



Fourteenth Annual Granger Holiday Newsletter



CURRENTS

Happy holidays from the Grangers! We hope our annual tome finds you healthy, in good spirits, and looking forward to 2004. On the other hand, if it finds you grouchy from overexposure to the holiday shopping madness or suffering from an overdose of good cheer, we hope you're smiling at the end of this newsletter.

As we pause and reflect on yet another year gone by, it is satisfying to realize that many of our hopes for 2003 have been fulfilled. It has been a particularly eventful year as turning points and milestones go, some anticipated and others unexpected.

In August we celebrated our 15th wedding anniversary. We also enjoyed a reunion of former Staefa employees, and another reminiscing with high school classmates, some of whom we hadn't seen in over 25 years!

In February Little Mee, our beloved cat of 16 years, passed away quite suddenly. Although she'll never be replaced, we filled the void by adopting a new family member – Celeste. She is a rare breed known as a "Ragdoll", so named because when held she is so utterly relaxed. For you cat fanciers, Ragdolls are a cross between a Persian and a Blue-point Siamese. She's a real cuddle bug and at home just about anywhere (see picture).

As predicted in last year's newsletter, many of John's side of the family pulled up stakes and relocated. Sister Alisa's family moved from Simi Valley to Murrieta within days of finding their new house. When we dropped in to visit them in early March, there were letters addressed to the former occupant lying on the kitchen counter. Karen happened to notice the name "Starnes" on the label. By sheer coincidence, we learned that the house had belonged to Karen's former colleagues at 24-Hour Fitness, Robin & Jim Starnes. Our small world just got a little smaller.

Mom, sister Carol and son Dylan now live nearby in Menifee, 10 miles north of Murrieta. Once home to pastureland with a bucolic fragrance that only a dairy farmer could love, Menifee may soon join Murrieta and Temecula as part of a fast-growing suburban megalopolis: Temuriettafee? After living in Moorpark - an Internet backwater - for several years, Mom is thrilled to finally have access to a high-speed cable connection. Niece Melinda and family have also moved to a new home in Murrieta. The rest of the family may not be far behind...



Celeste, our 4-yr-old Ragdoll, is at ease almost anywhere.

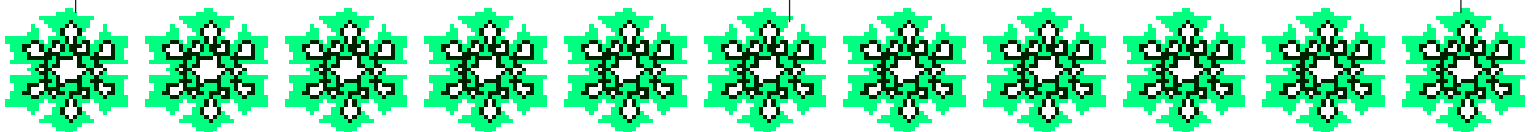
We joined Karen's family for Thanksgiving in Banning. Visiting from Sacramento, brother Art introduced us to all five of his grandchildren, some for the first time. It was great to see the whole family again after 2 years. Nephew Brian and wife Carla are moving to nearby Barstow, and great niece Amber has settled happily into the San Diego lifestyle.

While no storks visited our clans this past year, we were nonetheless thrilled to welcome a new family member. Luis Urquidi and Laurel Granger were married in Laguna Beach on November 23rd. They met the old fashioned way: on the Internet. Luis and Laurel quickly discovered that they shared the same passions...for long bicycle rides, exotic food, and brilliant sunsets. It was wonderful meeting Luis' relatives at the wedding, and welcoming our new extended family.

Speaking of extended family, Paul Noga and Sherree Penley finally tied the knot in September, Las Vegas style. The wedding party experienced a brief moment of panic upon real-



Galley Grandkids, clockwise from left: Jazzlyn (1), Casey (2), Brianna (11), Drew (9), and Maranda (1)





Marriage License certifies finality of bachelorhood for Paul.

izing that the 30-foot Hummer limousine would be unable to negotiate the turn into the drive-in chapel. So, in true pioneer spirit, we disembarked and gathered around the drive-through window for the ceremony. It's the best man's job to keep the groom as calm as possible. While most grooms admit to a sense of disorientation during the ceremony, some life-long bachelors like Paul experience this "out of body" dimension at a whole new level. But once the rice had settled, Paul and Sherree were both grinning from ear to ear. We are very happy for our dear friends!



Laurel and Luis Urquidi, flanked by daughters Mara & Melinda & granddaughter Angela, make a handsome couple.

S P O R T S

Charg-ers! Charg-ers! Charg-ers!
Pad-res! Pad-res! Pad-res! Pad-res!

Recent Decembers have seldom been a merry time for Chargers fans. After another trying season and off-field litigation problems, Charger "loyalist" may be a more fitting moniker than "fan".

Shortly after the Chargers suffered their 11th loss of the season, Saddam Hussein was finally found hiding in the bottom of a hole in the ground. Saddam's ignominious end prompted comparisons to the Bolts' hideous season. Pablo Nogatoches, Las Vegas football pundit and Charger Masochist In Denial, was heard to wonder aloud, "Is it possible for either of these two franchises to sink any lower?" We doubt it...

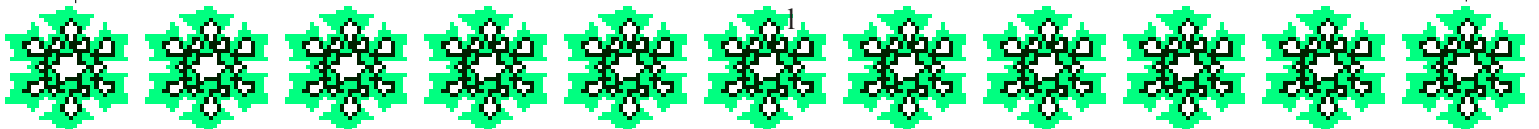
Well, there's always a high draft pick to look forward to in April...unless the Boltz blow it by managing to win the last two games. At least we can look forward to tweaking the Raider fans during the last game of the year in what could be a battle for the AFC West cellar.

Ushering in a new era in San Diego baseball, the Padres will open the season in Petco Park this spring. We're looking forward to a novel tailgating experience downtown. Let us know if you'd like to join us for a game!

T R A V E L

In August we revisited Kauai to look in on our timeshare. Every few months we get "continent fever" and feel compelled to return to our island. There was an exciting new dimension to this trip, as we were accompanied by sister Carol, nephew Dylan, and great niece Windi, all of whom were first-time visitors. It was great fun to experience the island anew through their eyes. After running them ragged for two days (hiking, touring, snorkeling, BBQs, body boarding, etc.) we thought they'd sleep in, but they were ready for more (a Luau, shopping, diving, spa treatment, more body boarding, etc.) We linked up with the Umscheid clan for more memorable family outings.

In late October we made our second pilgrimage in as many years to idyllic Guadalupe Canyon, a desert oasis about 40 miles south of Mexicali. The campground offers sites with thatched huts and tables, each with a private spa fed by a natural hot spring - and gorgeous views of the desert landscape and nearby mountains. A series of waterfalls and swimming holes is only a short hike away.





Grangers and Umscheids together again in Kauai. Front row: Neil Jr., Windi, Karen, Dylan, Cherie. Back row: Neil Sr., Kristine, John, and Kralter.

As we made our way back to Tecate on Sunday night, we observed that the marine layer near the coastline was much darker than usual. Turning on the radio, we heard that the Monday Night Football game was being moved from Qualcomm Stadium to Tempe, Arizona “due to the wildfires”. What the %\$*! Crossing the border and moving northwest on Highway 94, we were suddenly greeted by a vision from Dante’s Inferno. Fires burned unchecked on a hillside less than 200 yards from the road. A minute later we saw two mountains on both sides of the highway ablaze, with rivers of fire flowing like lava down toward our path. By then we were informed of the extent of the devastation that had visited our fair city on that sunny, blustery afternoon.

Our prayers were answered as we learned that our friends and family in harm’s way were safe and that their homes had escaped destruction. For several, the margin of escape was measured in yards, as homes nearby were burned to the ground. Karen’s Uncle Glen and Aunt Norah, San Bernardino mountain residents for over 35 years, were among those whose homes were threatened but saved by the superhuman efforts of the many courageous firefighting teams.

BUSINESS

On the career front, a year that began with uncertainty ended on a positive note. Last spring, with TeraCenter funding fading like a shooting star, John began a job search in earnest. Economists reported that California’s unemployment rate was “only” 6.6%, lower than the national average. A comforting thought, unless of course you’re among the 6.6% looking for work in a stagnant job market.

(Although I’ve only been unemployed twice in my life, I’ve found that looking for work is always a character-building experience. When you no longer have a daily routine, a new one must be created. Due to the “gift” of new-found free time, the unemployed tend to be more physically fit (‘no time for the gym’ is no longer a good excuse), more sociable (due to all those networking events we attend), and more introspective (plenty of free time to catch up on your reading). In short, it would be a nearly perfect existence if it weren’t for that nagging “cash” thing.)

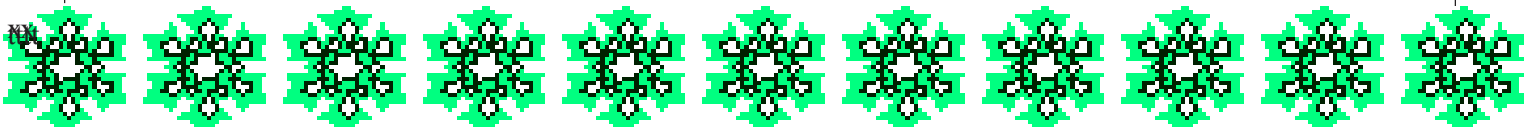
In October, all of the networking finally paid off; John got a call from his friends at Eastridge Infotech for an interview at Cubic Transportation Systems. After a spirited interview for the position of Training Specialist, John received an offer at the top hourly rate and is now happily toiling in the trenches once again. How refreshing to find a company in this economy that can make a hiring decision!

Just days after starting, the job almost went up in smoke. But as fate would have it, the fires that burned Miramar died out at the Cubic parking lot boundary, 100 feet from the main building.

Finding a job becomes a convoluted journey, with many forks in the road and discoveries waiting to be made. Throughout the process friends and family were incredibly



Great-niece Roxy (16) savors her first sushi on City Walk near Universal Studios. Bon appetit!



supportive. Many went out of their way to offer ideas, contacts, and suggestions. Perhaps most impressive was how willingly people gave of their time and energy. Even total strangers!

Over time, I found it useful to build a reference list of resources for my job search. Compiled over several months, they have been posted on our family Web site: www.jkgranger.com under Career Management Resources. Anyone you know who is looking for work, particularly in San Diego, will find it useful. Also see "Managing Your Job Search", a compendium of lessons learned that I was invited to present to several job search support groups.

PERSONALS

If there was a theme to this past year, it was the remarkable resiliency and generosity of the human spirit we observed on a personal, local, and national level.

Throughout a tumultuous 2003, we continued to count our many blessings. Thankful that we have a roof over our head, grateful for the opportunity to earn a good living, and appreciative of the time we've been able to spend with family and friends.

And now for those of you who still give at least a passing thought to making New Year's resolutions, we thought we'd share some words of advice from the Big Fella himself.

All I Needed to Know About Life I learned from Santa

Encourage people to believe in you.

Always remember who's naughty and who's nice.

Don't pout.

It's as much fun to give as it is to receive.

Some days it's okay to feel a little chubby.

Make your presents known.

Always ask for a little bit more than what you really want.

Bright red can make anyone look good.

Wear a wide belt and no one will notice how many pounds you've gained.

If you only show up once a year, everyone will think you're very important.

**Whenever you're at a loss for words, say:
"HO, HO, HO!"**

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