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Dear

In our 1982 Annual – our first joint effort—Steve and I wrote at length about learning to live together: with long, heated negotiations on housecleaning, ambient temperature, and should we have sterling. Most of all, I described my adjusting to Steve’s 1969 Rambler; its manual choke, the rear view mirror that flapped back and forth, the air bubbles in the brake lines and how it stalled on left turns. Steve loved trying to diagnose its ills, and I eventually decided that “patience and persistence in wanting to maintain a relationship with a crotchety being past its prime were not characteristics to be discouraged”. Seems prescient.

Synagogue: Some parts of Social Action went well; others have faltered. One shot feel-good things that Moms with Jobs can do in a couple spare hours work ok (food drives, adopt a family, dinners at a homeless shelter). Our house renovation has languished – the local affiliate’s board has problems. I continue reading Torah one or two times a month.

Our full time rabbi had left in July 2001; we went through the year with our emeritus rabbi returning part time and lay persons filling in the gaps (or trying to). Our search committee head was tireless; she’d review the resumes, interview anyone who had any promise; and email us an account of the interview. We’d do a group interview and then debate whom to invite for a trial weekend. And of course, we disagreed constantly: one candidate was too dovish on Israel, another had a history of contention with prior congregations. Could we consider someone trained as a Reconstructionist? Did the women have an agenda to select a female rabbi? We’d interview a candidate and then argue into the night.

When a candidate came for a full fledged visit, we’d scrutinize him or her anxiously. The jokes were funny now; but how often would they be recycled? It was like Victorian novels, where people married on the strength of a few dances and social calls.

We weren’t nearly observant enough for one candidate. Another hadn’t prepared his d’var Torah, and it showed. We agreed unanimously on a (female!) candidate; but she decided not to seek a pulpit post. Just as it seemed as if our search would enter its third year, we found someone we could agree on; a young rabbi serving as a chaplain at Georgetown, who accepted our offer. He’s the first rabbi I’ve met that wanted to be called by his first name, he listens well, and he’s committed to social action (all plusses)

Kids (intro): They’re healthy, they’re not in trouble, and their grades are good. I’m grateful.

Leon: His section (after Steve’s) covers robotics and his computer science AP exam (AB level) better than I can.

He spent a month, in Bavaria on a German class trip; about once a week we got wonderful day-by-day emails peppered with Bayerish, describing amazing feats of driving as busses traversed the narrow 2 lane roads with no shoulder, afternoons in the local Biergarten (“I met some interesting people; a skin head and a partly drunk guy named Lars who was outraged that I was a foreigner and wasn’t being treated correctly, so he bought me two beers (both from the local brewery)”), and trips and table conversations with his host family. In Swarthmore, he hung around with his fellow nerds – all boys he knew from years in the same math classes, and stayed out of the social scene. In Teisendorf, there was a constant round of parties with his host sister (Franziska) other exchange students, and their host siblings. He got a taste for the local summer wheat-beer; he still has the bottle from the last legal beer he drank, coming home on Lufthansa.

After he’d returned; I asked him and a friend had they ever discussed the Meaning of Life with their host siblings. Both laughed and asked each other; how would you translate that to German. They could understand Hochdeutsch when they were addressed directly, but conversations in Bayerish were hard to follow.

Leon was home a week; and then set off on a three week, 1,000 mile bike trip from Conway, MA to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. See his description. Sometimes the leaders underestimated how much the boys would eat; sometimes they forgot to check ahead to see if campsites had space; but Leon enjoyed the long days of biking and the camping.

The fall’s been busy; PSAT’s, learning to drive, beginning to contemplate colleges...

In the 1985 annual, when I was pregnant with Leon, I’d worried that he’d grow up to smoke or vote Republican. I was apprehensive when, in 1988, he alleged that Bush 41 was his “favorite friend”. I did eventually realize he had a right to his own views. He’s now Libertarian. He was almost in tears one night at having to live in a household of liberals who think the GOVERNMENT has a RIGHT to TAKE his hard-earned money and give it to others. I tried to paint myself as a moderate, but no; moderates vote Republican; just look at the last election.

Bar Mitzvah: Aaron’s Bar Mitzvah came in the middle of our rabbi search. His portion was Ahare Mot / K’doshim (Lev 16:1 – 20:25, which I chose because of the ethical commandments in the Torah section and its very short prophetic reading). Rabbi K (our emeritus) reviewed the

translation and meaning carefully with Aaron reading aloud. I kept looking from one to the other – the distinguished, white haired scholar and the fresh faced boy. Achare Mot ends with a list of sexual prohibitions, but Aaron stayed grave and attentive, at least until we got out of the Rabbi's study. At dinner, though, he regaled Leon with the more lurid possible relationships and the punishments. The table conversation got raucous.

Of course, there were months filled with drama and tension. Could we find a Klezmer band that wouldn't drown out conversation? Would Fran find a drinkable kosher wine? We had two wine-tastings in our quest (look for non-mevushal i.e. unboiled). A week before, it became clear the Bar Mitzvah tutor hadn't been reviewing prayers that Aaron had learned in earlier months. The new, part-time cantor (who we first met with less than a week before the bar mitzvah) reduced Aaron to tears over wrong pronunciations that hadn't worried the tutor, and then took me aside to tell me I had to let up on Aaron; he was wound up tighter than a spring. Aaron (bless him) buckled down and re-learned what he needed to.

In our congregation when we hora, the women lift women honorees in chairs; the men lift men. I'm not light; I worried they wouldn't be able to budge me. Steve's speech of admonition to Aaron was the subject of frenzied negotiation. The program I'd typed up at the last minute said that Mr. Rose Bernstein would read Torah, and that the Rabbi would say the blessing over wind and bread.

When the time came, of course, Aaron did fine, the ladies managed to lift me, and my clearest memory is dancing the hora and thinking this might be as happy as I'd ever be.

Aaron – Other: Aaron's had a mostly good year. He takes math at the high school now, and complains the other courses are too easy. He's continued at the community Hebrew High, which has better instruction and more orderly classrooms than our Hebrew school did. He's much taller and thinner than in the picture we enclose.

At the start of summer break, his first act was to buy Grand Theft Auto III, which involves careening down the streets, mowing down pedestrians on the sidewalks, and shooting at the general populace, when he wasn't playing Diablo on line. For the whole month of July, I'd wake up at 4:45 AM for work and shoo him off to bed.

He spent August at Camp Tockwogh, where he sailed the bay in a Sunfish every morning. He didn't want to progress to the more complicated boats and crews; just sail around alone peacefully. His first cabin was pretty wild; three kids strewed their clothes around and wouldn't pick them up, and one counsellor (from Russia) seemed to do little but doze and say "Boys, stop that sheet". (The next session was calmer).

He didn't come with me to pick out pumpkins, but carved the ones I brought home, and swathed himself in toilet paper

bound with masking tape to trick-or-treat as a mummy. When I pressed my cell phone on him, he wouldn't take it, but his friend did (telling Aaron he was being difficult). Three of them set out, singing "Every Sperm is Sacred" from Monty Python's the Meaning of Life. He brought home 7.5 pounds of candy, and spent the next week blissed out.

He identifies as a Democrat (a great comfort to me). Much of his political information comes from the Capitol Steps – he has almost their full collection, and many's the pleasant family time we've spent explaining the jokes from the early 1990's.

Kids (concl): I love dinnertime. The kids narrate their days (most nights), and sometimes the conversation takes off. We argue about whether table manners have social or economic value. They talk to Steve about their math. Leon narrates the Cultural Revolution in China, or Aaron critiques the Rama series by A C Clark or he and Steve talk about Flatland sequels. Leon and I argue about how to fund Social Security, or Leon peppers Aaron with questions on the Constitution (which the kids learn in detail in 8th grade). Or Aaron gives us snippets from The History channel ("Emperor Hadrian was gay, but had a trophy wife for show").

There was a wonderful Anna Quindlan column on being a parent of teens. Aaron and Leon both loom over me now, and comment on my shortness and grey hair. The mud room is filled with these huge shoes. It's sobering to look up at these enormous beings, and realize that for good or ill, their characters are mostly formed.

Work: Pretty much the same. Japan's economic climate continues to be difficult. We're setting up valuation systems for ALICO's health business (very old-fashioned stuff you wouldn't sell to your mother) and variable annuities. The interesting part is communicating with Japan and the Indian computer programmers that handle the annuities.

Travel: Steve and I went to the UK – Wales and the Midlands – for 10 days while kids were biking and at camp. There was lost luggage and mixed up rental cars, but otherwise it was lovely (especially having fewer people to negotiate with). I'd always wanted to see the castles in northern Wales, built by Edward I (1280's) as part of his military campaigns. Once the country side was subdued – within a few decades the castles fell out of use (see Steve's account).

Marriage: I've known Steve half my life, now. He can almost unfailingly know what I'll say (he says that's no great feat; I'm so predictable that the kids also usually know what I'm thinking). I love to fall asleep curling up on his right shoulder or against his back, especially in winter, when he seems particularly large and warm. I can't imagine not being able to talk to him.

He's always done most of the kid scheduling and transport. He signs his emails about housekeeping and kids EDH for Ever Dutiful Husband (based on the Ever Vigilant LA PD, from Dragnet via MathNet). He's probably done 45 of Leon's 50 required driving training hours.

Prairie Home Companion has a segment that starts "These are the good years for Barb and me", about a couple confronting the vicissitudes of middle age with the help of the natural mellowing agents in Ketchup (sponsored by the Ketchup Advisory Council). The skits always make me smile. But these are good years for us.

Closing (Fran) I never learned any Yiddish, but there's Klezmer song that keeps going through my head this year. (It must be pretty popular; typing **Abi gezint** into Google gives 10 pages of hits)

A bisl zun, a bisl regn / A ruik ort dem kop tzu leygn/ Abi gezint, ken men gliklekh zayn

(a little sun, a little rain / a quiet place to lay your head/ As long as you're healthy, you can be happy)

Wishing you health and peace in the coming year.

Work. This is my 3rd year in a 3-year term as Associate Provost for Information Technology (APIT). I have rather liked the job and last summer sounded people out about applying for another 3 years and postponing the Leave that I would otherwise get. I also proposed to do a report on the position, and by circulating it, get others to express their opinions to the Provost directly. Feedback seemed positive and I wrote the report. At Swarthmore the APIT position is somewhat anomalous – no one actually reports to the APIT (unlike a CIO, under whom both library and IT sit), and so I concluded that in time we should consider strengthening the position or at least specifying the duties better. The Provost's conclusion was, at least temporarily, to eliminate the position. Next year all there will be is a faculty member with one course released who will encourage other faculty to use more technology.

Will this work for the College? Maybe. I think I did succeed in getting the message to the Provost (in her 2nd year) and the new Treasurer that a stable source of capital funding for technology is needed. If they watch out for technology appropriately, a separate voice won't be needed. For now, with the weak economy and endowment, most projects are on hold anyway.

For me, this decision necessitated some quick rethinking about directions for my own career in the next few years. The upshot is: I am taking that Leave, after which I will return to a 3-year appointment as math/stat department chair.

The leave will involve projects related to my APIT work. After however long it takes to finally finish the revision of

my discrete math text with Tony Ralston, I will turn to a study of how online learning technology can aid an in-person place like Swarthmore. As I wrote last year, "if we can offload some of the more formal parts of our courses, then there is more time in the classroom for what Swarthmore does best – personalized seminar interaction." Offloading is only part of it; some things might be done better online (with interactive applets) or some things we haven't tried to do at all may be doable online (e.g., getting students to collaborate on creating class notes and text replacements or annotation). My plan is to develop some such online materials for my own courses (continuing what I have already done as described last year), learn what other mathematicians are doing, and find out some best practices in one or two other disciplines.

The other mathematical development is my return to being more involved in precollege education. I've become a consultant, especially for the discrete math strand, to the Core Plus curriculum project as it begins a major revision. This is one of the NSF-funded reform 9-12 curricula that have been front and center in the math wars most visible in California. Also, if the Philadelphia Math Science Partnership gets funded (under No Child Left Behind), I will be a consultant within that.

Finally, long-time readers of my annuals may recall that in 1976 and 78 I taught in the Hampshire College Summer Studies in Mathematics for gung-ho high school students. Well, this summer I am going to spend 3 weeks in Spearfish SD in another such program, this one for middle school students. I got an email one day last spring from George Thomas in London Ontario, the founder of MathCamp, a high school summer math program developed since my Hampshire days. He was founding a middle school program, and felt at that level there needed to be explicit attention to writing mathematics, especially proofs. He searched the web for sites about mathematical writing and found mine. He asked me to join him last summer, but the request came too late to fit with our already settled family plans. I'm a little worried that this program is too preoccupied with precociousness, but it's worth a try and it appeals to my thoughts about helping interested kids get respect for mathematical writing issues at an early age. The program is a national one (Canada too) but it just happens that Black Hills State College had available facilities, and a safe environment appropriate for younger kids. I liked the Black Hills on visits long ago and look forward to some of the outings.

A year ago I became president of the local Swim Club. It's usually a 1-year job, but I have agreed to a second year. Fortunately, the board members are so happy that I run shorter meetings than the previous president that they agree when I delegate jobs to them. Thus being President has been less work than my previous job as Treasurer. Of course, if something goes wrong during my tenure, all that will change. Ironically, I joined the Swim Club Board because I had been on the Trinity Nursery School Board and the Swim Club was being difficult about letting Trinity use their facilities. I

suggested, "Why don't we pack their board?" Well, having suggested it, and being a Swim Club member, I had to volunteer. That was about 4 years ago. And having joined the Swim Club Board, I polished that handle so carefully that now....

Vacation. This Wales/Midlands trip was our first vacation without kids. After giving everyone elaborate information about whom to contact when in emergencies, with some trepidation we got on the Philly-Manchester flight.

North Wales is compact. By staying in the middle (Bettws-y-Coed) little in the mountain region was more than a 90 minutes car ride away, even on winding roads. The Welsh mountains are stunning and unlike anything I had seen. The valleys are as steep and rugged as Rocky Mountain valleys, but there are no trees. And since it had been quite wet (not unusual, but a dramatic contrast to the then drought here), streams cascaded down these valley walls like wide ribbon falls. I imagine mountainside streams in the Rockies, or even New Hampshire, might look similar if you could see them through the trees.

The highlight for me was August 15, also my birthday. After a nice start in bed, we took a round trip on the Ffestiniog Railway, the most famous of the several narrow gauge steam railways in Wales. We started in rugged mountains at Blaenau Ffestiniog and went 15 miles to the gentler coast at Porthmadog. On the way back we got off at the Tanygrisiau whistle stop and hiked up into the abandoned Cwmorthin valley (there were slate mine ruins) and all the way up to Cwmorthin Pass. A misty morning turned into a sunny afternoon, and we had the valley almost to ourselves (just 3 other people and a thousand sheep grazing precariously on the valley walls). I was exhilarated in a way I have not been for a long time – similar no doubt to the happiness Fran described while dancing at Aaron's Bar Mitzvah.

Other great mountain scenery: our drive through Llanberis Pass near Mt Snowdon, and our walk to Moel Famau on the Offa Dyke Path. Offa was an 8th century king who built a dike on the east edge of Wales to keep the Welsh out. The trail roughly follows the dike remnants, but here it climbs high and Moel Famau allows wonderful views over the Midlands to the east, the farm district around Ruthin to the west, and Snowdonia to the far west. If you go, try to find a time when the mountain heather is not in bloom; in the heather areas a billion large flies buzzed around us, a type I had never seen, very annoying though they didn't bite.

We spent two days in the Midlands, overnighting in Chester. One day we went to Quarry Bank Mill (near the Manchester airport), a very thorough museum of the industrial revolution with working machinery in an original mill. It reminded me of our visit some years ago to the National Historic Park Museums in Lowell Mass, but in most ways the Quarry Bank collection is superior. Both were strong on the sociological effects of the industrial revolution.

The second day we went to Liverpool. I wanted to see it because the final leg of my grandfather's journey from Latvia to New York began there. I was not disappointed. It reminded me a lot of Philadelphia. Both are river ports with magnificent public buildings from the early 1900s, cities which had then fallen on bad times and are now making a comeback. There is a very nice 4-museum complex at Albert Dock along the Mersey. We spent most of our time in the maritime museum (excellent exhibits on the Liverpool-based slave trade and emigration), and before that the art museum downtown, but others may wish to hit the Beatles Museum first.

Marriage. October 9 was our 20th anniversary. The next Saturday we left children and went to Fran's favorite Thai restaurant, followed by a movie (*The Secretary* – very unusual; you can read my review on the Internet Movie Database, us.imdb.com). Anyway, Fran's voice is as pretty as the day I met her. Her face is still beautiful too, indeed better, now topped by slowly graying hair (I like gray). She feels great to hold – as I told her once, "pillowescent". And of course, she's a hard-working generous person, a caring mother, and a great annual letter writer. But I would be remiss to say everything's fine between us. While we are getting along better than we did a few years ago, it remains a stretch because we are so different in so many important ways. (Fran didn't want me to say this, admonishing that an annual letter should be upbeat. However, this is simply not my style. Call me humorless, but more and more things are half-empty, not half full.)

Making a Difference. I continue to teach honors linear algebra so some of Swarthmore's strongest first-year math students each fall. This year, as I concluded the last seminar meeting, one student exclaimed, "Didn't make it!" and they all laughed. "Didn't make what?" I asked. "I was one square short of bingo," he said. Somewhat sheepishly they showed me. They were all playing a bingo game where each square was something I had been known to do in class, such as: "Says that an algebraic expression 'cries out' for something" (a manipulation students are supposed to supply) or "says 'garbage, garbage' and quickly erases what he just wrote", or "names theorem after student who conjectured it". They had quite a few Maurer-isms, and each board was different. They were pleased that I was touched. By association, maybe they'll even remember the *content* of the course.

Other touching moments come in email. I've written in earlier Annuals about my Short Guide to Writing Mathematics for undergraduates, and how it was under contract but then the publisher pulled out. After that I put a few parts of it on the Internet, and said I would let people download the whole thing if they wrote to me to say why they wanted it. Well, people find these web pages and write to me, maybe two a month now, from all around the world. Most are students, teachers or professors, but some are working people, and the most recent is an enlisted sailor on an aircraft carrier. He never finished college, but he fills his locker with math and astronomy books that he finds at used

bookstores, and figures if he learns how to write math, that will help him read it too. As he wrote me, "you never know when you will be out to sea for 6 months without a chance to visit a bookstore". After some email back and forth I told him what he really needed are some correspondence courses and suggested an appropriate ordering. In his last message he told me I had prompted him to do better than that; he has talked to one of the naval counselors, and by correspondence he is going to get an undergraduate degree – the first in his family.

Letter on the Web? In future years, should we just send a card, with a URL for our letter? If we did that, only those of you who really want to would get the letter, and we wouldn't need to spend so much time shortening it (yes, we do that!) or preparing hard copy. If this approach won't work for you, let us know.

(Leon) Here's a run down of the major happenings during last year in semi-chronological order.

Robotics: Last year's game consisted of two teams of two robots both trying to put soccer balls in goals (5' tall open top cages on rollers) and moving the goals and robots to different zones to score points. As usual, we were given a box of parts, rules about what other materials we could use, and 6 weeks in which to build. We encountered a lot of troubles building the robot: wheels that provided so much traction that they often overloaded the motors when turning, belts on the conveyer that kept coming off, the conveyer belt not having enough power to shoot the balls into the goal, and the robot not being able to scoop up balls along the edge of the arena. We fixed most of these problems, but we ended up hardly using the ball scoop and conveyer belt in the competition anyway. We ended up placing 5th in a field of 45 at the Philadelphia regional, and 13th in a field of 71 in our division of the national competition at Disney World (there were also 3 other divisions of about equal size there). We also got passes to Disney world, so everyone had lots of fun. I was elected president shortly thereafter. This year's season will begin on January 4th. Many of our core members graduated last year, so this will probably be a rebuilding year, but who knows what might happen.

Computer science level A AP test: I got a 4, but it was an interesting experience because I learned everything that I needed to know on my own. I also skipped one of the four open answer questions completely; it was a very hard test (if I skipped an open answer question and got a 4, I'd hate to know what other people with lower scores did).

Germany: I stayed with a host family in the extreme southeast corner of Germany (very close to Salzburg) for a month last summer. I won't go into too much detail about my stay because you can find a complete log of my adventures on my web site (www.kaiserleopold.net). Instead, I'll share three general observations (note that these observations are only for the small part of Germany that I personally saw, and not all are universally true).

1) Bavarian food is underrated, and does not consist solely of sausage. The three best traditional Bavarian foods I ate were weisswurst (a white sausage in an inedible skin, best eaten with Bavarian sweet mustard), sauerbraten (beef with a slightly sour taste created by vinegar), and Knödel (similar to matzah balls, except infinitely superior, since they're made out of bread). I brought a cookbook back with me, but translation is a pain, since I don't know any German cooking lingo.

2) The drinking age in Germany is 16 (for non hard alcohol, however, no restrictions on alcohol seemed to be enforced). One might think that such a culture would prevent drinking to excess, but large numbers of teens (and probably other age groups) go out and get plastered on the weekends. My theory is that the culture as a whole accepts this (at a party, one of my German friends pointed to an intoxicated German and commented (in German), "You see him? His father has a gift; he can down a whole liter at once!"). Anyhow, they seem to get along at least as well as we do. The age limit also allowed me to sample the local brews (always responsibly of course), and I took up a half liter of a local dunkel weissbier (dark wheat beer, wheat beers are a bavarian specialty) as part of a balanced daily diet.

3) The stereotypical view of German society portrays it as very strict. I found the exact opposite true, at least with teens. Classes at school were absolute circuses, and I was at an academic high school. Granted, all the grades had already been computed, so nothing they did mattered, but it was still strange (however, I was told by my German teacher, who was on the trip, that things were usually more orderly elsewhere). The teens were extremely independent; their parents gave them free reign to do what they wanted because they thought they were responsible.

Cycling: I took a 1000 mile tour from Massachusetts to Nova Scotia that averaged 59 odd miles a day (the longest day was 74 miles). It was definitely my greatest physical accomplishment. Also, despite my fears that I would be the worst rider on the trip, I was the strongest rider, so I was allowed to lead occasionally. Although there were many great climbs and moments that I can recall (the climb up to the Grafton cheese factory in Vermont, Franconia notch in New Hampshire, and sleeping in a school field because we couldn't reach a campground) one hill stands out. It was the day we took the ferry from Saint John, New Brunswick to Digby, Nova Scotia, which was a heck of a day in other respects (biking on a limited access highway at 6 am with fog that limited my view to less than 100 feet at times), but that's another story. First, you must understand that the geology of that part of Nova Scotia is similar to that of the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay in that the land is high and relatively flat (relatively being the key word), but it drops steeply to the Bay of Fundy and the tidal rivers attached to it. At one point, we asked a local for directions and he said, "Your on the right route; just take a left in the town. There'll be some hills, but if you get over the first one, you should be fine". He wasn't kidding, but it was one whale of an understatement. So we continued along, stopped in a store in the town, and then took a left and crossed the Bear River just below the point at which it ceases to be a tidal

river. Directly across the river was the steepest road I had ever seen; it was easily more than a 20% grade, and it wasn't short either. It just kept going, and it was a royal pain to get up with all the gear on my bike (there was no van to haul around our camping equipment or clothing, so it was all on the bikes). But I managed it without walking, somehow. Later, on the ferry ride back to Maine, I started talking with another group of cyclists who had done a similar route to ours, but in the opposite direction. One of the cyclists commented on this great downhill, at Bear River, and asked if I remembered it. I said, "Yeah, that was one heck of a climb, I don't know how I managed to stay on my bike." The cyclist looked stunned for a moment then said, "Holy shit, you went up that thing?". The only things which marred the trip were mechanical failures; I had to have my rear wheel replaced because I kept on breaking spokes, and I went through 3 tires and 8 innertubes because of flats (I still have the innertubes in a pile on a shelf as a memorial).

Driving: The current set up in Pennsylvania is as follows: at 16 you take a knowledge test, and get a learner's permit if you pass. With this permit, you can drive with someone who has a full license and is 21 or older. Then, after 6 months and 50 hours of driving, you can take a road tests and get a junior license (it has time and other restrictions). This license automatically is upgraded to a full license at age 18 (or 17.5 if you take a state certified driving course). At any rate, I delayed for two months after turning 16 to get my permit. I've driven 50 hours by now, and I have my road test scheduled for January 2nd. I've been doing most of my driving on my Mom's old car (she bought a new one), but I've also been learning how to use a manual transmission with my Dad's old car (not that he's bought a new one). I also took an AAA driving course (class room and in car). I look forward to the freedom driving will allow, but that's about the only good thing that I'll get out of it; it would be simpler if there were just more bike lanes.

Rant: Following in my own footsteps, I'll share one of my recent thoughts.

"The correct way to punctuate a sentence that starts: "Of course it's none of my business, but—" is to place a period after the word "but." Don't use excessive force in supplying such a moron with a period. Cutting his throat is only a momentary pleasure and is sure to get you talked about."

—Lazarus Long (Robert Heinlein)

One of my friends has an annoying habit of prying for information: "Leon, you want to play a game of AOE II?" "Nah man, I'm busy." "What you doing?" "Homework." "What kind of homework?"... Anyhow, that conversation illustrates the key attribute of stuff that isn't you business: the information you glean is not particularly (if at all) useful to you. Now, there are philosophical arguments for why you should mind your own business, but I'll give a simple one. Time is valuable (especially when you're trying to do homework). Both the inquirer and inquiree use time when the inquirer fails to mind his or her own business, and the inquirer probably won't gain anything useful. Result, on the average, it's a net loss. Now, if both parties like to share personal information, who am I to say that they shouldn't? (If

the parties are gossiping about other people, that's another issue). If the inquiree and inquirer are friends, and the inquiree doesn't want to share, the inquirer might want to be more friendly by not inquiring. Lastly, If the inquiree and inquirer are enemies, the inquirer should watch that his or her throat isn't slit. :)

Good books read since last year:

—I only read one more Heinlein last year: Double Star, not his best work, but thoroughly entertaining.

—Childhood's End, Arthur C. Clarke

—Basic Economics: A Citizen's Guide to the Economy, Thomas Sowell. The goal of the book is to explain enough about the general workings of the economy so that you have a grasp of what's going on; it focuses on public policy. A lot of stuff through examples, no formulas or even graphs, and written to be understood by anyone. He probably oversimplifies many things in an attempt to keep it simple, so the book should not be taken as gospel, but most of the ideas are probably good.

—The Lucifer Principle, Howard Bloom. It's a book on human nature, and asserts that "evil" is a byproduct of evolution and how nature works. He attempts to back it up with science and many examples. While some things in the book are stretches, I think that he gets many things right. Even if you disagree with the premise (as I did), the book is hard to put down and contains some interesting ideas; you might even change your mind.

—The Great Libertarian Offer, Harry Browne. A primer on the Libertarian party's beliefs from its presidential candidate. It's easy to read, and full of good examples. His ideas aren't perfect (nor are they completely the same as the Libertarian Party's), but, again, that doesn't stop good information from being in there.

—The Triumph of Liberty, Jim Powell. Although I'm not done it yet, I've been working at it since before the last annual letter. It's a collection of 66 biographies of people who have championed liberty. The biographies are about 8 pages a piece, which is more than enough to pass on the good feeling of what they did, but also enough to spark enough interest to do outside research into the people (which is why I have spent so long on the book). Some of the people in the book are well known for their love of liberty (Thomas Paine), some many people have never heard of (John Lilburne), and other are not often associated with liberty (Beethoven). It also includes my favorite author, Robert Heinlein. Many of the stories don't have happy endings, but almost all are inspiring.

Good movies:

—Duck soup, "A child of five could understand this... Fetch me a child of five!"—Groucho Marx

—Citizen Kane

—I'm All Right Jack, Carlton-Browne of the F.O. (aka Man in a Cocked Hat), and Heavens Above!, all three are 1960 era British comedies that satire the whole British social and political system.

—It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World