

We've been Sub-Divided!

Yes, the subdivision. Regardless of whether you live in one or not, doesn't that word just sound bad? It seems redundant at best. Words like subtract, subservient, and subordinate imply "less than" to me, and the word already had "divide" in it. Egad, my poor land got divided up, and I got even less than that. And I paid a lot for it. Go figure.

On the plus side, we have close neighbors. There aren't any windows on the sides of our house, so we've been spared the picturesque views of the neighbors eating breakfast, sleeping, and getting ready for bed. The ones across the street are too far away to view with any precision without binoculars, which may explain the glint from the across the street. I'm not going to check.

Oh yes, the letter. Enough of my rant. Let's discuss the pitfalls and pleasures of the year 2000. In fact, I'm getting a bit ahead of myself already.

In January, we watched as the world continued on, much to our dismay and disappointment. Given the uncertainty about the globe, we were in IL for the event, figuring family would be less riotous if the worst came, and they'd probably share more food. We started out the year in the continually shrinking apartment my employer had provided for us. Don't get me wrong, we are thankful for the digs, but Brent makes anyplace smaller than a football stadium appear small after a while. I drove into the parking lot one night to find Julie on the small balcony in the below zero cold. "Get upstairs and deal with YOUR son, because I am NOT out here for my health" was the reply I received to the stupid question I asked when I saw her up there. Ahh, bonding.

Well, I respect the city life, but I spoiled myself during our stay in Bennington, so I asked my wife to locate a house in the country for us. She diligently dragged Brent and herself all over 4 counties trying to secure a suitable country residence, to no avail. We decided that farmers tend to spend more money on barns and machinery than they do on houses. Julie had recommended a city residence before the search started, but I remained stubborn. In any event, I returned to Cedar Rapids in January agreeing with her finally, and she switched gears. In February, she located some houses that satisfied my discerning (she calls it picky) eye. Ultimatums appeared when the deal loomed close to completion. As in Bennington, a new kitchen would appear, and a hot tub of her choosing would also be purchased. So, with the important items determined, we moved into our new residence at 7304 Beckett Drive NE, Cedar Rapids, NE, 52402

As we prepared to move, Brent decided, in a fit of helpfulness, to start talking. Babbling would be the best term to describe it in the beginning, but elated were his parents. Along with talking arrived demanding, picking up words, and describing things. As of this letter, his vocabulary has increased immensely with most of the animals, objects in the house, and food items. It also includes some memorable items like "pips" (Chips), "hautoo", Helicopter or Airplane, "hawhee" (close to heehaw, but no cigar), "bapeer" (diaper)



and our personal favorite: "toptoot" (Pop-Tart). You haven't lived until you've heard Brent demand a Pop-Tart on Saturday morning with all the authority of a hungry 2½ year old. "Daddy, TOPTOOT! NOW!"

On a foolhardy whim, we decided to delay delivery of our contents so I could replace the kitchen before they arrived. Can you guess what happened? Well, you should be able to. Julie did ask for a "functional kitchen", but she argues that I misunderstood her intent. I countered that she needs to clarify more. She didn't ask for a "completed functional kitchen". Like I am supposed to read between the lines. Women! In any case, I won back some lost brownie points during the "hot tub" incident. Would you like me to relate the exciting story? Well, sit back as we skip past this blank line, and I will tell you ALL about it.



OK, evidently Julie has always enjoyed a good hot tub experience. I measured success by technical achievement, salary, and title; Julie measured it by how close to a hot tub purchase we were. This year, we hit the mark. Truthfully, we both have talked about one for some time. Pools are too big and hard to care for, and the bathtub is built for one. We searched the Internet (like that surprises you), read the infomercials (Don't ask, it just appeared one Saturday morning, like buying a hot tub for thousands was as much an impulse buy as Holiday Barbie or a Slinky.) All the serious vendors allowed "wet tests". Figure that one out. Warning: wet testing and driving, don't do it. I suspect it's the non alcoholic equivalent of being drunk. "I'm sorry officer, I only sat for 45 minutes. You say 25 minutes is the legal limit? No, I will not take a test!" After much deliberation, we

decided on this 3-person unit that will just fit in the dormer of our "sitting room", the room over the garage attached to the bedroom. Funny name for the room, since we can't sit in there, and what fun is sitting anyway? Oh well, we bought the unit, and scheduled it for delivery. Since the dormer sits right over the two car garage door, I checked to make sure the 300 gallons of water would not create a big hole in my sitting room floor and appear in our garage. I also ran 220V service from the basement to the second floor, complete with GFCI and breaker box. I prepared for everything.

Well, except one thing. The tub arrived, and they determined that it would neither fit in the house, nor up the stairs if we could get it into the house. They suggested taking out the front door and the staircase railing, but I thought otherwise. In my mind, there was only one option: cut a hole in the side of the sitting room wall.



I got out my trusty hammer, knife, and tin snips, and went to work. The next day arrived with a bit more draft in the house. I rented a small lift, and the installers hoisted the 600-pound unit into position. I believe that qualifies for at least as many brownie points as taking a cruise. They both involve water.

Given that, the rest of the year seems somewhat pale. We met some friends up the street that we visit with. Brent spent a lot of

time outside this year, playing with friends and enjoying watching the older kids around here. Julie and Brent traveled home in June for his birthday, while I stayed behind and demonstrated some work at a conference in Kansas City, MO. Both sets of grandparents visited a couple times this year, bringing gifts for the boy and their willingness to be entertained by him. Julie has gotten involved in a bunch of activities in the area, including two MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) groups and a Bible study. We also found a nice church a mere 2 minutes from the house. A full band accompanies the song service, which Brent appreciates. He dances almost every Sunday.

We're still trying to visit friends in Kentucky. In September, we trekked home to IL. Since my dad had helped put siding on our house in Nebraska, I returned the favor and helped side a house he was working on. As well, we had to make the yearly "Farm Progress Show" pilgrimage, which was in Springfield, IL this year. We also planned to detour down to KY, but the word came that a good friend from Michigan, our minister while there, was in the hospital in not great shape. We turned North to go visit, where Ann and Dennis Chappus were happy to house us and feed us. It's nice to have friends that can do that on a moment's notice. In any case Bill was on the rebound when we arrived and is now recovered, although I do hear he had to give up some goodies in the diet department. We rescheduled our trip to KY to Thanksgiving,



when we ventured to IL once again to celebrate with family. However, timing and conditions once again prevented us from completing our quest. We're still trying to get down there, Bob and Marilyn! Not all was lost, as we enjoyed time with family, and Brent entertained the crowds. He also glued himself to his aunt Tricia.

In November, we unpacked the last moving box. Officially, we are now "moved in".

Once again, we're going to try to celebrate Christmas at our home. Last time we did this, I remember writing the letter as Julie struggled to survive in the bedroom during the early part of her first pregnancy. History shall not repeat itself this year.

My new position agrees with me very well. I manage two teams of 12 people

each, and direct the use of technology for the division. I travel a bit more this year than in the past, averaging 2 days per month to places like Kansas City, Chicago, San Diego, Los Angeles, Dallas, and St. Louis. Throughout the year, I have learned that once you attain a certain level within the corporate structure, an aggressive stance and outspoken demeanor are suddenly rewarded. I still don't understand that. My travels have also taught me a few lessons:

- The amount of food is inversely proportional to the cost (excluding fast food joints)
- The number of stations on the hotel TV is inversely proportional to the cost of the room.
- The time to get served is inversely proportional to the elegance of the restaurant.
- At home, \$2 is considered a drop in the bucket. At work, anything under \$20,000.00 is.

I am sure you already noticed, but the commotion last year prevented us from sending out our Christmas cards. Thus, we are sending 2 years of letters and pictures for your enjoyment. As it is, we all picked up the flu last week, and it put this letter behind, so you probably won't get it until after Christmas. All I can say is that I tried. If you'll keep reading them, I'll keep writing them.

Hope you and your family had a very Merry CHRISTmas,

Jim, Julie, Brent, Watson, and Sherlock Brain.

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