

Holiday Greetings, 2003, from Laurel and Brian Hines

As Brian sets out to write this year's "Christmas" letter (which we generally prefer to call "Holiday Greetings," since this allows us to procrastinate and send it out anytime before New Year's Eve) he feels some special pressure. For he recently began to ramp up his website (appropriately named www.brianhines.com) in anticipation of the long-hoped-for publication of his book about the Greek mystic philosopher Plotinus—*Return to the One: Plotinus' Guide to God-Realization*.

Since, so far, all of his books are either (1) out-of-print, (2) not-yet-printed, or (3) printed non-commercially, he needed to dredge up some immediate content for the web site.

And this turned out to be...The Collected Christmas Letters of Brian Hines—which now can be perused by the wired world at large (more accurately, world at miniscule, judging by the pathetic daily upticks on the site's page counter, most of which are being self-referentially produced by Brian himself as he checks the home page daily to see if, by some miracle, or the grace of Google, his Christmas letter oeuvre has hit the big time, or even the little time).

So here we are, with this 2003 letter set to join the Collected Christmas Letters archive, and Brian needing to burnish his credentials as a philosophical writer. Let him begin, then, by considering the deeper meaning of a casual remark Laurel made yesterday morning just after she woke up:

It's Monday, and time to change the sheets, but it seems like I just did this yesterday.

Oh, yes. How true. Weeks have become shorter by at least half. By the same token, these Holiday Greetings seemingly were last sent out a few months ago. In the life each of us experiences, time is speeding up. And this is happening in precise conjunction with our having less and less time to live. Hey, what gives?

We don't know, which is a fine philosophical position, knowing that you don't know. If it was good enough for Socrates, heck, that's good enough for us. But some guesses can be hazarded. Stoicism, the marvelous philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, posits that everything that happens in the universe is recycled, over and over. That is, in the endless span of time that is eternity, the same events end up repeating themselves. Just like doing laundry. And writing Christmas letters.

Maybe, then, life seems to be speeding up because, as we age, we're more aware that this merry-go-round of earthly existence often appears to possess much more circular motion than forward (or upward) progress. Revisiting our past Holiday messages, as they were posted to Brian's web site, he couldn't help but be struck by how this year's themes were also themes of years gone by.

Fighting lot partitioning. Laurel is still battling to prevent more houses being built in our semi-rural neighborhood than the environment, and aquifers, can handle. In round 1 of our appeal of the Nielsen partitioning request, we won. Then, after an appeal to the Marion County commissioners, we lost. Now we're waiting to hear the outcome of round 3, which resulted from our successful attempt to have the state Land Use Board of Appeals remand the case back to Marion County. Win or lose in the end, we've learned what "remand" means, in addition to "recharge rate" and "water balance calculation." Laurel has become well known (we could even say, notorious) at the Marion County Planning Dept.

due to her activism aimed at improving rural land use and groundwater ordinances.

Getting a book published. OK, Unlimited Publishing isn't Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, or even Random House, but it beats iUniverse, that's for sure (see my listing at www.unlimitedpublishing.com/authors/1588321002.htm). Faced with the cold, hard, brutal facts of the book publishing business (which goes a long way toward explaining why writers become alcoholics or drug addicts, an option that held increasing appeal for Brian as rejection letters continued to come in, except he doesn't drink, and has no idea where to get drugs), a co-publishing arrangement with a selective publisher came to make the most sense. That is, after being accepted, you pay your thousand bucks, and you get your books—in this case, in a print-on-demand fashion, which saves trees, and additions to the remainder bin. He's formed his own company, Adrasteia Publishing, hoping to enlist the aid of one of Zeus' daughters ("adrasteia" also means inescapable in Greek, which he hopes his new book will be).

Staying lively at, um, over forty. Laurel still has some problems with the foot she broke several years ago, and her back isn't, well, back to what it used to be, but she sure enjoys balling for a long time almost every day in weird positions! The reality isn't as erotic as it sounds, since Laurel's intimate encounters are, sadly, not with her husband, but with a large inflated ball on which, and with which, she does some pretty amazing Pilates exercises. Laurel also takes long walks daily, light rain or heavy rain (this is Oregon, remember) worshipping, like Thoreau, in the Church of Nature. Our remaining neighborhood coyotes often treat her to enjoyable serenades when a distant train goes by, or a plane flies overhead. She has encountered several coyotes on her walks. They may well sense that she is the Great Coyote Mother, working to save them from the patriarchal attitude that *mankind* is entitled to dominate nature, and shoot wild canine creatures for no real reason.

Green without the green stuff. Brian continued to experience the joys and sorrows of the Hines' investment in Sustainable Fairview Associates, the group working to develop a 275 acre Salem property into a model sustainable, or Green, development. Unsatisfied, along with others, about the way the development was occurring, he leapt into the business world as Communications Director for Eco-Enterprises, Inc.—an impressive title that, unfortunately, was not accompanied by a similarly impressive (or, indeed, any) monetary return. But Brian had a great time working with Russ and Delana Beaton, and the other folks who appear on the days-appear-to-be-numbered EEI web site which Brian wrote the content for). Numbered, because it looks like Eco-Enterprises, Inc. is going the way of so many other cutting-edge concepts: unfunded.

Well, we should end, as we began, on a philosophical note. Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics considered that there is only one important thing to do in life: live honestly and well in the present moment. Nobody can control what happens to them, or to the world. To a Stoic, that's in the hands of destiny, or Universal Reason. However, at every instant we *can* choose to make the best choice open to us, and be thankful for whatever life brings. We are indeed so thankful, and you, the recipient of these greetings, are a big part of our thankfulness. May we come closer in 2004, and, together, enjoy the moments that are flying by so fast.

Oops, got to go. I think it's time to help Laurel change the sheets.

Warm greetings, Laurel and Brian