

Dear Friends & Family,

(hmm, sounds suspiciously like a nationally-known long-distance service provider...)

Well, once more (actually, for the first time), I take keyboard in hand to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. (And, since those occasions have already taken place, I run no risk of being called a false prognosticator.) I spent a couple of days in Humphrey over the holidays, ostensibly to visit Mom and Dad, but in reality to take a peep at everyone else's newsletters and take copious notes as to what I want to include in mine.

I promptly lost the notes.

Me and mine are doing well. (For those of you not in the know, mine consists of three cats: Nefertiti -- a 9-lb black female, Tiffany -- a 10-lb white long-haired female, and the latest addition to the Wemhoff household: Tiger -- a 14-lb male.) Tiger became a Wemhoff in May. A friend gave me this sob story about how he couldn't keep Tiger and he wanted him to go to a good home. Well, I had already fallen in love with this playful kitten, and Neff needed someone to play with, so I agreed to try him out. I didn't realize that he would grow so much! Tige and Neff fight like, well, like cats and cats, but I think Neff enjoys having someone chase her constantly through the house. Her only salvation is that she's so much smaller than Tige -- she can get through holes where Tige can't reach her. Both of them bolt for the door whenever it's open, and then promptly run back inside as if to say "What's this white stuff that's over everything??" Tiffany just sits in front of the heat register, constantly grooming herself, and turns up her pert little nose at these uncouth felines.

The big news in my life is that I quit my job in August to return to school full-time. (And, no, I don't have the Ph.D. yet...) I just have to get the dissertation out of the way, and I'll be able to fulfill my dream and teach in a college setting somewhere. I can't believe how much the computer science field has changed in the three years I was away from the academic setting. It's taken me a lot of time to get back on track, but I think I made the right decision for me (even though \$\$\$ are awfully scarce!)

I keep busy in other ways, also. I'm in the second year of a three-year Lay Ministry Formation program through the Archdiocese of Dubuque. It's classes that meet once a month; this year we're concentrating on theology. Once I'm done, I won't have any kind of degree credit or anything, but I will be better able to take over some functions in the parish that are currently under-staffed or not being done at all. I'm leaning strongly towards Youth Ministry, so if anyone has any neat ideas that have worked well in their communities or churches, I'd like to hear about them. I went with a group of twelve high-school girls to the National Catholic Youth Conference in Minneapolis in November. What a great time! (What an exhausting time!) There were 10,000 kids from all over the U.S. and we adults were supposed to keep them in line. Yeah, right. The 1997 conference is in Kansas City, and I'm already making plans to go, so it must not have been too bad! I'm also on the parish School Board. Mom and Dad once joked that they would take any leadership role at St. Francis except School Board -- now I understand why! Actually, my viewpoint on the Board is very interesting since I'm the only one of the Board without kids (well, I guess the pastor doesn't have any kids, either...) Our focus also tends to be towards the day school (K-6), but I want to emphasize the older kids and adults (really old kids?) as well. I realized in January 1996 how dedicated I was to the Board; our first meeting of the year was on January 2. Yes, that's January 2, as in the exact same time as Nebraska's bowl game. No, I did not play hooky to watch the Cornhuskers. I was a nervous wreck, but I sat through the entire meeting and only called a friend once for the score!

I'm also continuing my volunteer work on the Boone and Scenic Valley Railroad. That's a tourist railroad about twenty miles from Ames that runs a 15-mile trip into the Des Moines River valley during the summer. I'm a tour guide and have great fun with the people who ride the train. Kids like getting into my car since I tie balloon animals for them on the ride home and ask them questions to see if they've been paying attention. The guys are trying to get me onto the operating crew. They actually enjoy being in the cab of a steam engine in the summer and having the temperature get up to 120 degrees. Hmmm, maybe that's why there's no females on the operating crew; we're too smart! I would like to learn to be brakeman, but we'd have to change all of our titles to a politically-correct nomenclature. (brake person? human in charge of those thingamabobs that stop the train?)

Family? Mom officially retired on 12/29. She's been looking forward to this for months. She and I are both procrastinators (why do you think it's taking me ten years to get my Ph.D.?) and there's all of these projects that she's saved up to get done once she has the free time. Dad still keeps up with his insurance business (personally, I think it's just an excuse to get out and talk to people!) Connie, Don, Darren, and Dustin are just south of San Francisco, where it was 70 degrees when it was -20 here...grrrr. Don's doing great work as a local girls' volleyball and basketball coach, and their latest venture is into Amway. Dustin is turning out to be the family chef, but he's at that age where gross (and I mean gross) recipes are his forte. Marcie, James, and Jackie are in the house of my dreams in Lincoln. They're restoring the Thayer House; the outside is finished, and they're working on the inside rooms as they get time and money. If you're anywhere close to Lincoln, you've got to give them a call and stop and see the progress. Lee's kids, Mark and Trel, are growing up way too fast. mark will graduate from St. Francis this year and played both offense and defense for their state championship football team (hey, I had to get some bragging in!) Trel helps Connie with her horses and enjoys it a lot. The rest of the kids are in Omaha. Gina and Kevin and their two, Ian and Kelly, live in the one place I can find my way to in that city...(Becca, the perpetually

lost...) Ian and Kelly are both rail fans (read that: train nuts), so I'm hoping to get them out here on the BSVRR next summer. Rob, SWM, is a VIP CPA working on auditing HMO's. (Don't you just love abbreviations?) I finally got to see Jody and Kory's new house (they had been in it over a year) (well, I told you I get lost in Omaha!) It's gorgeous! The only thing it lacks is a hot tub (hint-hint).

The weather here is gorgeous. I love snow. (And I had better say that this year.) My neighbors across the alley turned their backyard into a small skating rink, and so the local kids have been out there enjoying every afternoon. I still can't ice-skate (nor roller-blade nor swim), but everyone has a good time laughing at me!

So, all in all, it's a good life. I hope everything is well with you and yours and that the Lord blesses this year for all of you.