

Holiday Greetings From Laurel and Brian Hines

Have a very merry Christmas. I only wish I was. It's so dark down here. I've lost lots of weight. Hard to sleep when the rats keep running across your face. Laurel won't unlock the basement door until I finish this Christmas letter. And there isn't much room under the jamb to slip food through. Thank god Saltines are thin! But why do they have to put so much salt on them? I'm so thirsty, so thirsty.

"How much longer till you're done??!! How much longer??!! Write faster!! Why do you think I married you! So I wouldn't have to write Christmas letters myself!" By now I hardly notice Laurel's screams anymore. I'm fully immersed in trying to dislodge this writer's block. It isn't because there's nothing to say, there's *too much*, too many happenings in 2000 to choose from. Where to begin? Must start somewhere. The gloom is closing in again in my hellhole beneath the stairs. Sun must have set. Soon the rats will return...

Wedding. Yes, here's just the thing to get the letter rolling. My dear daughter, Celeste, married a wonderful guy, Patrick. And the best thing, almost? His last name is "Vos." So now she's Celeste Vos, *tres cool*, as in "Coming down the runway in a beautiful Dolce evening gown, European supermodel Celeste Vos." As was befitting her soon-to-be enhanced nominative status, Celeste's wedding was at a chic Beverly Hills restaurant, *Il Cielo* (which, I believe, means "the expensive place" in Italian; at least that's what it says in my father-of-the-bride lexicon).

However, whatever the wedding cost—Price Waterhouse is still working up the final figures—it was worth every penny. For one thing, how many weddings have you been to where the Beverly Hills police were called out not once, but *twice*? No, it wasn't for what you're thinking of. Shame on you! It was because the snotty, selfish people living in the apartments behind the restaurant thought that it was more important that they be able to get some sleep so they could go to work Monday morning (as if anyone in Beverly Hills goes to work), than that the Vos wedding's DJ should be able to yell every 30 seconds through his microphone to the sound guy, "PUMP IT UP!" Which he did.

So the festivities didn't last quite as long as planned. But that simply served to hasten the priceless moment when all the ~~waiters~~-serving professionals at *Il Cielo* gathered to promenade Celeste and Patrick down the sidewalk and across the street to the hotel where they spent their honeymoon night. Ah, the candles, the crisp white linen, the traditional Italian wedding songs, the honking horns as passing motorists "toasted" the newlyweds. And then there was the father of the bride, screaming as they passed arm in arm through the doors of the hotel, "Hey, Patrick, what are you doing? You're not going to sleep in the *same bed* with my daughter, are you?!"

Then I came to my senses: my little girl was someone else's now. And for the rest of her life, he, not me, was going to be responsible to support her in the style she feels that she should become accustomed to. YES! "Take her, Patrick—the elevator is behind those columns."

Well, there's more to say about the wedding, but if I don't move on to a mention of Laurel, it means another night on the cold concrete, and the usual crumbled-up vegetarian dog biscuit for breakfast. Must finish this letter.

White girls can jump. At least, a few inches, which was plenty enough to break Laurel's left foot. Oh, I hear you saying, "how did she do it?" Glad you asked. I'm happy to tell you, just as I was happy to tell the meter reader, gas station attendants, telephone solicitors, grocery check-out clerks, and anyone else who feigned even the slightest interest in my tale.

But Laurel has threatened to throw away the key to the basement if I go into too much detail. So let's just leave it in the form of a Health Alert, which may or may not pertain to anything that happened to anyone in the Hines household: "Caution: if you are talking on the phone to someone, and that person says things that disturb you, and you keep your feelings bottled up until you hang up the phone, then do not (repeat, *do not*) jump up in the air after setting the receiver down and yell "Aaaaahhhhhggggg!!!" (or a sound to that effect). You may, in all likelihood, come down on your foot wrong and break it."

Of course, this didn't necessarily happen to Laurel. I just wanted to pass along that health tip so it won't happen to you. What is indisputable, however, is that Laurel had to suffer through several months of crutches, special supportive footwear, podiatrist visits, and—last but not least—people asking, "How did you break your foot?" After a while she began saying, "While I was returning to base camp after climbing Everest," while I would bite my tongue.

Domestic violence. What else could I do? Laurel has really gotten into domestic violence. And I'm not just talking about what happens when I'm late writing the Christmas letter. She has become quite the authority in this field, and I'm not saying that because I'm afraid of what will happen if I don't. Laurel has had several articles published in a social work publication in which she bemoans the lack of knowledge therapists have about this under-recognized societal problem. I too have been educated, and can recite my mantra like the good boy that I am: "Domestic violence is *not* caused by a man's anger. It is caused by a man's need for dominance and control over his spouse or partner, and a male sense of entitlement."

(Did I get that right, Laurel? Did I? Can you let me out of the basement now?)

Laurel also has remained active with the Family Violence Institute, of which she is vice-president.

Vegetarians and pornography. My own contribution to uplifting society's moral climate came in the form of an "In My Opinion" piece that was published in the *Oregonian*, and which, I'm proud to say, netted me \$100. Proudly titled, "Vegetarians, honk your horns," I was able to discover a heretofore unrecognized link between eating meat and frequenting adult book stores. Since the article's publication I have been watching my mailbox for correspondence from a Nobel prize committee, but I suppose letters from Sweden could easily get lost. I also am nervously awaiting the results of this year's *Oregonian* Christmas letter contest, the winner of which you will never learn from me if it isn't, to put it frankly, me.

Oh, yes. I also completed a 440 page manuscript on the spiritual teachings of Plotinus called *Return to the One*.

But who cares? All I can think about right now is returning to the part of our house that has heat and light. Thank heavens the bottom of the page is showing up on my (battery-powered) word processor. One more Christmas letter completed for the ~~little woman~~ (Bad boy! Bad, bad, bad!) co-equal domestic partner with whom I share so much love and good times, rejoicing in our egalitarian, non-sexist marital relationship which, none the less, somehow demands that only one of us writes this ~~damn~~ joyous letter of good cheer to our friends and relatives.

Happy Holidays. And, most importantly, Go Beavers! (God is *not* on Notre Dame's side, I just know it). Oh, I almost forgot to proudly point out that, thanks to a nomination from our meter reader, the not-so-gentle family dog, Tasha, has made it onto Portland General Electric's "cross-dog list." *Such* an honor!