

# Merry Christmas 2005



Hi Everybody

Life is good but eventful. Maybe that's why it's good. We included some photos below. As you can see, the children are growing up and we are getting more "mature". Here are the pictures and some notes:



The first one is of Gabriel, who just turned 21. One time during the last year he had let his hair grow a little bit, and had just gotten up, we looked at him and thought we saw two horns sticking out of each side of the top of his head. We said, "Don't move, we've got to get a picture of this." So here is Gabriel looking devilishly handsome. Then he went and got a buzz cut and shaved off all his curls.

I'm appreciating Minimalism more and more as I get older, in architecture, decorating and especially, makeup. I tell myself that mascara does not fit into the simple life. Besides, it tends to run if you should for some reason shed some tears. Our minimalist move this year was to get rid of almost ALL of our standup bookcases. Goodwill could not believe their good fortune. We just kept coming in with more stuff. In place of standing bookcases we have one set of built-ins that are sunk into the wall past the two-by-fours that the drywall gets nailed to. This wall was a non-bearing wall, so Dominic knocked out a bunch of the two-by-fours and built this bookcase, the shelves of which go back into the space behind where the drywall used to be. Then, I donated all the books that I could live without to Goodwill. Whatever was left over after we filled up the bookshelf was what I could live without. After I saw his beautiful bookcases I added a bunch of items to his honey-do list. It would be a shame to waste all this talent.



The summer of this year still looms large in my memory and in Dominic's. I wrote to a few people about our search through Southeastern Washington this last July, looking for our 14-year-old, who had snuck off on a camping trip with his older brother and friends. We didn't find out until late that evening that Val had NOT actually stayed overnight with a friend, but had gone on the camping trip. He was expressly forbidden to do this because the boys were going to camp alongside the Columbia and Snake rivers, among others, and I could just see Val out in the middle of the Columbia on an inner tube while the older boys shouted directions and encouragement from the shore.



Dominic and I hatted up about 8 AM the next morning and drove to Eastern Washington, looking in every state park and private campground we could find. No dice. One of the campgrounds just happened to have an incredible view of Palouse Falls. We decided to take a 10-minute-tourist break and then went back to the manhunt. The thing that is amazing about these falls is that the Palouse River seems to erupt out of the rocks. There is no visible river that flows above-ground here. It looks as if an underground river gets suddenly exposed, and then just as suddenly dumps for a couple hundred feet.

Dominic and I were pretty disgruntled during our trip to find the boys, and our silences and conversations went something like this: I would say, out the blue, "I just can't believe it". Dominic would say, "I know." About twenty miles down the road, Dominic would say, "What were they thinking of?", and I would mimic some imperious ass and say loftily, "Oh, that they know far better than we do, all we can do is make money!!", and Dominic would say, "I just hope they have enough sense not to take one of those inner tubes near any part of the Snake River!", and I would say, "Or for heaven's sake, the Columbia!", and Dominic would say, "Well, they wouldn't do anything that stupid, I give them SOME credit.", and I would think about this statement, growing more and more uneasy, and Dominic

and I would just glance at each other. After about two more minutes of not saying anything I would say, "This is awful! Those brats! I just hope they're safe!"

All the boys came home safe and sound Friday night. Val got grounded from his motor scooter for the rest of the summer, but I think he thought it was worth it. That darn motor scooter! Why couldn't he have done something in September that I could have grounded him for until Christmas? But no, he had to get that thing all oiled up in September and went buzzing around until he had an accident trying to avoid rear-ending a car. I think that was October. He cut his finger, and blood from the wound streaked everything, the police came, he was on crutches for a couple of days and as usual, we provided entertainment for the neighbors (especially when the fire-truck drove up). The next day Val decided to sell his scooter.

October was a momentous month, for my mother's husband of 27 years died of liver cancer at the age of 85. Dominic, my sister and I left immediately for Farmington, New Mexico, in the Four Corners area, and worked day and night to get his estate cleared up. The picture of one of the work crew next to a pickup is of my folk's property. You can see part of the cleanup going on. That's New Mexico. I came to love New Mexico while I was there. Maybe I just loved being in a small town—people are so nice. Also, the New Mexican cuisine was easy to get to like. I had more green chili during the three weeks I spent there than I'd had in the previous 8 years. Our kids back in Washington rose to the occasion. Gabriel took over the soccer dad (actually, football dad) duties for the 10 days that Dominic was gone, before Dominic accompanied my mother back home.



Near the beginning of last year, Gabriel's friends Joe, from middle school and high school, and Jesse, whom he has known since elementary school, were living with us. Things weren't busy enough, so in the fall I got another dog, a German Shepard puppy. After all, we only had four dogs; I thought that we were running a little short. And then there is the fact that Gabriel is planning on moving to Salem, Oregon later in the year, and I wanted him to have a trustworthy companion, as in, someone who never drinks beer. Ergo, the German Shepard. That's Joe in the picture, holding "Mac" (Machiavelli) while Mac was still little enough to be held.

Joe got a job at a really nice restaurant here in Bellevue and makes enough money in tips that he now has a place of his own. You know when kids ask, "What's the use of learning math?" It actually does come in handy when you want to calculate whether someone left you a 15% tip, or got carried away and left you 25%. Just about the time Jesse and Joe moved out, Mom moved in. But my mother does not conform to the norm in this house; she does not ride motor scooters or surreptitiously gain passage to

campgrounds on the Columbia River. She spends her days in such a normal fashion that it takes some getting used to. The dogs all love her.



The picture of Val in his football uniform requires mentioning that his team went to the state playoffs for his level of football. They lost by one point in the final seconds of the game. I don't know what Val is doing with all that money in the picture. I think that he was just holding Joe's tips.



The other picture of Val, with me beside him, is not only a picture of Val all dressed up to go to the football awards dinner. It is a picture of the first time in his life (truly!) that Val agreed to wear a "button shirt". When he was about 4 years old I had this darling little boy's suit that I had bought just for him to wear to Christmas Mass on Christmas Eve. Well that

was a short-lived dream. Val cried and hollered that he would NOT wear a "button shirt". So he wore his Christmas suit with a T-shirt. And since that time, he has always worn T-shirts and sweatshirts and pullovers, and hated shirts that buttoned up. But mysteriously he appeared in front of me the night of the football awards ceremony, wearing a buttoned-up dress shirt and a tie. I said not a word. It's all in the picture.



The picture of Fiona is of her with one of her co-workers at Barnes & Noble, where they had a "Winnie the Pooh" day. She said that the funnest part of her day was reading to all the little children that came to see Winnie the Pooh.

Now it is almost Christmas of 2005. I have just gotten off work and am writing furiously so that Dominic can put pictures into this letter and sent it off to our friends. We have had a year of events, some fun, some amazing, some that seemed to stop us in our tracks. But life has been so interesting! And we have spent time with so many wonderful people! I hope that Christmas

finds all of you doing the same.



**MERRY CHRISTMAS.**

