

Greetings from Laurel and Brian Hines December, 1995

It's 7:13 pm on December 18, and I just saw an angel in my home office. I turned away from my computer for a moment, and there it was—about the size of a small child, with silver wings and a halo above its head. I was startled, but not frightened, for clearly this heavenly messenger was on a loving mission.

Also a licking one, for there was barbecue sauce on a plate left on my desk. Something wasn't quite right here. Do angels have brown fur and a pointy nose? Then I saw through the disguise. It was Tasha, our German Shepherd, dressed by Laurel in an angel costume. **Gosh!** It sure fooled me!

This is the same dog, by the way, who now has entered the electronic age. She goes for walks with what looks like a cellular phone antenna strapped to her neck. Except Tasha doesn't get calls from doggie-friends, but shocks from a transmitter when she misbehaves.

A side-benefit of this gizmo is the spark it's put into our marital relationship. If there's nowhere to go on Saturday night, it's black whip and dog-shock collar time. Brian has learned how to be a *very* good boy who does *just* what Laurel asks.

But seriously...Laurel wanted this obviously ridiculous statement in our Christmas letter so you won't think our lives are as boring as they really are. Thank heavens for all the vicarious excitement Laurel gets from hearing about her clients' problems (affairs, addictions, abuse, anorexia, and all that other stuff that for some reason mostly starts with an "a").

We don't have to buy the "Enquirer" to know what goes on behind closed doors—which, by the way, is one of Laurel's secret (up to now, at least) fantasies: to be able to see through the walls of people's houses and find out what everybody is doing as we drive by in our car. I always tell her, "Probably watching TV, just like we'll be doing when we get home."

Which reminds me that it was a miracle my book got published before the O.J. trial was over. Both Laurel and I got just a *tiny* bit involved in this marvelous show (or sideshow). Maybe addicted is a better word than "involved." It was scary when the newspaper published an "O.J. Trivia quiz." We got almost every question right! "How many pieces of luggage were put in the limo when O.J. left to take the plane to Chicago?" Five. Call us if you want to know anything else about the trial, including whether he was guilty ("yes!").

But during sidebars and commercial breaks I was able to finish up work on the book, which a small firm in Vermont—Threshold Books—agreed to publish. *God's Whisper, Creation's Thunder* was printed in September. It was quite a thrill when the UPS man came to the door with a box containing ten copies. There's nothing like seeing your name on the cover of a book, especially when it took years to research and write.

The book is in its second printing. Only one review has come out so far, and that ended with "Thoughtful, convincing, and highly accessible to the non-scientist." (I didn't need to look that up; I've memorized it.) Oh yes, here's an idea I want you to consider: buy a copy of my book, and send a letter to ten other people asking *them* to (1) buy a copy, and (2) ask ten additional people to do the same. Add something vague about how good things will happen to them if they do this.

I've figured out that if this works like it should, within a few months every person on Earth will have bought a copy. That darn well should put the book on some best-seller lists, and make me fabulously rich to boot. Be assured that I'll send a photo of our (as yet unbought) beachhouse on Maui to everyone who got this Christmas letter and helped me become a best-selling author.

Laurel is enjoying her own brand of success. She's staying afloat in the new world of managed care (forms! bureaucracy! paper work! discounted rates!) and is still swimming in her counseling practice. It just takes a few episodes like this one to make all the headaches with insurance worthwhile.

Her most severely traumatized long-term client returned recently for a final session. As she was about to go out the door, this woman who once resisted any form of physical touching asked Laurel for a hug and said "You've changed my life."

This, by the way, is what I've been telling a new friend who has become an intimate companion. I like her, even though Laurel is getting a little jealous of how much time I've been spending with her. She's colorful, very responsive, full of interesting information, and generally does just what I want her to do. Well, for a couple of thousand dollars she *should*.

Yes, I finally broke down and replaced my ancient Macintosh computer with a 7200/90 16/1 gig, plus a LaserWriter 4/600 and a Portrait Pivot 1700. If you don't know what all that means, you're hopelessly out of touch with modern technology and should schedule a visit to Computer City *immediately*.

In the past few days I've surfed the Internet, gotten a score of almost 100 million on my "Loony Labyrinth" pinball game, and spent a couple of fruitless hours trying to figure out why one utility program won't work with the others (Incompatible? Abused by its programmer? Sociopathic? I'm about to send the disk to Laurel to see if she can talk some sense into it).

Speaking of good sense, who would have thought that my daughter, the chip off the old block, the beloved offspring who I'm counting on to support me in my old age if the book-selling pyramid scheme doesn't pan out, is well on her way to becoming a high-ranking executive at Neiman-Marcus—maybe even **president**.

OK, she's technically still an assistant buyer in the Designer Handbag department, but she's gotten a great initial evaluation and even a *raise*. She's settled in to an amazingly cute apartment in Dallas (overlooking a creek, of all things, and near a large lake), and is in love...with Alamo, her cat. I know she's in love because Celeste sends me photos of Alamo just sitting around looking like a cat, which is exactly what Laurel does with Tasha.

We get pictures developed, and there will be *one* photo of me at the beach or somewhere, and **23** photos of Tasha in various poses, almost all of which look virtually indistinguishable to me. Maybe this is why Laurel got her an angel outfit. Fortune cookie say: "23 photos of a brown German Shepherd with a halo and wings will be coming into your life soon."

Here's hoping that you will enjoy a great 1996. If we can do anything to make next year happier and healthier for you and your family, give us a call, particularly if you have a question about pre-menopause or menopause. One of us—you can guess which—has become a top-notch expert in this field. If her current career falters, I'm guessing that she could get a waiver for one or two years of medical school, based on the research she's done the past few months.

May all your hormones be in balance, along with the rest of you.