

March 21, 2000

We thought it was high time you heard something from us that wasn't bad news or the mitigation thereof. This is a bulk mailing, and it seems to have gotten rather lengthy in spite of itself. I believe the convention is that folks send out a one or two page letter every year. Just look at it as a few years' worth of those. I trust you will find it not at all boring and fairly informative - since we don't get to sit down for coffee and shoot the breeze like we used to.

First the old business: I have recovered fully from the close encounter of the Buick Kind, and the thing they found in my brain (which has been there since I was born) hasn't changed in a year. This is good news.

I don't know how many of you know that my plans to leave my job at the Orpheum, and technical theatre in general, were in place long before the accident. I had come to a point after four years at the Orpheum and 15 years backstage where the imaginary checklist of things to do and learn in theatre had been completely used up. I also felt that I was entitled to a life. Many of you have been kept at a disappointing distance as a by-product of my addiction to my work. When I started thinking that there might be something else to do with my waking moments, other than slave away in a room with no windows, it was time to start a new life. But, "What to do?" never entered my mind. I had a few lukewarm leads and a lot of friends who think I'm smart (please don't tell them the truth:-)) so the important thing was to give notice. Which I did, three months in advance of my departure. Two weeks before my last day is when I got nailed crossing the street by the rouge Buick with the elderly driver.

After the weeks of caution and months of recovery, the phone rang with work, and I have been moving around in the application of my technical skill set ever since. First, I was hanging microwave antennas on the rooftops of Boston as part of an alternative telephone carrier network. It was technical, physical, and flexible hours. Unfortunately, it was also arcane, bureaucratic, and the boss only wrote paychecks now and then - although the rate was good so the checks were big - if you could get one. That was from about November of 1998 through April of 1999. Things slowed in the spring, and, as bad as it was to be 35 floors up in -20° weather, the thought of a black roof in the middle of the city in July was even worse.

Before the accident, I had thought that I might try computers as a general field of employment. They have always come easily to me, and I knew that once I got started on a problem I could stick with it until it was fixed. The one thing I knew I didn't want was to go from a career where I never knew what time it was to one where I watched the clock. In pursuit of a new future as a geek, I called up a fellow I had met at the theatre. He had come to work as a carpenter for one of the community theatre groups. In real life, Mark Plukas is a computer consultant. Mark and I had a long talk about the way he tries to help the businesses he works with, and he and I decided to try working together to help his clients.

It has been eleven months now, and things are going well between us and with our clients. The way it has worked out, I do most of the workstation repair, and Mark concentrates on the network and server stuff. I have learned the rudiments of networking, and we have done some trouble shooting and upgrades together. I am enjoying the work and the learning curve. I am accustomed to learning on my own or with a mentor, as that is essentially how I got my education in theatre: work 'till you have a problem, and then ask someone with experience how to solve it. By and large, the rates are good, but the work is erratic. However, the income is sufficient to maintain our modest lifestyle.

I whittle away my idle hours by mixing sound and exploring the technological needs of Einstein's Little Homunculus (www.elh.org). They are all friends of mine, including Rob Rudin - a fellow who was under my supervision when I was an RA at Simon's Rock (along with the bands late co-founder Derek Gross). They play Celtic music and offbeat songs at folk music venues and at Contra Dances (the New England ancestor of the square dance).

Living in Lakeville has been the best digs ever. We could use a better array of ethnic restaurants and natural food grocers, but they would just attract too many people, and we like where there aren't any. I have cultivated marginally successful vegetable gardens for the past three years. Nancy has invested months of her life and the GNP of a small island nation in creating exquisite flower gardens around the 1 acre lot we call home. Our country setting helps excuse our reclusive social habits, but it also seems to promote them. In a perfect world this idyllic setting would be less than "an easy 45 minute drive to anywhere". All this is in jeopardy however.

Nancy's post-doc will soon be drawing to a close. After three years on her post-doc and some bonus time during the studies which preceded it, it is time for her to spread her wings somewhere else. Many of the events described below, combined with Nancy's retiring nature have limited the active exploration of the job market. It is also true that the local want ads seldom say "Needed immediately: Sexy, blonde, marine mammalogist. Population modeling a must. Great pay. Work at home." Hence the job search, such as it has been, has mostly raised the names of several Centers in the National Marine Fisheries Service. As Nancy has dutifully pursued all offers and opportunities, our possible future homes have been Charleston, South Carolina, Seattle, Washington, and the teeming hot bed of social enlightenment Pascagoula, Mississippi. As it happens, at this writing, the only serious contender left is Seattle (having been ruled out once and recently resuscitated).

So, we wait, with bated breath, for the good people at NMML (the National Marine Mammal Lab, in Seattle, a division of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center of the National Marine Fisheries Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the Department of Commerce) to finally approve the funding. At which time, they can write a job description which will be submitted to the Office of Personnel Management for review.

Having passed the review, the Job will be "posted" for roughly two weeks. During this interval, anyone clairvoyant enough to learn of the posting can submit a Curriculum Vitae. Submitted CV's are scored based on astrological sign of the applicant and with the liberal use of a random number generator. Any applicant with a sufficiently high score (sufficient being determined by OPM) and whose name begins and ends with a double letter will be submitted to the originating

Agency (remember NMML?) as a qualifying candidate. All qualifying candidates will then be interviewed in accordance with the methods and procedures outlined in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

If Nancy clears all these hurdles and has not died of old age, starvation, or infected electronic paper cuts, we expect she has the inside track on actually getting the job since they have been saying for a year now (possibly longer) that they want her out there, and have called and written emails to confirm her interest in the position. Did I mention this was only a 15 month assignment? The good people at NMML assure us that they will be working right along to stretch the position or find money to have her stay and do something else for them. But, remember, this is the government, anything can happen.

For all the nonsense, you must be asking, “Is this really the best our little Dr. can do”. Well, in brief (finally), it is. She wants to stay “in the system” (this means the Feds). Which means Fisheries, of which there are five. She has already done Woods Hole (1). The Southeast Center (2) is the one with labs in South Carolina and Mississippi. They don’t have any money, and Nancy would be a big fish in a small pond – although capable, she isn’t really ready for that. Southwest (3) doesn’t have any projects that need her skill set. Northwest (4) is small but growing. And there has been talk of a joint position between NMML and the northwest (as they are both in Seattle). That leaves our friends at NMML (5). Nancy has met with these folks at a number of conferences. The fellow who would be her boss’s boss is first rate people, and the woman who would be her boss also seems like a good egg. Now if they would hurry up and set up the hoops, we could start jumping through them.

Then we pack all are pets and move to Sea-att-le, (Wash that is) swimming pools, movie stars. But for now, Nancy is really trying not to think about the moving part since her head might explode.

On the topic of exploding heads, please secure your duct tape cranial reinforcement as the following could prove hazardous to your sense of reality. If you have not already heard: We are getting Married (see enclosed flyer)! Nancy proposed to me on September 8, 1999. I, immediately, accepted. The gala celebration of our union will be on the afternoon of June 11 with a ceremony on the campus of our alma mater (Simon’s Rock, Great Barrington, MA) and the reception at a family friends’ (Annette and Michael Miller’s, Lenox, MA). Real invitations will follow, but tentative replies are appreciated so we can start to get a head count.



Our four-legged children have been a major focus of our attentions this year, as in many years past. Shane, who has been with me since 1989, is my alarm clock and exercise coach. As our thirteen-year-old Black Lab-Border Collie mix, he is aging gracefully. With just a touch of arthritis, (as well as gray hair, and an occasionally impish case of diabetes), he is responsible for getting me out of bed and walking me around the house three times a day. The elder statesman of the household, he maintains a rather doormat-like posture but remains a sweet, old man, and a loving companion.



We say Tristan, who has been with Nancy since her birth on April 20, 1986, is the boss of the house in the most affectionate way possible. She is known for being the reserved matron. We find this makes her that much more adorable when she is apprehended doing “typical” cat things. A particularly yoga-esque sleeping position is much more endearing when assumed by the Queen Mum than by Jerry Lewis. She is known to spend whole days secreted under the

bed, but when bedtime comes, she will seek out your legs through the covers and hold you hostage by sleeping directly atop them. She is the adorable paradox.

Trissy has offered us a fantastic education in veterinary medicine. (An education which, but for her, we would have no interest in.) Having survived a thrown blood clot in November 1994 and the associated heart disease for (you do the math) this long, she has added: two years ago, a hyper-thyroid condition, and as of December, abdominal lymphoma. All this may provoke the question “Isn’t it time to let her go?” Well, we looked at that in December, and when the whole treatment for the cancer was one more pill each day and one chemotherapy pill for five days each month, we decided, as long as she was happy (she is) and enjoying life (she is) and comfortable (she certainly seems to be), we would do a little more work so she could stick around as long as possible.

This part may be boring, but some of you might feel you just have to know: What does it take to run this menagerie of geriatric animals:

Shane: Walk 3 times a day. On the morning walk, collect a urine sample. When I get back in the house, I swirl a special swizzle stick to get a glucose level to determine his insulin dosage. Feed him - a good idea with any dog. Give him an insulin shot in the neck - he could hardly care less – his arthritis pill, and a cookie for a reward. He is now done till the evening walk & food and finally a pre-bedtime stroll.

Tristan: Is a champ at taking pills, and for the number she gets in a day that could be a deal breaker if she were not. She gets her heart meds three time a day, her thyroid meds twice a day, her anti-cancer steroids once a day. Every other day, she gets a bonus pill for her heart, every third day she gets a baby aspirin also for her heart, and, as I said, five days a month, she gets one extra pill full of superhero kitties fighting off all the evil cancer mice.☺ We weigh her every other day (it is the only proxy for the state of the tumor). If she keeps her weight up, then we can assume she is at least holding the tumor at bay. Food, water, and litter are other things which make up the life of a high-maintenance kitty.



Sadly, we haven't always had such stellar result form our fastidious pet care. Our precious angel, Turtle, lost her hard fought health battle in October 1998. We lavished her with all the attention her many doctors advised, but she had a secret. While we focused our efforts on her conspicuous and brutally chronic sinus infection, she was hiding her own abdominal tumor (probably lymphoma) behind her symptoms. In the span of a week, what palpated as perhaps only a stool in her bowel grew into a large and subsequently ruptured tumor.

Her sudden death from unexpected causes was a shock and a major tragedye in our pet-based family unit.



On a lighter note, we have added a new child of the feline kind to our home in February of last year. Emerald (aka Emma) selected me from thousands, perhaps dozens or even one or two applicants for her affections. Now in our home for just over a year, she is a loving, playful, and by all accounts, healthy member of the household. She and Tristan have not yet formed the sisterly bond we had hoped for, but our home is tranquil, if segregated. As Trissy's health watch continues, more stability might provide some more chances to help

them get along, but if not, that's OK too.

Well, I did warn you that it was long... I promise I won't write again for a long time... No, wait, I'll write less more often, (more or less). It was lovely chatting with you, and I look forward to seeing you in June – Remember June? Feel free to send us your own catalog of endless drivel. We look forward to hearing in exacting detail how hard your life is. In the meantime, at least we know you won't have any trouble filling your recycle bin.

Hope you had half as much fun reading this as we did writing it. Want more?

<http://people.ne.mediaone.net/nancyandmark>

(must be all lowercase – it's a MediaOne thing)

No, we haven't suddenly become self absorbed – just excited, and, ok, a little carried away :-)

Lots of love,

Mark and Nancy

(and Tristan, Shane, Emerald, and (in our hearts) Turtle)

