting, and watching for jungle creatures. Linda will be the one scouting for the nearest Westin Hotel with whirlpool tubs.

Our sincere best wishes to all of you during this special time of year. For the coming new year we wish you **health and happiness, peace and security**. And please remember the sacrifices of those serving in public safety and in the military who make these cherished goals possible --

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