

2002 Holiday Greetings from Laurel, Brian, and Serena Hines

This past year we've devoted ourselves to getting in touch with our feelings. More precisely, our feelings of *moral outrage*. We use our own **EMOTE**[®] system:

Express Moral Outrage Trenchantly & Entertainingly

(please note the copyright symbol, ©, and do not use this acronym without permission, or you'll learn firsthand from the Hines' what "trenchantly" means, a word that most people are clueless about, because nobody opens a dictionary anymore with the damnable takeover of computer spellcheckers—its outrageous!)

With so much moral outrage floating around in our psyches, and the level rising higher with every passing day of the Bush administration, we've had to carefully choose how to focus our **EMOTE**[®] energy. Each of us has had to pass over some outrageous problems that need fixing, but we don't have time to get to:

- Vegetarian dog biscuits. Get that @%!#@! out of stores so it can't make it into people's homes. Do taste tasting with real dogs, Mr. Barky! (Serena)
- CBS's "Survivor" series. No way should the sexiest gal, Erin, get voted off the island weeks ago, while the sexiest guy, Brian, stayed to the end. Regardless of how much the two Brians share, this must never happen again! (Brian)
- Today's fashions. What is with the horrible plaids, bell bottoms, fringe, and otherwise ugly clothes in all the catalogs? This is 2002, not 1972! (Laurel)

It was **coyotes**, **lot-partitioning**, and **dysfunctional management** that *did* get us raising hell. Do you remember that scene at the beginning of *Gladiator*, where Russell Crowe surveys the Roman legions lined up in the gloomy Teutonic forest, ready to fight the Huns? "Unleash hell!," that's the gladiator's command.

We haven't been catapulting any flaming balls of tar, or marching a phalanx into battle, but we've gotten pretty adept at composing fiery letters and putting up inflammatory web sites. There's nothing like good old-fashioned righteous indignation to warm the soul.

The coyote crusade began when a neighbor got concerned that coyotes might eat the feral cats that he and his wife like to feed. Our reaction was, "Big deal. Cats eat birds. Coyotes eat cats. So more coyotes equals more birds, which is better than fewer coyotes and more feral cats."

Strangely, this pristine logic didn't satisfy our felineophile neighbors, so they threatened to have a federal Wildlife Services employee come out and poison, trap, or shoot the poor little coyotes who we feel personally close to, undoubtedly in part due to our intimate childhood relationship with Wil E. Coyote.



Laurel was not about to have any members of a noble canine species that starred in a cartoon show needlessly sacrificed. So she linked up with the Predator Defense League and other coyote defenders. We've blanketed Spring Lake Estates with pro-coyote and anti-Wildlife Services communiqués.

Also, about the evils of partitioning lots in this area, when there already isn't enough groundwater. Another neighbor is trying to divide a lot, but has run into Laurel and her "Stop Densification in Spring Lake Estates Committee," which makes up in Laurelian environmental passion for its lack of a compelling name.

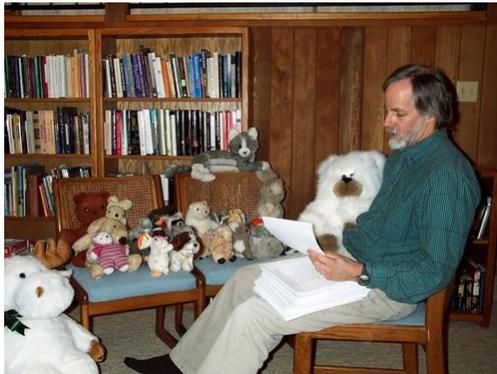
Brian's crusade is against the authoritarian, undemocratic, dysfunctional, uncaring, incompetent (but otherwise, just fine) management of an investment that we've put some money into. His rabble-rousing ended up taking the form of a web site that cataloged damning evidence against the manager of the investment and urged fellow investors to join in a shareholder revolt. As you might guess, this year we aren't expecting Christmas cards from several neighbors, or a certain manager, a price we're happy to pay for the joy of **EMOTEing**[®].

But we don't want to leave you with the impression that all we do is write curmudgeonly diatribes and put up critical web sites (that's a big part of our life to be sure, but not the most important part).



Here's Laurel at our backyard pond with a rare white wolf on her lap and an amazingly tame coyote that likes to perch on her shoulder and lick her ear. Obviously these critters have heard about her efforts to save them from the heartless killers at the USDA Wildlife Services office.

Laurel is becoming the feminized St. Francis of Assisi of Spring Lake Estates. Watch for her soon on an episode of Animal Planet's "amazing home videos," though we're having a little trouble getting the wolf and coyote to move around in a natural fashion.



When Brian isn't frothing about the moral outrage of the day, he gives readings of his Plotinus book manuscript to interested audiences. This particular group was spellbound as he read them the 450 pages of "Return to the One." Not a single member of the audience got up to leave, or even yawned, during this extensive exposition of classical Greek philosophy.

The book clearly has great potential, judging by this early response. Encouraged, Brian hopes to have a publishing deal worked out soon with Ashland's White Cloud Press. He's also finished rewriting his first book, *God's Whisper, Creation's Thunder*. Hopefully it will be back in print before too long.



Serena wanted to do something for the feral cats in our area (besides chase them), so she invites one cat in every day during the holiday season to share her gourmet Ukanuba dog food and a chew stick. Serena just eats four carrots that meal, to show that dogs can indeed eat vegetarian, if they are near starvation.

Serena inspires us, as we hope she does you. After all, isn't it all about coming together this time of year? Hug a Wildlife Services coyote-killer. Hug a lot partitioner. Hug a dysfunctional manager. Hug a feral cat. You'll feel better, at least after the blood from the claw marks stops flowing. Then, after the holidays are over, get back to complaining and rabble-rousing. You can bet we will.

Warmest greetings,