

Dear Friends and Relations!

Merry Holidays and a Wonderful Winter Solstice To You All!

Well, here it is, that time of year again. Welcome dear friend, fond relation, and Gentle Reader to the first First Annual Holiday Letter from the Langs. This is the first "First Annual" letter; next year will mark our second "First Annual" letter. By keeping each one as the umpteenth First Annual letter, you can see that we shall promise to keep each year's letter fresh and new, just like this first one. Think of it as mental recycling and you'll be fine.



This year was very exciting here at the Lang house. We moved into a nice big house, **much** bigger than yours. No, I mean, much bigger than our old one. OK, really we just threw out a bunch of crap and rearranged the furniture, but it seems like a much bigger house now.

Have you ever noticed that no one ever swears in these Holiday Letters? Let's just nip that little issue right in the damn bud, shall we Bob? (Note: if you're not Bob, you can assume I didn't get the MS Word Mail Merge to work right. Sorry about that.)

I got a new job this year. I'm at the Department of Education, still with CSC. They seem to think I'm "critical personnel" and gave me a Blackberry. It has a game called Brick Breaker. This is a really dumb game. I don't play video games like that, especially dumb ones. I hardly ever play that one. I never waste my time like that. I can quit at any time. Really, I could quit now. In fact, as soon as I get to level 17 or break 10,000 points, I'm quitting for good. Really.

Mind you, I didn't realize how critical they think I am until I started getting Top Secret Granite Shadow alert notifications from the FBI Strategic Information and Operations Center (SIOC) on the Blackberry. I guess I hadn't realized how classified the Department of Education really is. This is usually the territory of folks like the Department of Homeland Security, and here they are reminding me about when I'm supposed to recall my personnel. I don't even have personnel.

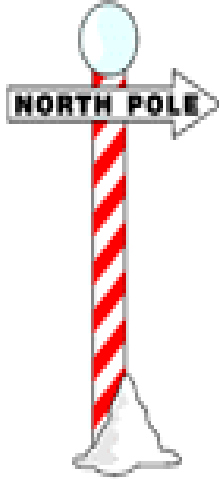
Of course, if you tell anyone about this, I'll have to kill you. And the fact that you're reading this is proof that I know where you live.

Speaking of death, no Annual Holiday Letter would be complete without the death of a pet or loved one. Oh relax, the family is fine... However, since by mid-October our cat Flitwick looked like he was going to make it, I was forced to take matters into my own hands – in a very literal way, it turned out! I adopted a small, cuddly, little fuzzy thing from the local animal shelter in early November. We brought him home and everybody made much of the little fellow. Connor named him Sam the Santa Kat. As we headed into late November, in accordance with prophecy and per the dictates of the Annual Holiday Letter, I killed him with my bare hands.



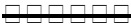
Needless to say, we're all devastated at the loss, which is hereby recorded and therefore purged in this Holiday Letter. The children seemed to take it especially hard. We're thinking of getting two next year, kind of like the old maxim about umbrellas: "One to use and one to lose." But I feel better having written to you about it.

Poor Sam. We'd had him so long – at least 2 weeks, which is forever in the mind of a child. That child would be Connor, in particular. Connor's doing much better, but he still has only two senses of the passage of time: (A) "Right Now" and (B) "Huh?" Although as I say, he is getting better: If you catch him late at night, in bed, as he's going to sleep, he will occasionally concede the existence of "morning" and "tomorrow". This is usually put in terms of "if you don't stay in this damn bed, you're not going to get (insert current bribe here) tomorrow." There are times when he (A) likes the bribe enough that this is effective, (B) he is tired enough that this is effective, and (C) he actually concedes that there is such a thing as "tomorrow" even though it does not seem directly related to "right now".



Connor's been to two birthday parties recently. I escorted him. He is greeted with cheers and hugs from his friends, mostly girls. Their mothers are there also; I am often nearly the only guy. Do you remember the line from the end of Toy Story 2, where the little girl finds Prospector Pete in her backpack? "Look, mommy! A big ugly man doll!" That's pretty much the reaction I get escorting our kids to these things.

Ah well. Maybe the cuteness magic will rub off from him to me. Then again, maybe monkeys will fly out of my butt. Then again, maybe my monkeys have already flown, which would explain a lot about why people look at me like that when I take the kids to parties. And would explain a lot about my dry cleaning bills.

Back on the topic of death, another exciting part of the year was the much-anticipated release of Harry Potter the Half-Blood Prince, in which  dies on page 517. There, I just saved you 4-5 hours and \$20 bucks.

Heh. Julie won't let me spoil it for anyone who's not yet read the book, or at least hasn't gotten to page 517. She says I'll go to hell. Yeah, like **that's** not a foregone conclusion.

Julie's doing very well this year. We stood down the SerfsUp.com business so she can focus her time on the kids without having to fret about the servers getting hacked and people getting freaky. If you're going to make money in web hosting, it's on volume – and if you're going to support volume, you need a lot of time to devote to it. Neither of us have that kind of time – between Julie running Kate, Connor, and Annalise around to various schools and activities, and me with a new commute, new job, and still in grad school, we decided that this was the wrong business model for our lives right now. It was a great experience, a good run, but it was time to reassess, reevaluate, and reboot. We're moving on. Julie will be starting a more home-friendly business early next year, growing, um, herbs. Yeah, that's it. Herbs. And then selling brownies. Really, really good brownies. You'll like 'em!

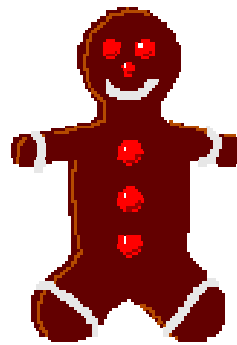


We're also looking at getting into the origami rock market: You buy wadded up paper now!

The kids are doing great – no arrests at all this year. Kate's reading is on track, but her real skill and fascination is with Math. We're very proud; she only wanted one book for Christmas: Arithmetic and Analytic Theories of Quadratic Forms and Clifford Groups, by Goro Shimura. I teased her that she really only wants it for the pictures of Clifford, the Big Red Quadruped. Of course, she just ignores me. She's also taken to talking smack to me when we play checkers: "Daddy, you shouldn't drink Scotch when you play checkers with me, 'cause you're goin' down!" Marvelous child. Mind you, she **did** beat me. Must have been the Scotch.

Connor also plays checkers and continues to teach himself chess. He’s also started getting into hunting; he found the guns a few days ago and took out two Al Qaeda terrorists. At least, that’s what we told the FBI SIOC, and once I mentioned the Granite Shadow alerts, they stopped asking questions. We’re very proud of our little agent – did I mention he turned five this year? How time flies.

Annalise is learning new words and phrases every day. Recently she walked up to me and said, “Daddy, I’m going to get the Barbie baby, and no one is going to stop me!” You go, girl. We’ve recently found that Annalise has some food allergies; specifically, she’s allergic to alfalfa sprouts, almonds, anchovies, apples, apricots, arugula, asparagus, arithmetic, avocado, air, bacon, bamboo shoots, bananas, barley, bartlett pears, basil, bean sprouts, beef, beets, beet greens, bell peppers, black beans, black pepper, blackstrap molasses, blueberries, bluefish, bok choy, boston lettuce, broccoli, brussels sprouts, buckwheat, butter, cabbage, calf’s liver, cane juice, cantaloupe, carrots, cashews, catfish, cauliflower, cayenne pepper, celery, chard, cheese, chicken, chicory, chili pepper, chives, christophene, cinnamon, clams, cloves, cod, coffee, coriander, corn, cornish game hen, cow’s milk, crab, crimini mushrooms, cucumber, cumin, dandelion peas, diapers, duck, eggplant, eggs, endive, escarole, flaxseeds, flounder, garbanzo beans, garlic, ginger, george w bush, grains, grapefruit, grapes, green halibut, halliburton, ham, hearts of palm, herring, kidney beans, kielbasa, kiwi fruit, kohlrabi, lamb, limes, lentils, lima beans, lobsters, mobsters, mache, maple syrup, mayonnaise, millet, mineral water, morels, mushrooms, mussel, mustard seeds, natural oats, okra, olive oil, olives, onions, oranges, oregano, parsley, peanuts, potty training, peppermint, peppers, Gingerbread Men, pineapple, pinto beans, plum, pork, politics, potatoes, prune, pumpkin, pumpkin seeds, quail, quinoa, radicchios, radishes, raisins, raspberries, reading, rhubarb, rice, romaine lettuce, rosemary, rye, sage, salmon, sardine, sauerkraut, sausage, scallions, scallops, scrod, sea vegetables, sesame seeds, shiitake mushrooms, shrimp, shit, snapper, snow pea pods, sorrel, soybeans, spaghetti squash, spelt, spinach, squash, squid, steak, strawberries, string beans, summer squash, sunflower seeds, sweet potato skins, swiss chard, tea, tempeh, thyme, tofu, tomatos, trout, toast, tuna, turkey, turmeric, turnip greens, turnips, veal, venison, walnuts, water, water chestnuts, watermelons, wax fruit, wheat, writing, winter squash, yams, yogurt, and zucchinis. So, we’re working out a careful diet that we can all eat. Did I mention that we’ve lost a ton of weight?



I feel strongly that three pages is sufficient pain to put you through, dear friend, fond relation, and Gentle Reader. So, in accordance with the dictates of the Annual Holiday Letter, I will conclude by wishing everyone a wonderful year in 2006. May you forget only the things you want to forget, not the things you, um, you know. Thingy!

With Lots of Love and Holiday Thingy,

-Doug, Julie, Kate, Connor, Annalise, and Flitwick