

April 15, 2003

Dear Family and Friends,

We wish you all the best of tax seasons; may your returns be processed promptly and your refunds delivered swiftly. Our second year of home ownership has been an interesting and exciting one. Though world events are unfolding around us, we continue to live an amazingly enjoyable life. We've traveled a bit, visited with friends a bit, done a bit of work on the house, purchased a couple new toys and generally tried to make the best of good health and gainful employment.

Last May, Sarah had a conference in Atlanta and David flew down at the end of it to visit with Loren, Susan, Kate, Sam and Sally in their recently remodeled and rebuilt house. It was great to see them all, and David's parents managed to come down as well. Atlanta in the spring is very nice, and fabulous in great company.

Inspired (or not) by the stories of the months they were out of their house while it was being rebuilt, we decided – with the water pressure so low and the basement pipes just starting to think about leaking – to replace the old pipes in our house; such are the joys of home ownership. The work went well and we and the kitties are very pleased with the finished product, which forced us to repaint the living room (http://www.kayakero.net/per/new_pipes.html for more photos).



Sarah was promoted to Senior Research Advisor in July and celebrated by upgrading her eyes via laser surgery. Tired of blurrily hunting for glasses in the morning, she ventured into the 21st Century world of medical miracles and had her vision laser corrected.

This made David jealous: he started to notice smudges on his glasses and not being able to see well upon waking up and many other minor irritations which he's lived with un-noticingly for many years. So he may take the first step and have his eyes measured to see if similar corrective magic could be worked. More news on that in next year's letter.

Sarah just happened to be unveiling her new and improved eyes during a weekend visit with David's folks. They were amazed (as was David) at the rapid recovery – we all enjoyed a nice dinner out the evening of Sarah's surgery and we had a great visit and chance to catch up.

Part two of that visit was a lunch date in Richmond with Martha Mabey. We met Martha at David's old stomping ground of Strawberry Street Café – some things never change: it's hard to think that the bathtub salad bar has been that popular for over 20 years. (Having spent some time running



veggies through the food processor there, David stuck with an omelet.) After lunch we looked at photos, talked and enjoyed the weather in the park across the street – and Sarah showed off her digital camera.

Martha (far left) is doing well (though her life may, at times, be more interesting than she would like). She's working on another novel, which we've been privileged to read some early chapters from – but we still don't know who did it. Since that lunch she's had surgery and returned to Oaxaca with a brace on her leg and a smile in her heart. She is still very much enamored with the life and the people there. (We certainly enjoyed visiting her in Oaxaca two years ago: http://www.kayakero.net/per/vac/feb_01/index.html.)

Sarah's Dad and Elle came for a visit in October; again we had a great chance to catch up (David especially so – Sarah's had a couple of work trips to New York and more of a chance to see Harry and Elle). And the weather was much nicer than two years ago when we tried to freeze both sets of parents on a trip to Mt. Vernon in 20 degree temperatures. This visit wound up in Rockville at a brunch of the "old Astrophysics crowd" – Harry's friends from the early NASA days, celebrating Hong Yee Chiu's 70th birthday.

Then it was David's turn to get promoted, to Manager of Web Technology (AKA chief bit-wrangler) for AARP Services Inc. The manager part is scary but he's enjoying the chance to make his own mistakes, rather than just recommend them to others.

While David was getting new business cards printed, Sarah was working on turning a gleam in his eye into reality by working out an itinerary for our trip to New Zealand. As the final plans were coming together, Steve, Helen and Aaron were in the neighborhood and Helen passed along last minute tips as she wistfully remembered her trip to New Zealand (her main tip: three weeks was not nearly long enough).

That was clearly the big event in the Williams-Zapolsky household this past year. We managed to take almost a full month off and head Down Under for lots of adventures: diving, kayaking, horseback riding, winery touring, zorbing and parapenting:

http://www.kayakero.net/per/vac/dec_02/index.html



Christchurch Museum – he’s the retiring curator of their Antarctic exhibit and a member of several expeditions to the frozen continent. His first hand stories of life there and of organizing the exhibit were truly fascinating.

We unpacked from that trip and promptly headed to New Jersey for Christmas with the Zapolskys and Conzevoys. The coolest present was Ian’s helium-filled remote controlled UFO, which he generously shared with all willing co-pilots.

Early on in the trip we used up all our superlatives: New Zealand is just a spectacular place inhabited by very friendly and helpful folks who really enjoy helping visitors have a great time (except for the Ring Wraiths, Orcs and Goblins – but we didn’t cross paths with any of those). The most unexpected treat was running into Baden Norris in the



After the first of the year, Janek snuck up to DC to help Em plan Tom's 40th birthday surprise party. There was whole lot of cooking going on in our kitchen and we helped to keep the party a surprise.

Speaking of surprises, in February, we headed to 7 Devils to casually drop in on David's Mom's birthday dinner, and visit with the rest of the North Carolina wing of the family – including a visit to Biltmore Estates. As home owners (and now refinancees), we saw the advantage of having enough guest rooms for 25 of our closest friends and the convenience of our own indoor pool (strictly for kayak rolling practice), but we cringed at the thought of replacing the pipes or paying the staff to clean the place.

Other fun highlights of the past year: dinner with Peter Muth (a Zapolsky friend from the way back machine), a Gauley trip in September with the Herrmanns and LeBeaus, seeing Dave Barry live, Sarah getting great grades in both her courses this year and a trip to New Orleans for her.

We would be remiss, in this, a tax day letter to not point out the cool form our tax refund took this year:

