

The 5th Christmas letter...The traditional gift for a 5th anniversary is WOOD -I'm not about to carve this letter on 2x4's, so I give you this:
I "WOOD" wish you the best in the New Year and I "WOOD" give thanks to God for the presence of all of you in my life.

The Wemhoff News

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Annual Christmas Edition 2002

Poyius sero quam numquam

Wemhoff Household is Completely Spayed

(Joke from the Internet) In the Bronx, N.Y., lived a rich cat who was a bit of a snob, though she did chat occasionally with her neighbor, an alley cat. One day, she announced that she was about to have an operation, although she didn't mention what it was for. Two weeks later, her humble friend saw her again and inquired politely how she was feeling. Then he dared to ask what kind of operation she had.

"I am quite well now, thank you," the rich cat replied, very stiffly. "I had a hysterectomy."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" the alley cat exclaimed in exasperation. "Why can't you just call a spayed a spayed?"

So, the big news of the summer is that my cats and I now have something more in common than the fact that we love tuna fish and long afternoon naps.

It turns out that fibroids are common on Mom's side of the family. (Maybe that's why there's only 30 first cousins on that branch...) On May 21, I had a total abdominal hysterectomy with a bilateral salpingo oophorectomy. Each word was worth about \$2000. Thank goodness that insurance covered most of it. I did finally give up fighting with the insurance company over some charges - it just wasn't worth the emotional jolt I got each month when the bills arrived.

Because of the size of the fibroids, I needed to have a vertical incision in my abdomen. The uterus was the size of a 21-week pregnancy and weighed three lbs. I ended up having a seroma, so for a few weeks I looked (or at least my belly looked) exactly like that of Sigourney Weaver's in Alien. (You know the scene - where the monster is coming out of her stomach. I wish I lived closer to my nephews; I would have borrowed one of their plastic insectoid critters and given my doctor a little surprise when he inspected the incision...)

I know that I there is much for me to be thankful. The surgery went well; the fibroids weren't cancerous; I had a wonderful sister who came to help for a couple of days and wonderful neighbors on both sides who looked after me the rest of the summer. My health is now even more precious after hearing about Julie (Julie Herink, a first cousin on Mom's side who married Dave Krings, a first cousin on Dad's side, just had surgery, including a partial mastectomy, after discovering lumps in her armpit.)

But I'm not sure what direction this new chapter of my life will take. Many of my friends do not have children, but I never imagined myself without my own kids. It's not a chapter; it's going to be a whole new book to write...

Degree Update

(I have a friend who's been working on knitting the same sweater for many, many years. Each Christmas, she reports the progress - or lack thereof. I have a feeling this is going the same route...)

Well, I'm not at the point that I wanted to be at this time last year. I actually noticed something wrong healthwise last fall. I was exhausted and couldn't concentrate. I thought it was because this idiot gal couldn't compete intellectually with kids half her age. It turned out to be other problems. The end result, though, was that I didn't finish my fall classes, and took incompletes in my spring ones.

This semester is going a bit better, even though the emotional issues regularly take their toll on me. However, I have a research assistantship for spring semester, which should light a fire under me to finally get the creative component finished. The one good thing in all of this has been discovering the absolutely wonderful faculty here in Computer Science. I don't know what I would have done without their support.

When I do have the Masters, I then need to decide my next course of action. I'm not sure I have the support or the stamina to get the Ph.D. I'll have to consider my other options next spring.

St. Jude, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Isidore of Seville will be my patrons!



Ames, IA

Reported by Hazardous Materials Removal Squad

Partly Clear

UV Index (Untidiness Vanishing):
0 Minimal

Temperature -459°F/ -273°C
(It'll be a cold day in H-- when I finally get the cleaning finished!)

Do Point (I've got to just do it and get done):
100°F

Humility (Jody actually saw how bad it is!):
29%

Visibility (within the house):
About 4 sq.ft. of carpet

Pressure (to finally have a housewarming): 29.77 in. and rising

Wind (of people saying "when can we visit?"):
From the West (Humphrey) at 55 mph

As reported at 626 9th Street Ames IA. Last updated Sunday, December 1, 2002, at 2:53 PM Central Standard Time

~~Red~~ Cardinal Update

Only my Big Red is now the Cardinal and Gold of the proud ISU Cyclones. I made the decision in August that I should really support the hometown team. I even purchased football tickets. However, the only game I attended just happened to be on 9/28: ISU 36 and UNL 14 !!!!! What a great game. I was on the very top row of bleachers and could see everything. The only comment that I have is that students at a Technology University should really be able to get a couple of piddlin' goalposts down. We also beat the in-state rivals, the University of Iowa Hawkeyes, on 9/14 by a score of 31-36. (In fact, we have been the only team to beat the Hawkeyes so far

The Balloon Lady

This year, "Becca the Balloon Lady" was seen at Fairmeadows, St. Cecilia's FSA, Special Olympics, Roosevelt School Carnival, and some private birthday parties (both for kids and for adults). I'm not going to quit my day job yet...

All Work & No Play?

Becca dropped off of ACTORS Board in January but still got to some theater this year: The Lion in Winter, Heroes Among Us, Sylvia, Grease, Murder at the Vicarage, Oliver!, 1776, The Music Man, The Laramie Project, 6 Degrees of Separation, and A Christmas Carol.

The In-Law Test

The Theodore Wemhoff and Mary Wieser descendants got together again this summer at a picnic in Humphrey. The Krings family were the local hosts and planned myriad activities (which I skipped in favor of studying ComS 561 notes.)

At any reunion, we can count on Marcie Wemhoff to bring the family favorite of Poppy Seed Kuchen. This year, though, the Missouri Wemhoffs surprised us with Panhaus. To the uninitiated, panhaus looks a regurgitated turkey dinner covered in snot and fried in lard. To the Wemhoffs, it's ambrosia from heaven, a feast for the gods, an indulgence of cholesterol. I did a quick Web search for the term and mostly came up with the idea that it's composed of the broth left over from making scrapple that is thickened to a pudding consistency. Someone else said that they used ground liver and cornmeal and complemented it with mustard.

Not so with the Wemhoff panhaus. We use the head meats, like in scrapple, but it's ground together and then flavored with cracklings and salt and thickened with flour. And then thickened some more. And when you think that it's not possible that you could add any more flour, you manage to get a couple more cups mixed in.

One of my memories from childhood is Mom and Dad making it. One would be stirring the mixture with a 2-inch dowel, and the other would be holding onto the pan with all their strength. It would be packed into loaf pans to be fried in a good amount of lard the next morning. You never could make enough.

At the picnic, there finally was.

You have one little piece, just for nostalgia's sake. And then another, because you don't know when you'll get it again. And yet a third, because it tasted so darn good. And it shouldn't go to waste, should it, so you sneak a fourth. By then, weighted down with enough grease to open your own musical, you realize a significance to the pattern of its partakers:

It's only the Wemhoffs who are eating panhaus; not anyone married into the Wemhoff family. So, I hereby decree **PANHAUS** as the official "Welcome to the Wemhoff Family" test: If you can watch us eating it without gagging, you belong in this family.

Santa Obesity Lawsuit Surprises World

Santa Claus is known for "a broad face and a little round belly, that [shakes] when he laugh[s] like a bowlful of jelly." Obviously, Santa is overweight, but recent actions have put this knowledge in a new light.

Yesterday, in the Inupiaq District Court, Kris Kringle [aka Santa Claus] filed a reverse class-action suit claiming that the milk and cookies left for him by the world's children is a major factor in his obesity.

Officials admit there could be some validity to his claims.

According to the American Dietetic Association, if Santa drinks a glass of whole milk and eats two butter cookies at each American household he visits Christmas Eve, he'll consume 7,246,166,400 calories in one night alone. That's 2,070,333 pounds he'd need to lose, or 217 consecutive workouts with Richard Simmon's "Sweatin' to the Oldies."

In reply to assertions that he didn't *have* to eat the cookies, Mr. Kringle replied, "Yes, and if I don't, millions of children will think that I don't exist. They already have a tough time with the cynicism of modern society, and you want me to disappoint them. Believe me, I've consulted several renowned child psychologists around the globe, and they all assure me that a child's self-esteem could be irretrievably damaged if I fail to recognize them in this simple matter."

Kringle also contends that it's not just the cookies that have contributed to his alarming girth, but also the inactivity.

"Look at the distance that I travel in that one night. The popular notion is that it's only one night of inactivity, but in actuality, I am simply "borrowing" time from the rest of the year. I challenge you to take anyone who travels the same amount and see what kind of shape they're in – especially with these new rules where we can't get out of our seats within thirty minutes of landing. And it's not only that, it's taking these lists and checking them twice. I thought that the Internet would be so helpful. Not at all! Now I'm glued to my chair investigating sites like

www.gbronline.com/tnye/christmas and www.cs.iastate.edu/~wemhoff

And then some kids! You know, I look at Megan and say she's nice. But then she's naughty. And then she's nice. If I

could just do it once and get it over with, it wouldn't be so bad. But you've got to give these kids the benefit of the doubt and hope for last-minute redemption..."

At present, he's limiting his legal battle to the North American continent, but pundits predict that a success here could lead to him filing in other jurisdictions. "I wanted to try it in America first. It's the locale with the big bucks, and the juries there will also reward Mrs. Kringle for loss of conjugal affection. Kringle's lawyer, Susan Menow, thinks that the case will be settled out of court since finding a jury of his peers would be problematic; after all, how many other 1700-year-olds are there in the U.S.?"

For now, authorities are urging children to forego the usual calorie-laden cookies and put out apples as a more nutritionally conscious choice. They are high in fiber and contain phytonutrients which are known to fight cancer, heart disease, and strokes. Authorities are organizing a massive public relations campaign which won't mention the lawsuit but will promote apples as being a treat for both Santa and his reindeer. Besides, they come naturally in the Christmas colors of red and green.

News of the Family?

I've been sort of buried this year and haven't stayed in contact like I should... Of course, the murders in Norfolk and then Mark Zach's suicide had everyone in Humphrey shaken. Dad had kidney stones, Trel finally got her voice back, my godson Ian broke his finger at football practice before 6th grade even began (didn't Rob break something at the first football practice his freshman year?), Kory's leg had termites (well, that's what he said when I asked why he had a band-aid on his artificial leg!) Pam's son Eric survived Basic Training, Mark is with a wonderful gal, Jen (wonderful because she had the astute intelligence to go to Doane), and Trel has a new friend Jeff (who just survived his first Wemhoff Family Dinner.)

Coming in the next edition:

Becca's trip to California for Christmas. Steffes family reunion. Becca graduates? Becca's official house-warming in August. (She will have owned the house for six years – that must be a significant number somewhere!).