

The "Belle" Tolls

What a difference 365 days makes! This time last year saw Julie in bed expecting our second child, Brent being bounced between houses, and Jim playing Mr. Mom. Tonight, we just spent an hour trying to get Brent to cease stalling and go to bed, Jim just kissed his tired but healthy bride good night, and the baby is FINALLY asleep. But, it's an interesting road from there to here. Travel it with us, if you're so inclined.

The year started on a bittersweet note, as Julie found herself sick, pregnant, and bored. We dug out the many episodes of "Perry Mason" (the original black and white versions, not the later "impure" color 2-hour TV movies) and "Little House on the Prairie". In college, Jim taped 300 hours or so of Perry Mason, and we'd used the tapes only once before, while Julie was expecting Brent. Jim relocated the television for easier access while in bed, and moved a portable refrigerator close as well. Some of Julie's friends arranged for daily activities for Brent, while our church and some friends arranged meals. As well, Brent spent some time with the grandparents in IL. We kept refilling the Zofran prescription and felt blessed that our medical plan covered the \$750.00/week costs. Brent, for his part, was excited to have a baby brother or sister, though he prayed for a brother.

In January, the Mars Exploration Rovers (MER) landed, and Julie bought Jim and Brent LEGO versions of the rover and the launch vehicle. They built the models, followed the landing, and talked about how far away the rovers were. Brent took it very hard when Jim reached the discussion about them running out of power and shutting down. Brent decided to organize a trip to go retrieve them and bring them back. Perhaps, he will.

In early March, Julie started feeling a bit better, and we decided to purchase a small battery powered mini-bike for Brent to ride. Brent had been having trouble learning to balance on his bike. Jim and Julie thought this might help him master that. As usual, Brent struggled at first to ride the scooter, but soon mastered the art of balancing himself. Shortly after, he tried the bike again and immediately found his bearings. Jim and Brent thus spent the next few months taking long bike rides across town.

There was a last minute drive to finish household projects before the baby came, so Jim finally finished Brent under-stairs toy-room he'd been working on since we moved here. Some of the rooms also received a new coat of paint. However, the kitchen is STILL not finished, though I am sure Jim will complete it...Right before the Brain's move again. Julie hopes that won't happen... again.

After a visit to the hospital to visit the "birthsutes", the family was leaving the hospital parking garage when a driver decided to back up very quickly without looking behind. CRUNCH! I'm not sure what is up with the Brains, pregnancy, and auto-accidents. In any case, Brent

took his first field trip to accident-land. Jim learned a very important lesson that evening.

If there is anything worse than a scorned woman, it is a scorned pregnant woman. Brent and Jim watched helplessly as Julie gave the teenage

driver a piece of her mind and a bit more for good measure.

In addition, the damage happened on Julie's Nissan, which is but an omen of bad auto-accident

luck. It's the same truck involved in a rear-ender as

we left Omaha, the one Jim damaged by

tossing a board into the fender while

moving, the one Julie scraped the paint off the rear

fender while parking, and now this. We'd

considered trading in the vehicle, but there may be little left to trade. Thankfully,

the driver's insurance covered this mishap, so into the shop went the truck.

After 1 false trip to the hospital, we arrived on the afternoon of June

14th for the real thing. Brent went to stay with

friends, Julie rested in her personal

"birthsuite", and Jim

tried to find Internet access from the room. The evening came without

much change, so the doctor hurried the plans along a bit, and Belinda Lael Brain arrived a bit after 9PM.

Jim dutifully took photos for relatives

and friends, and ran home after midnight to post them and grab some clothes. The new parents spent the night in the suite, with Belinda in the same room. It was very nice having Belinda close by, even if she did spend most of her first day of life sleeping in the little bassinet. The

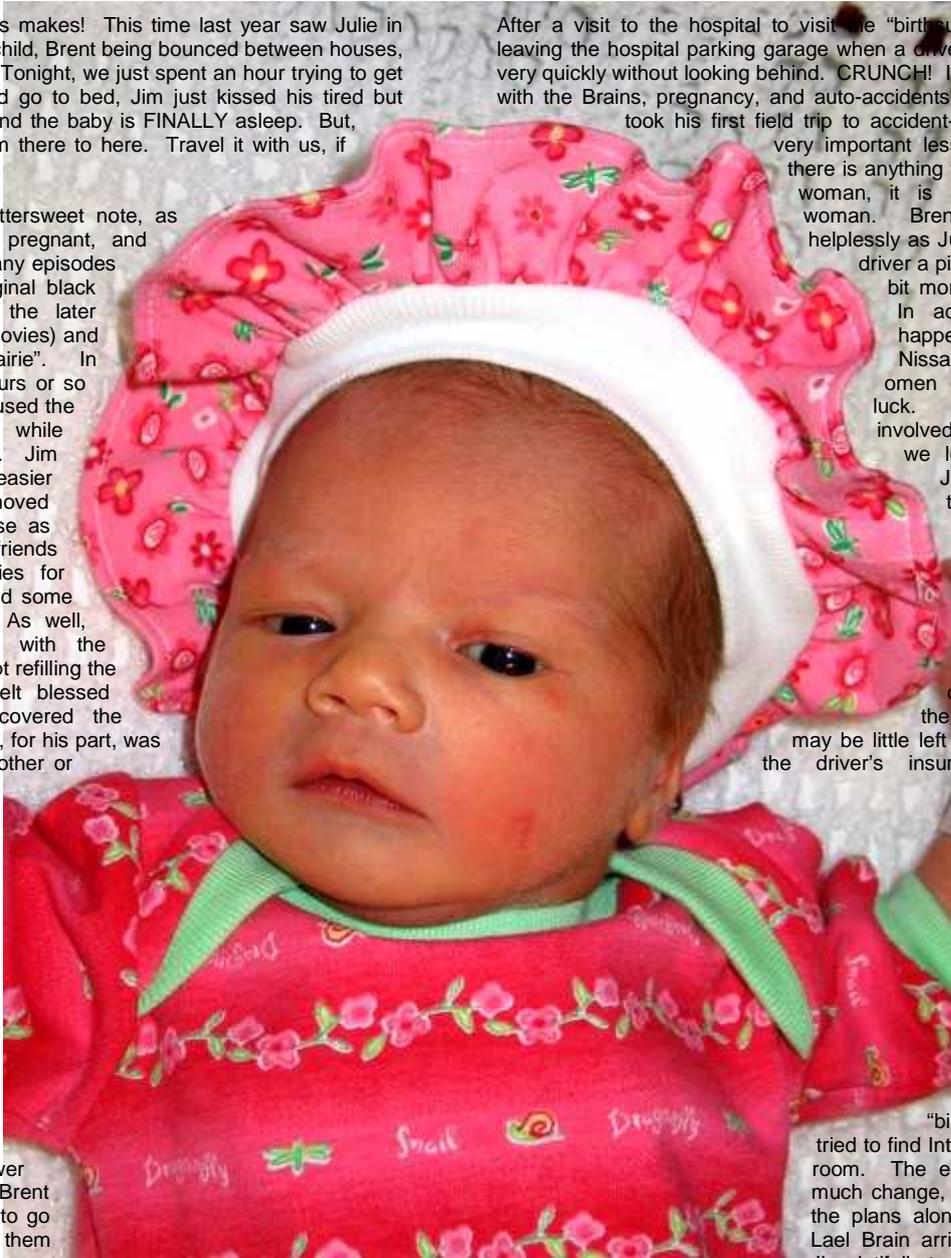
next day, Brent came by to see his new little sister. He decided having a little sister was OK, and he morphed into Big Brother almost immediately. As fathers need to do, Jim coined a nickname for

Belinda: "Belle".

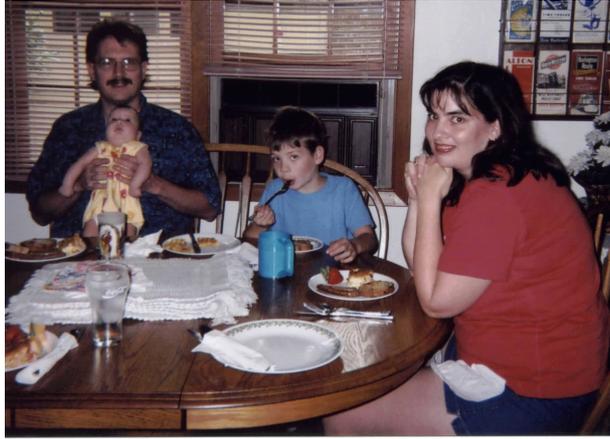
With every beginning, there are endings. Shortly after Belinda came home as part of the family, Sherlock took ill. Julie had noted that Sherlock had aged quite a bit since she got sick last year, we'd all

noticed his arthritis, but he started refusing food. The veterinarian noted that Sherlock's liver had ceased operation, and his time was up. So, we bid our faithful friend a family adieu and he slept peacefully

forevermore. One will never know, but we all rather feel Sherlock stuck around to see Julie get well and have Belinda, then slipped from us. As for Watson, he'd went home months prior to stay with Julie's



parents. Later in the year, Julie's mom called to note that Watson was nowhere to be found. Sadly, he never was. Sherlock came into the home right after Jim and Julie were married, while Watson came one year later. We remember both of them eating concrete in Fenton during remodeling, the many rounds of Frisbee toss, Watson getting covered with sandburs in the Sand Hills of Valentine, NE, having to buy dog harnesses for walks because both of them pulled so hard they choked themselves, and Watson's periodic "frenzy mode". We will miss them. Brent has wanted a puppy to play with him, and we'd put that off during the pregnancy, but Julie and Brent are now poring over "Dog Fancy" issues to find a new Brain canine companion.



Brent has been busy this year, in spite of all the changes. Throughout the end of last year and this, he's been losing his baby teeth, a rite of growing older. As Spring came, Brent started soccer with the YMCA. During the Summer, Brent and Jim participated in the Home School Program's summer Father/Son baseball league. In the Fall, Brent started Cub Scouts as a Tiger Cub, and Jim became his Tiger Cub Den Leader. Brent participated in a gymnastics class and now takes ice skating lessons during the week. He built rockets for the Home School rocket launch, and he's finished another semester of Writer's Workshop unit class at the Home School building. He's still singing in the Church Children's Choir, and he graduated from AWANAS Sparks to the SOAR program. Brent and Jim decided to do the Home School canoe trip this year as a father/son pair. They only capsized once, and the only loss was a cheap one-time camera, so Julie was relieved.

After Brent was born, Jim had gotten away from his Commodore collecting hobby, but the downtime while Julie was sick allowed him some time to play around with his collection again. It culminated in the family traveling to Chicago in early October so he could attend a Commodore Exposition. Truthfully, we'd taken a trip to Michigan to attend our old church's 20th anniversary and visit old friends like the Chappus family and the Hills. As tickets from Chicago were cheaper than flying out of podunkville, IA, we decided to drive to O'Hare, fly from there, return a few days before Jim's EXPO, and then travel home afterwards.

Well, it was a nice idea in theory. On the way there, Belinda screamed the entire trip. The next morning, we found ourselves late to O'Hare, and we misunderstood the "Kiss 'n Fly" sign to direct us to the terminals. In a cruel joke only Windy City folks would appreciate, that merely took us to a tram stop in the economy parking lot. Nothing says "I Love You" like making them drag their bags onto a tram and stand up for an excruciatingly long ride to the terminal. In any case, we were late for the flight. Have you ever seen the self-service ticketing kiosks at the airport? Did you ever wonder what would happen if they replaced all the live people with kiosks and you found yourself needing human attention? Well, wonder no more, because the Brains can tell you in great detail.

The kiosk told us we were too late for the flight, and to see an attendant. We proceeded to walk to the front where some attendants were taking bags, but they told us to remain behind the line until our bag numbers were called; bag numbers we did not have! Julie asked an attendant about the situation, and she stated she didn't have any idea what we should do. (But, stay behind the line...) Jim finally found a helpful attendant farther down that understood our plight and booked us on a later flight. However, we had to go "standby". We arrived at our gate in plenty of time, so Julie nursed Belinda while the boys went for food. An hour before departure, we checked our status at the gate, only to find our H16 gate had been changed to F12! Jim hiked to the new gate area, only to find that only middle seats were available. Still, the helpful gate attendant vowed to try for adjacent seats. Jim then hiked back to H to get the rest of us, and we all hiked back to F. The attendant made a last change stating that we need only ask the gentleman in 24F if he would trade for Jim's 21D seat and we'd all be in the same row. We triumphantly paraded onto the Jet only to find the gentleman in 24F was foreign and did not understand English.

Resigned, Jim sat in front and Brent, Belinda, and Julie sat in 24. Brent kept trying to converse with the foreigner in 24F, and quizzed us as to why he was not talkative during the flight. As a final insult, Dennis Chappus, our ride from the Detroit airport, got harassed at the terminal for stopping to help us load, and we got stuck in a Michigan traffic jam with Belinda for two hours.

After that, though, the trip went pretty well. After our visit in Michigan was over, we had no trouble on the return flight, we easily found the expo site, Jim and Brent rode the METRA to the Sears Tower on Friday, and Jim attended his expo on Saturday. After all of that, the minor inconvenience of the Dodge automatic transmission overheating on the way home was easily handled. We simply stopped early for dinner and let it cool down. Along the way, we decided that the Brain's would fly through O'Hare, but never out of O'Hare. It's not worth the money saved. As well, we found Belinda did NOT like car trips, at least not yet.

As the year grew to a close, Brent finally got another wish fulfilled. Our house evidently sits below some hot-air balloon jetstream, so we are blessed to see ballooning over our house all the time. Every time, Brent asks to go up in one. Notwithstanding the expense, we're not sure how one arranges that. Just like the tow truck incident, though, Brent must have prayed. One night, Jim was taking Brent and Belinda to a free Cedar Rapids Kernel baseball game, and right down the street a large hot-air balloon was stationed at the local park. They all stopped for a look, thinking the balloon had suffered some problem. However, they found a line of kids waiting in line. Jim determined that the winds were too slow to carry the team across Cedar Rapids, so they set down in the park and were offering free rides up and down in the tethered balloon. Needless to say, they all missed the baseball game.



Thanksgiving came and went at our home with little fanfare. We're very thankful for a healthy family, and Belinda is only driving us mildly insane. Brent has grown so much this year, he learned to read, and he's taken on big brother duty with vigor. Julie's glad to be not pregnant any longer, and Jim's playing with his toys again. The following weekend, the entire Brain family went to cut down our first Christmas tree as a foursome. We came home with 2, one for the family and a smaller one for Brent. The following weekend, Jim attended a Commodore EXPO in Toronto, Ontario (the rest of us stayed home), and we're now all preparing for the holidays.

This year, we're blessed to be happy and healthy as we wish you and yours a very Merry CHRISTmas and a Happy New Year.

Jim *Julie* *BRENT*

More pictures at <http://www.jimbrain.com>

Late breaking news: The Cub Scout cubmaster is leaving town, so Jim has been asked to take over the role for Brent's pack!