

Greetings from "Ceter Rabbits", IA

Who'd have guessed giving Brent "Tales of Peter Rabbit" would cause THIS problem? Oh, and if you think that one's a hoot, he keeps telling people his Daddy works at Eggon with a bunch of eggs. I just hope my co-workers don't pay too much attention to my son. The other day, I came home to find a very concerned mother, who explained that she had to date failed to explain the difference between "whole" and "hole" to my son. After demonstrating something broken and putting it back together, Brent continued to question: Mom, where's the hole?

This Christmas season finds the Brain family, well, rather normal. Yes, you heard it right folks, no illness, no broken bones, no major renovation, and all the siding is on the house. I believe the only unresolved issue is the kitchen. 3rd house, 3rd kitchen, 3rd kitchen project as yet unfinished. This time, I'm so close, but I can't quite get Julie to accept it as done.

**Is it dark outside?
Yes, Brent.
Daddy, what is the Dark doing?
Uh...**

That's one of the easy ones, in my opinion. Come over and help us with the harder ones. We're falling further behind every day.

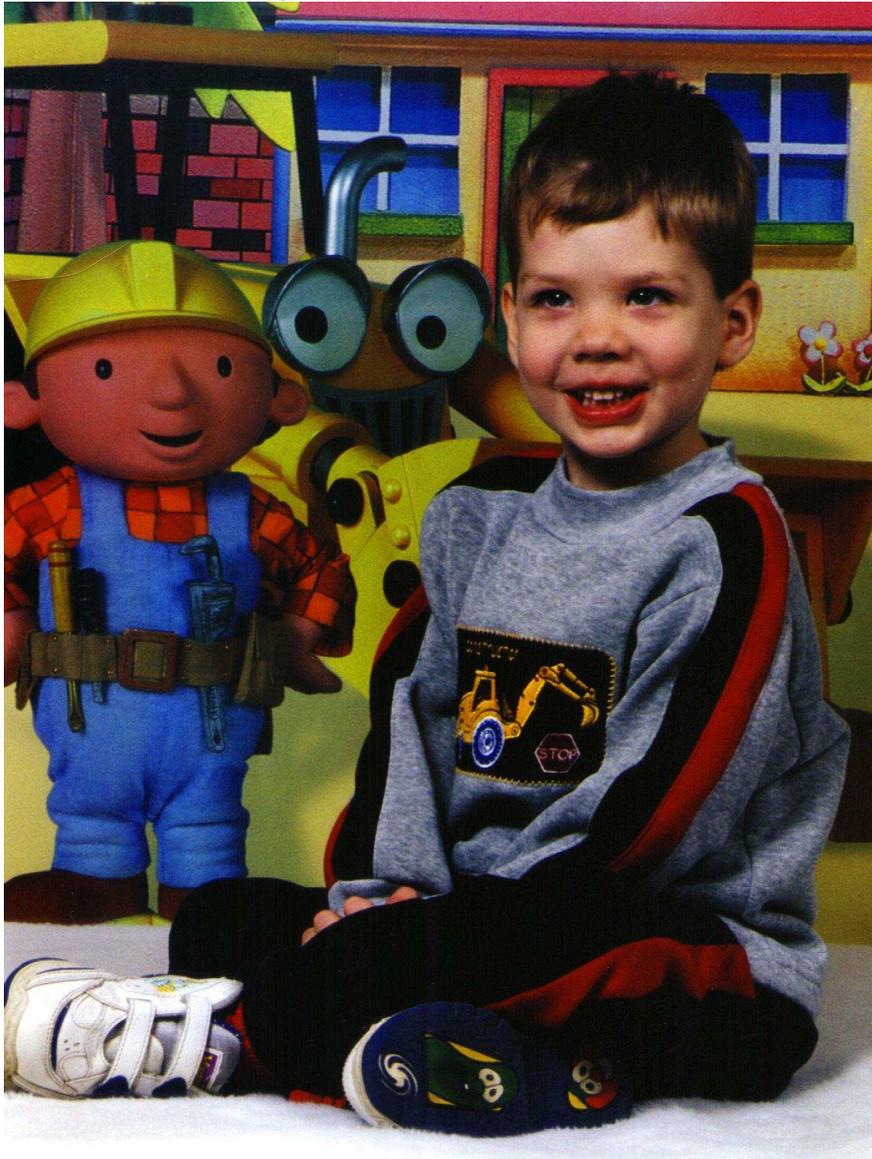
I decorated the room of my dreams this year. Floor to Ceiling tractor motif. Light blue walls, International

Harvester wallpaper, IH tractors on shelves, pictures of IH tractors on the wall, and a huge IH tractor rug on the floor. I even installed 1/64th scale IH tractors as pulls on the ceiling fan. Julie helped with the border, and "feathered" blue clouds on the walls for an added look. She even sewed IH curtains and enlisted Grandma

Huffman to make a bedspread from an IH mural. All in all, an IH lover's delight, with enough red paint to color me rosy and the only green visible for miles is a few wimpy trees in the border. I admired our handiwork, and then I turned the room over to Brent. I had to, it's his bedroom. Julie says tractors just don't work for our bedroom, so I'll live vicariously through my son. Truthfully, it's a cool room, Julie's faux finish on the walls is impressive, and not many kids have tractors for chain pulls, no matter the color.

As I look back, I believe this was the year of Brain travel. Valentine's Day saw us strolling the streets of Chicago. Given that it's been 12 years since we met, we decided to throw caution to the wind this year. We drove our own vehicle to downtown Chicago, the Dodge Ram no less. Scared to death I was. There's no better

Can We Destroy It! Yes, We Can! way than a hick in a big truck on Lower Wacker Drive to increase everyone's prayer life. And the kicker? We had a map, but it was useless when we got in the heart of the city, so I winged it. Yep, aforementioned hick in big truck on Lower Wacker looking for street signs. We both decided that God intended streets to be one level. It's hard enough trying to find out where you're going without being on the right road, wrong level!



In June, I had the chance to attend some business functions in Washington. Julie and I made a vacation out of the trip, traveling to the rest of the attractions in Olympic National Park, the ones we missed during our 1994 visit. The park is breathtaking, but my favorite part was the drive up Hurricane Ridge. When we got to the top of Hurricane Ridge, there was a small-unpaved road that went to "Obstruction Point". Julie (and I swear upon a stack of bibles I am telling the truth) actually suggested we drive on to the viewpoint. We'd rented a 4WD Blazer/Explorer/Cherokee/something (they all look alike to me), so I kicked it into 4WD (or was it AWD, and what would be the difference anyway? They should just have a button that says: "Going somewhere stupid? Press Here!"). Julie quickly recanted her suggestion as we descended at a 35-degree slope at the trailhead. However, folks, when you see a sign at Olympic and it says "one lane", they're being optimistic. In light of this revelation, I was forced (really!) to



Washington Sidewalks

ignore Julie's pleas to "turn around".

However, I'm writing this, so you guessed the rest. All in all, the drive was "COOL", but the view was anticlimactic. When we got to the end, my pumped up ego was deflated as I saw a family of four get back into their Ford Taurus station wagon and drive off. And, to add insult to injury, another car PASSED us on the way back over the lane. Nonetheless, there's nothing like stopping the car on top of a ridge, where you can see over both sides of the mountain from the car. Scares Julie to death.

The rest of the trip was slightly less scary. We did Mount St. Helens, tried to see Rainier, and witnessed that there are lots of "hole in the wall" towns in WA. (ahhh, home...) However, never let it be said that they don't have culture. We saw coffee and cappuccino bars in every town, even towns that had little else. Combinations were common, but some were a bit more thought out than others. Starbucks and bait-n-tackle, tanning(animals, not people), or repair shops just don't make me want to slurp high priced coffee-related beverages. However, I'm not from Washington. All I know is that it must be darn important for Washingtonians to get their coffee. Maybe they spike the stuff.

Oh, yes, the point of the trip was a visit to Microsoft in Redmond. We enjoyed 2 days at the Microsoft Executive Brainwashing, er... Business Center (EBC). Truthfully, we did get some useful information. All in all, a very relaxing vacation. Oh, did I mention Brent visited

his Grandparents? Well, he did. Like I said, a very relaxing vacation.

In October, we donned our plastic mouse ears and headed to the sunny state of Florida (OK, yes, they have sun, but it rains almost every day, from what I see. No, not bad, but still. Maybe they should be the light-shower-at-about-2:30-PM-for-about-15-minutes state. I think the poncho people are manipulating the weather there for profit). I was in town for a conference (held at Disney World, to state the obvious), and we enjoyed the scenery and the attraction all week. Sadly, I think Mickey was more enjoyable when I was younger, but I marvel at how efficient Mickey's helpers are at separating you from your money. Brilliant, actually. Mickey aside, we enjoyed the relaxation and the slow walks. Oh, yes, I forgot to mention the boy again. See above. (No, we're not heartless, we didn't think Brent would be old enough to enjoy much of it this time. From the looks of the parents we saw and their 3 year olds, we were right.)

Late October found us back in Illinois for Julie's 10 year high school reunion. While Julie went off and talked with her classmates, the left-over spouses made the best of the situation. It is here that Joe Carey (Angela Grant's husband) informed me that my Christmas letter has a large readership (not sure why), and wondered if he'd "make it into the letter". He must know something about the letter I don't. Everyone, let Joe know he "made it". Actually, he was good company, as were the others at our table, but Joe distinguished himself by causing me to remember his name. So, there you have it. The key to inclusion is lodging yourself in my memory bank. I'll check with Julie to see if anything else notable happened at the reunion, but nothing else registers. As with my reunion, people get older, some mature, others don't, some surprise us, some don't, and every organizer thinks a band or DJ is required. Note to reunion organizers: skip the DJ and just burn a CD of songs relevant to your period. No one will know the difference, and it'll cost nothing. If there's cash left over, buy more food or prizes. Food and free stuff is always a winner.

Which brings us to now. We've raked all the leaves (what a waste, in my opinion), brought in all the toys, trimmed the tree, and shopped for presents. So, from Jim, Julie, and Brent, enjoy the holidays and remember the reason for the season.

Merry CHRISTmas, Charlie Brown!