

We hope that this letter finds you healthy & happy!

1999 has passed in the kind of blur that only four young children can induce. We are all doing well, but find it hard to believe the year has passed so quickly and with such impressive growth in our children. Our first anniversary with the boys was in September. They have now experienced the cycles and rhythms of our Canadian year and we are enjoying deepening bonds and a shared family history.



Lauren, who will turn five in February, has impressed us all with her growing independence. Once a "Velcro baby" who couldn't separate from Mom, she now sails into nursery school with absolute confidence, maintains a busy social calendar, and even gave us "permission" to take a weeks' vacation without her (more about that later). In addition to her active social life, Lauren also enjoys her time home with Mom where they can work on projects without the constant interruptions of her siblings. She continues to enjoy gymnastics and is looking forward to kindergarten and the expanded opportunities available to five year olds.



Biniyam, now six, is repeating kindergarten (full-time this year) as we felt he was not ready for the rigours of grade one. Academically, he is performing well and no longer complains that school is "too tricky". Socially, he has found the adjustment more difficult, but we have worked closely with his teachers and have seen him grow into a much happier and more confident child since September. He is bright, loving and full of deeeeeep questions! He has been attending gymnastics, but plans to give cross country skiing a go after Christmas. The boys (all three of them: Biniyam, Gosaye & Dad) are enjoying Beavers together.



Gosaye, seven, is doing very well in grade one. He was rather astonished by the more serious, academic tone of "real" school. "Why me no play???" he asked when he arrived home after his first day. He has settled in well, though, as he loves school and is an absolute sponge for new ideas and information. His quick mind and abundant enthusiasm win big points with every teacher he encounters. We have been thrilled to see him beginning to read just one year after he held his first book. He has been enjoying swimming lessons, but also plans to try out cross country skiing after Christmas.



Meghan, who will be eight next month, is excelling in grade two, reading everything in sight and generally growing up too quickly! She is very much the big sister, usually kind and loving, occasionally frustrated, always seeking a bit more privacy. She develops elaborate plans for building a wall to divide the girls' room, but always crawls in beside Lauren when it is time to turn out the lights. She is now a Brownie and has been swimming twice per week with the swim club. As if that wasn't enough, she also started a weekly club with several friends where they shared favourite books and undertook intricate applications of nail polish. After Christmas, she's planning to take gymnastics and art lessons.

As it was obviously too quiet in our house, we added to our menagerie of four children and three birds by adopting a dog in February. Sasha is a four-year old, long-haired Chihuahua (or ouchihauhau as Lauren says). He's got some anxiety problems and was never successfully trained. After many months and various approaches, we've given up trying to house break him so he now wears little pants to catch the occasional accident. This allows us to concentrate on eliminating more serious stuff like nipping at joggers. For all his eight pounds, he stands up to anyone, and is especially suspicious of men. He is very loving with the kids and small enough for even Lauren to handle on a leash.

What about that vacation? Last month we enjoyed our first child-free week since we became parents. Leslie's sister, Andrea, bravely flew out from Saskatchewan to take care of the kids. Assisted by brother Mike on the weekend, she masterfully kept the kids alive & happy and the house standing. We were able to enjoy a fascinating week in New Orleans with excellent food, great music, fascinating historical sites and not a care in the world. The relaxed atmosphere of the French Quarter made for a stress-free week beginning with our first hurricanes in the courtyard of Pat O'Brien's. (Hurricanes? Pat O'Brien's? You'll have to check it out for yourselves!)

We also enjoyed a great vacation in August, spending over a week at Leslie's family cottage on Lac La Ronge. The kids always enjoy the natural setting of the island & beach and of course the attention of their grandparents, uncles & aunt. We, of course, enjoy the time off!! We travelled home through Pinawa, Oakbank and Winnipeg where we spent precious time with far away friends and family. Another vacation highlight was attending the *Canadian Advocates for African Children* annual picnic in Minnedosa. CAFAC is the organization that helped us adopt the boys. There were ~14 Ethiopian children at the picnic, as well as other adoptees, "home-made" children and their families. The boys were amazed to see the Ethiopian kids and we feel it was valuable for them to meet other kids "like them".....and see that no one would take them back to Ethiopia as Biniyam sometimes fears.

Andrew's work life continues to take interesting turns. During the early part of the year, he was busy juggling his responsibilities of managing an R&D group while filling in occasionally for his boss who was on extended sick leave. Then, just as things were returning to normal, he was asked to take on a new position as the Director for R&D Planning. The job came with a promotion and less travel, but his workdays are more unpredictable. Andrew is enjoying the challenges of trying to gain support for R&D in an environment of funding pressures, but misses the interactions of line management and the involvement in technical matters.

Leslie is enjoying more freedom now that three are in school full-time. She is still volunteering in everyone's classrooms, but has arranged to spend at least one afternoon a week entirely alone in her sewing room. Helping mothers to breastfeed with *La Leche League Canada* remains her volunteer priority, but the kids' schedules seem to keep her busy with contributing to bake sales & the like. Still, a bit of personal time goes a long way in helping her feel like she is beginning to get her own life back after several years of being devoted to meeting the needs of babies, toddlers and, finally, preschoolers.

Wishing you ample measures of peace, love & joy throughout the New Year!

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