



Slim Volume Writes the Family Christmas Newsletter for 1997

Well... I have finished my first year doing factory demolition on an international scale. I had to make trips out to our ant farms in Puerto Rico, Singapore, Ireland and so on to fix problems they were having, as part of my current job assignment. The first of these trips was this time last year- a whole week in Spitzbergen, which wrecked my plans to get the Christmas cards written and sent off. That's why you didn't hear from us in '96. (Since the Arctic blow was going then, the blimp fleet was grounded and I had to ship out on an icebreaker, where I divided my time between knocking ice off the superstructure with a mallet and flensing those pesky narwhals.) When I am on the ant farm road I always wear a hernia truss given to me by one of my dad's oldest friends, who is a retired Voodoo priest from Haiti. My dad then reports back to him about exactly where his truss has been, and he marks it with a pin on his map of the world (OUCH!). The list of truss destinations has grown surprisingly long.

With all the travelling, I haven't had much chance to get together with my pals from Stamp-Collectors Anonymous and play canasta- it seems that all I have to do to get another emergency call from some far corner of the globe is to commit myself to a date for cards! Kind of like forcing a rainstorm to happen by washing and waxing your car. So instead I have been working bit by bit on various bagpipe projects (for the first time in years I built a new bagpipe to replace the old one which I had to put down in July) and goofing around with the resulting hardware late at night. I have finally mastered the art of getting a dead sheep out of its skin without slitting it open, which means you can save lots of time by just attaching the pipes to all the orifices that are already there and not having to stitch the skin back together. Good thing, too- we were all getting pretty tired of lamb night after night around here.

When not travelling I have been putting together ethnic cleansing seminars for our overseas managers; these are workshop simulations of factory "problems" that the participants get to "solve" in creative ways. I'll be finished with the last of these designs at the end of this year, but will be helping run at least one of my simulations at our new Edible Pantyhose facility in Tasmania next March.

I've been a Boy Scout Daddy for the last four months and just last week did the first of our Oregon Coast Winter Storm/Tent Demolition Campouts for 1997 with Henrik's troop. We were lucky to get a Gulf-of-Alaska ballbreaker that blew the barbecue into the next county, peeled the rain tarp off the top of our tent at midnight, put a lake in the floor of it by 2:30 and finally broke the tent poles down on our heads at 5:00AM- a successful event. Unfortunately, Henrik's tent did not collapse, so no merit badge this time. We'll try again next weekend. I get my stitches out in a couple of days and am in the midst of arguments with the insurance company about who pays for the hairpiece lease.

Diana continues on part-time at HP, although the organization she has been working in for the last 16 years went through the windshield 6 months ago and has been on life support ever since. She still enrolls in classes that catch her interest at OSU- Botswanan Pygmy Hygiene, Plant Psychology for Birdwatchers, Post-Modernist Deconstruction of Estonian Prose, etc. requiring term papers and final exams- the sort of stuff I still have nightmares about from over 20 years ago, and too obscure to find pre-written papers for sale on the Web. This year she also is teaching a Witchcraft class at the Unitarian Fellowship as well as helping out with emergency first aid at the kids' public schools (her speciality is gunshot triage)- a busy schedule to keep, and only more so when I am out of town.

Henrik is now officially a middle-schooler, he started in the 6th grade this fall and seems to have made the transition O.K., getting passable grades in Parental Abuse, Introductory Cigarette Theft, Defiant Yelling 1 and Total-Immersion Dawdling. His driving ambition is collecting MassMurderer sports cards. It appears his plywood airplane-flying days are finally over, especially since I have so far refused his requests to put real engines, camouflage paint and Gatling machine guns (or hydrogen bombs- "none of this napalm stuff, dad!!") in the biggest of the planes, which now sits forlornly out in the rain while Henrik fiddles with the "Mario's Half Asteroids from Hell" on the big-screen Nintendo 64. He's enrolled in the tennis elbow program after school and wants me to help coach the electric fencing team.

Alicia is in the fourth, no better make that the THIRD grade (thanks, dear), and is still earning her allowance through exotic dance. Unlock your browser and check out her website sometime. This fall we finally got her to start singing in the Salvation Army chorus. Since she is very interested in the story of Amelia Earheart, last summer she got to pretend to be Amelia and "pilot" one of our smaller planes through the streets of Corvallis in a parade. I was the power source- and brought along a bottle of whiskey as part of my "Noonan the Navigator" costume. I spiffed up the plane for the parade (among other things, I painted "Howland Island or Bust" on the tail) and towed it into town by human power- hitched to the back of my tandem bike, which was a trip in itself. I made a wrong turn at Highway 34 and wound up in Albany the first time- I should have left the whiskey at home. Alicia was really thrilled when the crowds cheered "NO AMELIA!!! TURN BACK!!!" as we rolled by.

The chuckawallas totally wiped out the eggplant crop for the third straight year, so again I pulled on my wading boots and harvested wild salmonberries to fill the void in our freezer. It was another good year for kumquats, with my mom and dad falling out to help with the pruning in spring and springing out with the help of the prunes in fall. We didn't get much of a rock garden planted this year (we have a very short growing season up here, as you know) but the big hit was a poison oak vine that took over the south end of the compost pile and supplied us all with big surprises when we had to "use" it during Corvallis' annual Ecology Month Power Failure and Water Shutoff Festival!

This year we camped out in Olduvai Gorge with Diana's sister Melanie and her daughter Kaita, and also spent a week at the Cal State Psychiatric Facility Alumni Family Dysfunction Dog Disobedience Camp in the Poconos with our Pekingese. We shuttled Henrik, Alicia and their cousins back and forth between Corvallis, Reykjavik and Helsinki to give them more time together and really piled the miles on the amphibious blimp this summer! Fortunately I've got an Instrument Rating Endorsement for my Amphibious Blimp Captain's License so this year we were all legal and everything for the first time.

Here's hoping your year was at least as screwy as I imagined ours to have been. Good luck figuring out what Slim and the rest of the family we were REALLY up to.