

Greetings from Laurel and Brian Hines December, 1996

Thankful? Are we thankful? Of course we are!
Who wouldn't be, after a year filled not only with blessings and mixed-blessings—but also it-could-have-been-worse-but-wasn't-blessings.
Here's a sampling from our 1996 "Blessing file."

We were thankful that...

Once again, our beloved family dog, whom Brian continues to refer to affectionately by such cute names as "that psychotic animal from hell", got through another twelve months without biting or injuring a human being other than her owners (Laurel has hearing loss from Tasha's exuberant barking-greetings, which are best imagined—if you have never experienced them—as having a tiny, but powerful, stick of dynamite go off in your ear while tightly encased in a metal garbage can; also, Brian has tendonitis from repetitive throwing of balls and frisbees, accompanied by laryngitis from constantly yelling "bring it back...closer, closer!"—a German Shepherd she is, a retriever she isn't).

Brian's first book, *God's Whisper, Creation's Thunder*, did not make any best-seller lists, which saved him from all of those tedious book tours, appearances on national talk-shows, adulation by fans at book signings, and the other meaningless trappings that accompany fame and fortune. As a result, he had enough time and energy to write another book: *Life is Fair—karma, the moral law of justice, and vegetarianism*. It's in one of the final stages of the creative writing process, which often is referred to in a technical sense as the "please God, let me find a publisher, and I'll be good, even to the extent of not calling our dog 'that psychotic animal from hell', I mean it, I really do" phase. Meanwhile, Brian has embarked on a new project, humbly (and tentatively) titled: *Ageless Answers to Life's Most Important Questions—the spiritual teachings of Plotinus*.

We decided to just remodel our downstairs bathroom, and not more of the house, or else there wouldn't have been enough psychiatrists in Oregon to prescribe sufficient Prozac to keep us from sinking into bottomless depths of despair. As it was, our resident mental health professional, Laurel L. Hines, LCSW^{*}, BCD^{**}, SRH^{***}, was able to maintain her equilibrium during a seemingly endless series of delays, mixups, and screwups by using a time-tested therapeutic tool for stress reduction: almost daily, she would calmly step into the center of the yet-unfinished remodeling project, making a sacred space by pushing aside the myriad tools and pieces of sheet rock that littered the floor, then fold her hands in front of her while taking a vital breath of life, and utter a powerful healing mantra: "I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING!!!"

Hint: if you pick a Salem remodeler, make sure their name isn't the same as the companion of a chipmunk named "Chip".

^{*}licensed clinical social worker ^{**}board certified diplomate ^{***}supreme ruler of the household

There is enough room in our pantry to store our ever-increasing supply of dietary supplements, cure-alls, vitamins, and nostrums of all sorts: melatonin, DHEA, Garlicin, saw palmetto, zinc, flax seed oil, Noni juice, echinacea, grape seed phytosome, to name but a few. When we need more room, we just throw out some of the non-essential stuff in the cupboard—such as food. After all, when middle age has gone beyond staring you in the face, to changing it, desperate measures are required to stave off the wrinkles and gray hair which greet you in the mirror each morning. Still, all-in-all we are thankful to be as healthy as we are. And as our lifestyle slows down from 33 rpm to “is that record even going around at all?”, we remember a wonderful quotation Brian saw recently in the *New Yorker*: “Happy people don’t have to have fun.” It’s true.

Celeste, Brian’s daughter, still has a good job with Neiman-Marcus, in Dallas Texas, which means that instead of calling up her father and asking for money every month or so, she only calls up her father and asks for money every five weeks.

This is wonderful! His little girl is standing on her own two feet! (which, however, are shod in shoes purchased by a maxed-out credit card, hence the calls, which are made—by some cruel twist of fate—via Brian’s own AT&T calling card; so he pays money to talk to his daughter who is asking him for money... isn’t there some kind of a federal law against that?) But seriously, folks, we’re proud of our “assistant buyer in designer handbags”, and look forward to her possible move to the West Coast next year—unless she heads to a Neiman-Marcus store in New York instead, for a real immersion in the world of fashion merchandising.

Well, this doesn’t begin to cover all that we are thankful for, but we’ve offered up a sampling. Life continues to be a blend of ups and downs for us, sometimes more of one and sometimes more of the other, but after all is said and done we usually find a smile on our faces—if only out of a realization of how absurdly seriously we often take ourselves.

Last night we were listening to a taped talk by David White, a marvelous poet and interpreter of poetry, and he said: “We should be able to look at a mountain without considering it a comment on our life.” Meaning, we think, that the real majesty of **Life** is something quite different from the itty-bitty personal sort of *life* that, unfortunately, consumes our attention so much of the time.

May we all get more in touch with the one, and laugh away the other.

Warm holiday greetings,