

Dear Friends and family,

December 22, 2004

Hummm... I guess I missed a year. I do not see a 2003 letter and do not remember writing one. Did anyone miss it? Well, wife doesn't even pretend to do lots of letters any more, so I am doing this one on my own.

Music is becoming an increasingly important way to consume time in the household. Claire started singing as well as doing the drama. She is cocoo for Broadway and her teacher is feeding her tons of that sort of stuff. She got into Bellaire's top choir and performed a really nice duet with another girl and the orchestra (Vivaldi Gloria, not Broadway, but still well done) at the fall concert. But she will not shut up, and we can never communicate with her because she is only transmitting, not receiving. And, unfortunately, a lot of it is in an ethnic pop style that I cannot deal with ☹. If she is not singing, she is singing-emailing-instant messaging-knitting-on the phone-infront of the mirror! Sigh.

I am still in the brass band (www.houstonbrassband.org) and this year I got to also play performances with a Civil War reenactment band and the Fort Bend Symphony. Playing on the 150 year old horn was taxing, but the Ft. Bend Christmas concert was wonderful! Maria has given up being ugly about taking time for the band since I do it anyway.

I got a little lathe and have it outfitted now so that I can be more active making strange-shaped mouthpieces for the upper brass instruments. With few exceptions, they draw pretty strange glances from my colleagues. You see, the hole is not round, and this confuses people. But they are always round because it is easy to do, not because it is the best, and there is a good reason for making it the way I do. But they will see... one day, my mouthpieces will be famous and all the naysayers who call them offensive names, laugh and make ugly faces will regret it!!! So there.

We still have the dog (Honey). She survived Maria's wrath¹ and seems now, finally, to be a permanent resident. I now wonder why I ever liked cats so much. She is the only woman in the house that still runs and gives me hugs and gets excited when I arrive! ... a creature of superior taste and discrimination ☺

Speaking of women, Maria and I are still married! And even happy a lot of the time... Imagine that. Thank goodness, we haven't crossed swords in a really big way for some time now. Maybe my wife-coping classes are working. And it is a good thing, too. She spends countless hours hovering over 7 computer screens full of stock charts studying technical analysis. I am not at all happy with that activity, but, so far, we have managed to disagree politely. Never a dull moment.

My "2 ½ to 3 week" consulting job that I started in August of '97 finally pooped out in June. It was a wonderful piece of good fortune and was a good client/consultant match for a long time. But all things come to an end some time or another. The last half of the year was OK as I finished up other projects. But 2005 is a complete unknown! I think I am actually going to have to go out and beat the bushes. Oh my! Or maybe I'll just grab a horn, join another band or orchestra and wait for some paying work to fall on me out of the air! Now, there's an idea ... ☺

¹ Maria wants me to clarify that this is because of the time, money, motion, emotion, commotion, and other demands imposed by Honey.

Remember that garage we built (www.mcadams.info and click on Maria's Labyrinth)? Well, all of the doors started to rot because the contractor did the bottoms wrong. All of the tiles are coming up off the floor upstairs and he refused to fix them. And I got to rebuild some very creative plumbing in the bathroom that was leaking. And the stairs are coming apart, as I expected. But we have it and it is very useful and pretty (if you don't look at the floor). So I am torn whether to thank the contractor or tie him down and put bamboo shoots up under his fingernails. It's a toss-up.

Maria put her foot down and refused to drive the '86 wagon any more. Claire was making nasty remarks about it, too, just because it made some embarrassing noises. Honey liked it fine and I thought that 2 to 2 made it an even vote, but the two human women disagreed. Heck, it was practically new and had a lot of life left! But Honey and I lost, and we sold it on Ebay to a couple in Austin who were just thrilled to have it. In its place we got a peppy little Toyota that Claire latched on to and claimed as her own. Aside from being able to spin its tires (a talent of dubious value) it has no character at all, looking like every other 2003 car made. Pull off the Toyota emblem and you would be hard pressed to identify it.

I went a little loopy and got myself a motorcycle (www.mcadams.info and click on JP's Toys). For years, I had been looking at them and saying "Boy, wouldn't it be nice to have one of those? What a fine looking machine!" etc. And wife always cooed "Well, you should do it, Dear. You deserve it." So in March I realized that I wasn't getting any younger and had been saying the same thing for 7 years, so I picked up the phone and enrolled in a riding course at Mancuso Harley Davidson. I then trotted in to tell wife and see how happy she would be for me. And she cooed "YOU WHAAAT??? NO WAY! CALL BACK AND CANCEL!!! YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND!". Wow, how sweet. So I reminded her that she had had 7 years to protest and that now it was too late. She calmed down after a while and even occasionally rides with me now that I got a more derrier-friendly rear seat. So far, I have only been in contact with the pavement once and have managed to dodge and avoid all of the people that try to play "bumper cars" with me. Wish me luck.

Now for something completely different having nothing to do with Christmas. You know how if you turn on the faucet just right it will have a pretty, smooth stream coming out of the spout and then about half way down it goes crazy and gets all rough and splashy? Have you ever wondered what it is doing? (I did.) Well, wonder no more, I have solved the mystery: it breaks up into little wobbly balls! See the photos to the right... is that pretty or what?



Well, that is plenty for now. Hopefully our 2005 will be as carefree as 2004 was. Take care of yourself.

I wish you a Merry Christmas...

James McAdams (speaking also for Maria, Claire and Honey)