

# Merry Christmas



Hi Everybody

We hope you all are as happy in your lives as we have (pretty much) been this last year. There was the time someone unloaded an AK-47 clip, at 3 AM, in front of the grocery store about two blocks from our house. That event caused a little commotion in the neighborhood, but no bodies were found, so we all went back to sleep.

The still-unresolved governor's race here is mildly interesting. Neither candidate has gotten poisoned, so we're all pretty complacent. In our house, however, really exciting things are going on. Everyone's growing up! And I, armed with makeover ideas, am transforming Dominic's golden years (he's "retired" now, so he has all kinds of time to do house projects!) Below is a picture of one of our joint ventures.

I made milk paint (old Quaker recipe, seriously, and no Volatile Organic Compounds) and we suddenly decided that Val's room needed to be painted. Well, the color was kind of a dark terra-cotta pink, and Gabriel told Val that it was too "girlie". Val would be a girlie-mon! So I promised to paint a second coat over the first, something more sober and more masculine (i.e., ugly). Meanwhile, two girls came over to see Val (which never used to happen until he turned 13.) They walked into his room and exclaimed how cool it was, it looked all red, it was great, etc. An hour or two later I started to repaint his wall and he told me not to, he had decided that he liked it the way it was.



His room needed more lights, too. I felt the long-simmering desire to experiment, and realized that his room needed A LOT of light, NOW. Dominic did all the rewiring. I got old light fixtures from Goodwill and tinted various pots of polyurethane (HIGH VOC's, this time around) and painted lots of glass lampshades. So the three-branched light fixture you see, mounted on a milk-painted wall, has 3 different colors of glass lampshades. Our house has its own version of "Girls

Gone Wild".

Val wanted to play football this year, and really went for it. He would come home from practice (which he faithfully went to) covered with mud and sweat and would complain proudly of how hard the coach had worked everyone. Every now and then he would tell me that he had a great game, he "sacked the QB". He lost weight and has developed muscles. Only one down side. Every once in a while, some teen-ager in this country dies from a head injury. I see a major tug-of-war between Val and me developing as he grows older and the players grow bigger.



Val



Tree hugger

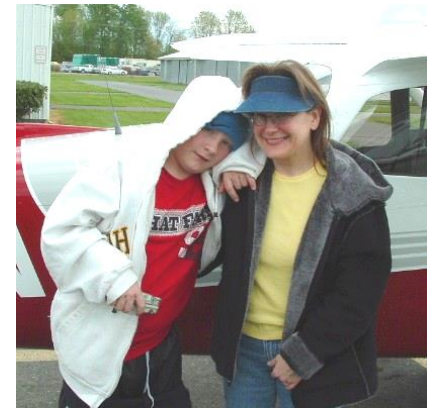
We had a red maple sapling delivered to replace the apple tree that came out 18 months ago. My neighbors almost cried about the apple tree. They grudgingly admitted, when the maple leaves turned bright red in the fall, that the new tree had worked out pretty well after all. I really like the tree. However! A new tree needs a new patio! So we took the hardpan down about 6 inches and dug the front lawn slope back, dumped lots of gravel into the hole for drainage, and flagged the

area with sandstone. To do all this, I begged to rent a jack-hammer. Dominic said, “Are you kidding?! You’ll rent that jack-hammer so many times we’ll have bought the thing by the time we’re done! We can easily do this with a pick and shovel.” Ha. We ended up renting the jack-hammer. And to avoid the recurrent cost that would accrue in the future, I asked for a used jack-hammer for Christmas. Ebay is so wonderful.



We also had one of the tall firs in our front yard cut down. My neighbor across the street was afraid that the tree, which had a split trunk, might fall down during one of the many windstorms that occur in the winter here. The sight of the tree getting taken down was pretty dramatic, eclipsed only by the prior year’s display of the pickup stuck in the side of our house. What will we do next year, to meet expectations?

Dominic and I gave Val a very unpredicted birthday present this year. An airplane ride in a 4-seater! We went too. There’s a picture of Val and me in front of the airplane. For once Dominic and I penetrated a 13-year-old’s bored and worldly-wise composure. Everyone had fun!



Dominic read somewhere that “Sir Jeffrey”, the Basset Hound that was used to advertise for “Hush Puppies”, had a grandson whose ears are in the *Guinness’ Book of World Records*. He has the longest ears of any dog in the world, 11-inches long. Dominic immediately measured our Bassett’s ears. They were only 9 and ½ inches long.



Fiona works at Barnes and Noble. This store has a nice atmosphere for someone who has always wanted to be a writer. After the pressure of handling lines of people at her old job, Blockbuster Video, the cashier work at the bookstore is so easy she says it’s “BORING.” But the other parts of her job are a lot of fun, especially helping customers find books. She sees so many books nowadays, she reads all the time. As far as I’m concerned, the best part of her new job? No more armed robberies, which happened at her Blockbuster job.

Gabriel graduated from high-school and got a job at Trader Joe’s, which is the greatest food store chain on the West Coast. Seriously. For example, they sell “pear w/blue cheese” pizza, one of about 12 combinations. Gabriel gets up at 4 AM most mornings to go to work. He works so hard! His goal in life right now is to make a lot of money and be a success. Some days he wants to go to college and become a



civil engineer, “because they make a lot of money”. (Also, it’s hard to outsource the engineering job, if the bridge is inside U.S. borders). But other days, he wants to join Trader Joe’s full-time (minimum 50 hours/week.) That way, if he gets to be a manager, which he could do, he could be about 24 and earning \$50,000 per year. Dominic and I keep our mouths shut; we just let him mull this over. Making money is not the worst thing that a nineteen-year-old could be thinking about.

So, these are our lives since last Christmas. If you are bored, I wish you a Happy New Year with so much excitement that you’ll wonder what ever possessed you to even THINK about excitement. If you are already suffering too much excitement, I wish you a very tranquil new year. If, every year, you wish for the opposite of what you have, you’re pretty much like us. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Dominic and Cynthia

*Cynthia*

*Dominic*

