



Seventh Annual Granger Holiday Newsletter

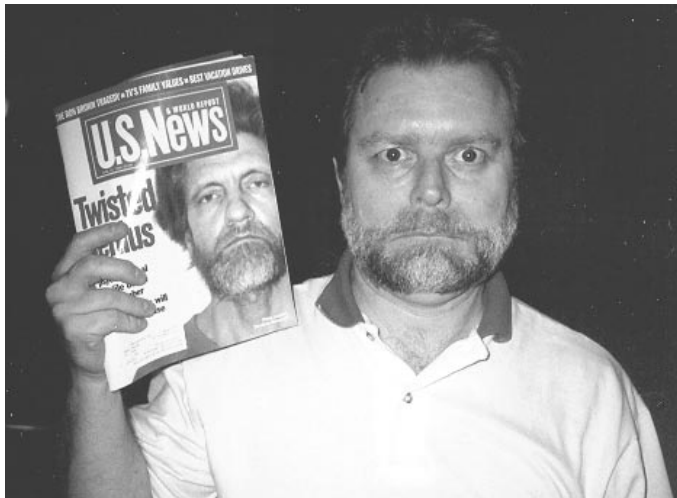


CURRENTS

December 24th, 1996

All I want for Christmas is ... an automated, drive-thru, coin-operated, self-serve Christmas tree dispenser. Such a device would have solved our most immediate problem of locating a tree on Christmas Eve. In hindsight, I suppose we were operating under the naive assumption (probably due to watching "It's a Wonderful Life" one too many times) that modern suburban families can, in the true holiday tradition, purchase and decorate a tree on Christmas Eve. Well...not in today's frenetic marketplace! Our chosen Christmas tree farm was shuttered by noon, and 6pm found us gazing longingly at a bundle of trees piled high against a wire fence inside a dark, deserted enclosure. With not a soul in sight, we were tempted to breach the dilapidated fence, leave a bill on the counter, and make off into the night with our treasure. Then reality set in, and at once we could visualize the headlines in Wednesday's paper: "Rancho Penasquitos couple caught playing Grinch, claim 'We were desperate'".

Yeah, I know. Is that violin music in the background? That's what we get for going on vacation (see *Travel*) the week before Christmas. Combine that with 5 fewer days between Thanksgiving and Christmas than last year, and something had to give. Typical of our year in general!



Our Favorite Photo of the Year: Due to an uncanny resemblance to the leading suspect in the *UnaBomber* case, family friend Shelby's life was inconvenienced by numerous false arrests in past months. However, he has hired himself a good lawyer and has announced plans to retire when he receives an expected 6-figure damage award. In the meantime, he will begin writing his autobiography, tentatively titled: "Get Off My Back!"

Milestones

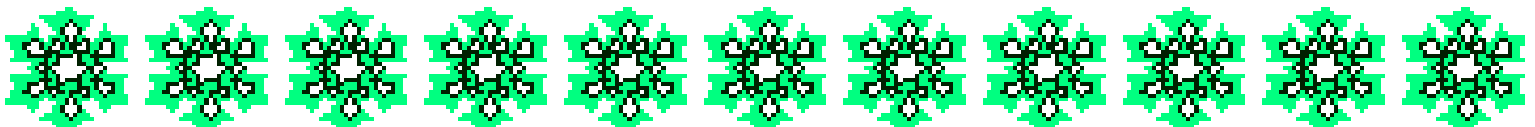
This was a huge year for milestone birthdays! We helped Karen's mom Dorothy celebrate her 75th birthday in April with many friends and family members, and we feted John's mom Patty with a surprise 70th birthday party in October.

Our nephew Devon, 19, decided to take a sabbatical from playing guitar in rock bands and joined the Army. He has written us several letters from boot camp in Georgia. Aside from the 4am revelies, he seems to be enjoying the "activities" like marksmanship and grenade launching (why do I keep thinking of Bill Murray in *Stripes*?) If you would like to make his day, please send a card or letter to Pvt Devon Galley, 620-09-7075, "B" Company, 1/38 Infantry, RN:215, Ft Benning, GA 31905.

John's sister Laurel continues her recovery from elbow surgery due to carpal tunnel and plans to resume Spanish language studies in '97. She recently accompanied sister Carol on a 2-week trip to Wisconsin, where Carol and nephew Dylan, 3, are now freezing. At last report, their dreams of a white Christmas had been fulfilled, but they were pining for the Santa Ana winds of Simi Valley. We won't be the least bit surprised if they turn from snowbirds to seagulls real soon. Nephew Gary has been working full-time at El Camino Country Club in Oceanside. Niece Lindy is busy raising our great nephew Tresean, 1.5, while working full-time in child care and finishing her AA degree in social sciences. Tresean has recently started talking, and his favorite word is "ball" (a good start for a future hall of fame running back!)

Nephew Garrett recently became certified and can now experience the wonders of the sea while scuba diving with parents Alisa and John. Niece Mara is continuing her studies in musical composition at Cal State LA, while working as a hollywood extra. You can catch her regularly on "Pearl", a sitcom starring Malcolm McDowell and Rita Perlman. She plays a student and usually sits in the front row, middle, on the aisle (long brown hair). She's also in "Father's Day" with Robin Williams (this Spring) and plays a space cadet...er, I mean a soldier in "Starship Troopers" due out this Summer.

Our niece Amber, 18, moved from Apple Valley, CA to San Diego last summer. She is waitressing at Kooky's Diner while preparing to enter fashion design school. She gets plenty of exercise on the job, wearing in-line skates to deliver meals to customers. If you're in the Mission Valley area, do stop in and say Hi!



TRAVEL

After more than a year, we resumed our love affair with the Caribbean and warm water diving. We liked Club Med's Bahama diving operation so much in 1994 we decided to return to San Salvador island in May. It will probably be the last time we book an international flight out of Miami near a holiday weekend. After getting bumped by Bahamas Air, we ended up laying over in Nassau at the airline's "dive" hotel (not the scuba kind) for the night. Sharing our fate were Shelly and Dave, a couple from Berkeley also headed for Club Med. The beer and complimentary food was great, but the location and accommodations left a lot to be desired. Killing time in the deserted lobby the next day, the thing that saved us was the hotel brochure with a hilarious misprint: *...come and enjoy the Bahamas as you always dreaded it would be, the Sun Fun Resort Hotel (!)* It was as if they'd read our minds! After a protracted wrestling match with the airline bureaucracy, we boarded a flight for Club Med the next day. Soon the warm water and 100 foot visibility made the layover a distant memory, but we still laugh about the brochure!

December is actually a great time to go to the "big island" of Hawaii. Crowds are minimal and the weather is well-behaved. There's also plenty of timeshare condos available, which give you the option of eating "in". With John's sister Alisa, husband John, and nephew Garrett all recently certified divers, this was the first time we'd all had a chance to do some warm water diving together. We commuted from our condo in south Kailua-Kona to the Kailua pier each morning to meet the crew of our dive operator, Dive Makai. These folks trucked in their 31 foot dive boat each morning from their home 4,500 ft up the gentle slope of the neighboring volcano.

The first thing we noticed about Hawaii was the different types of tropical fish not found in the Caribbean, including racoon butterfly fish, dragon moray eels, flame angelfish, and a variety of brilliantly colored snail-like animals called "nudibranchs." We also saw some old favorites, including octopus, trumpetfish, red/white banded shrimp, and both bottlenose and spinner dolphins. The hands-down highlight of the trip was the Manta Ray night dive. At sunset, our group of 8 divers anchored 50 yards from the Kona Surf Hotel. Mantas are attracted to the lights, as are plankton that they feed on.



The newest certified member of our family to experience the rapture of the deep is none other than our cat Nouvie, pictured here in fine feline form during his inaugural dive off La Jolla Shores beach.

As we entered the dark water, we saw a scene out of the movie "The Abyss." Imagine 20 divers huddled in a circle on the ocean floor in 36 ft of water, pointing their dive lights heavenward and waving them like search beacons. The graceful forms of five large Mantas dove and arched as they sought the plankton attracted to the divers' lights. As we arrived and hunkered down to watch, the Mantas swooped from all directions, cruising inches over our heads like enormous birds, with wingspans in excess of 12 feet. Being in the presence of these gentle giants leaves you with a sense of exhilaration and awe.

Thanks to Dive Makai's knowledgeable divemasters, we learned more about Hawaiian reef life than we ever would have on our own. They log information about each dive and keep an extensive database that lets them track inhabitants over time - they even have names for some of the critters! On the last day, Karen spotted the blow from a humpback whale and her calf. The dive boat gave chase and came within 60-70 yards of the pair. As if to acknowledge our efforts, mama gave us a couple of waves of her tail before submerging.

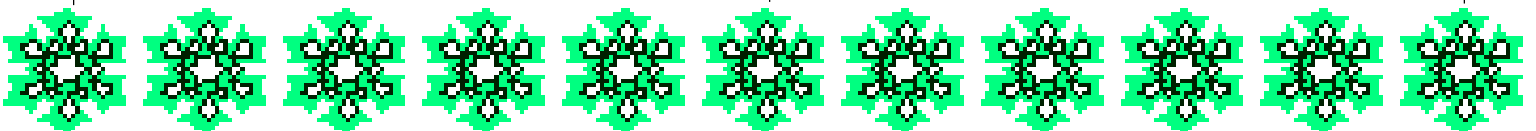
SPORTS

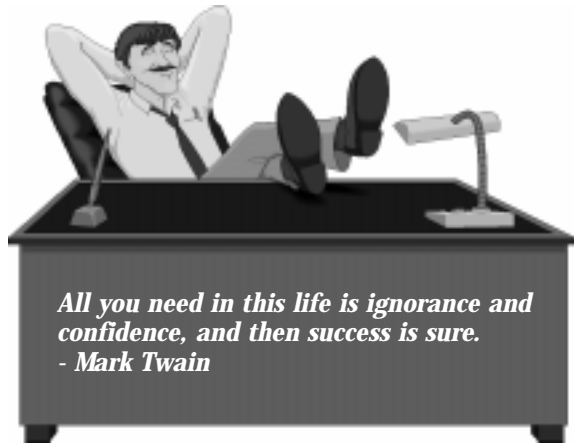
Pad-res! Char-gers! Pad-res! Char-gers!



Boltheads prepare for victory - Tim Ball (his better half Suzi took the picture), John, Karen, and famed sports prognosticator and Charger masochist, Pablo Nogatoches.

The Padres gave us quite a ride this season! Finally banishing the ghosts of 1984 (the last time the Pads visited the post-season), this year's club won the NL West title from the dreaded Dodgers in sensational fashion, coming through in the clutch against all odds. If they'd made a movie out of this season, the producers would've been accused of over-dramatization! Unfortunately our beloved Chargers struggled through a mediocre 8-8 season, nonetheless providing some great highlight footage en route. After two consecutive playoff appearances, Bolt fans have come to expect above average performances from their team. Surely that doesn't mean we're spoiled..does it?





All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure.
- Mark Twain

B U S I N E S S

One evening at home in early January, John received one of those rare, life-changing phone calls. The caller was a Vice President with Stellcom Technologies, a San Diego-based computer engineering consulting company. He said the company had an opening for an “engineering retention manager” (excuse me?) and proceeded to describe the position. He said, “you would be in charge of managing the professional development of about 150 engineers.” I said, “Wow.” He then said, “you would develop training programs, including our Microsoft Certification Program.” I said, “WOW!” Encouraged, the caller then said, “and you would get to take lots of people out to lunch (consultants love to go to lunch!)” I said “WOW!!!” As it turns out, the caller had found my name in the 1995 Drake-Beam-Morin (DBM) outplacement catalog. More small world stuff: I had been introduced to a recruiter at the company some months earlier by our insurance agent, Dianne Smythe.

Following a six-hour interview, affectionately referred to as “the gauntlet,” I decided that the position satisfied many of the criteria for job satisfaction that I’d established during my time at DBM. Here was a young, rapidly growing, entrepreneurial company that sought energy and innovation from its people, while encouraging them to stretch for growth and continue learning at a frenzied pace. After I pinched myself, I thought about the possible downside: I would no longer be programming in multi media day to day. When I was told I would be able to contribute to the development of the company web page, that clinched it.

All of this seems like light years ago, as Stellcom has grown from about 150 to over 220 employees in less than a year. With over 50 clients in the San Diego area alone, Stellcom employees provide software and hardware solutions to growing high tech companies including such luminaries as Qualcomm and General Instrument. And in case you were wondering, Karen and I are now in the same profession - sort of. After getting quizzical looks

when asked about my new title of “Engineering Retention Manager”, I decided that “Employee Relations Manager” would be easier to relate to.

For Karen, this has also been another big year of change. Although the merger of Family Fitness and 24-Hour Nautilus is now complete, the new organizational structure of 24-Hour Fitness continues to evolve. The changes have resulted in increased opportunity for Karen (meaning that she has more problems to solve), and she faces new challenges daily.

Karen has been more focused during this year on mediating disputes that may arise between employees and management, and she derives satisfaction from approaching each situation as a new training experience, rather than a disciplinary one. Of course, all such matters are confidential, but if Karen could tell you about them, she’d say “...and I thought I’d heard everything!”, and you’ll certainly never catch her saying “I have such a dull job!”

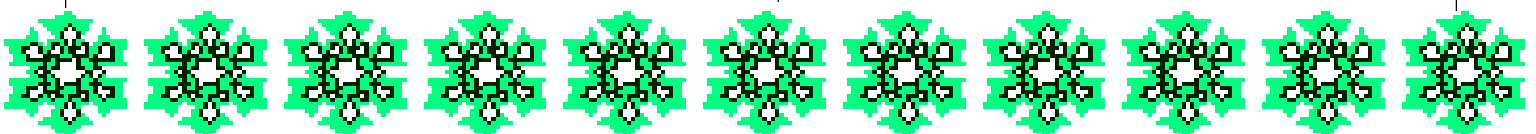
Why don’t you write us via EMAIL if you can? Our home address is: jgranger@electriciti.com. If you would like to receive humor fixes routinely via internet, send your address to john@stellcom.com. After all, what better use is there for the internet than to spread humor?

P E R S O N A L S

We cherish this time of year for the opportunity it provides to re-establish contact with friends and loved ones, particularly with those who may have felt we’d fallen off the face of the earth! As the years roll by, life seems to get more - not less - complicated. Judging by the increasing number of newsletters we received this year, we suspect that many of you feel the same need to keep in touch.

However, we just wanted to let you know that there’s a happy ending to our Christmas tree odessey after all. Thanks to the kindness of our neighbors, we have a tree on Christmas day. Naturally, we plan to repair their window and return the tree before they fly in on Sunday... (yes, we are kidding!)

Season’s Greetings





No, it's not the latest Vegas casino, it's the beautiful Stellcom Technologies office building in Sorrento Valley, just off I-805 near La Jolla. If you are unable to stop by, why not pay us a virtual visit at <http://www.stellcom.com>