

Dear Family and Friends,

December, 2000

Last year we got busy and didn't have time to write a Christmas letter, an oversight for which many of you are undoubtedly thankful. This year, we are making another effort so that you will not become complacent. (Remember, though, that you can always avoid having to read our letter by the simple expedient of moving away.)

Xandie turned 2 years old this April. Those of you who have children of your own (at least, those whose memories haven't been blurred by interactions with teenagers) will remember this milestone as the advent of something that horrifies every parent, something whispered about in back rooms, something known by the initials "TT." No, we're not talking about the Terrible Twos. Always precocious, Xandie started those at 1½ and shows no signs of boredom so far. We're talking about a much more traumatic experience: *toilet training*.

We reluctantly began the process at the urging of Xandie's preschool teacher, who insisted that she was "ready" to move up from diapers. The teacher conveniently neglected to mention the fact that *we* were not nearly as "ready" as the baby.

Since Pat is much cleverer about these things than Geoff, she suggested that we postpone the start until after our February trip to San Francisco, where Pat's mother was celebrating her 90th birthday. So after we flew back home, we dug out the training pants.

For those of you who aren't familiar with this remarkable invention, "training pants" are simply underwear with a couple of extra layers of fabric. The theory is that the cloth will absorb the, um, product when Xandie has an, um, accident. We would like to meet the person who came up with this concept, because we want to ask him how a 2-inch square of cotton is supposed to retain approximately 7 quarts of said "product."

On the day we finally started the training, Pat again demonstrated her intelligence by going to work. As soon as she had left, Xandie demanded a cup of apple juice. Apparently apple juice is the most powerful diuretic known to mankind, because she cut loose about a millisecond later. That was when Geoff discovered that "training pants" is a synonym for "sieve." He was up to the challenge, though: he simply got out the hose and washed down the entire house—after first securing his nose with a manly pair of Vise-Grips.

The rest of the day was occupied with entertaining Xandie, jumping back to avoid a new stream of, um, product, running her to the bathroom, mopping up the puddle, blotting the drips out of the carpet, putting a new pair of training pants on her, and returning to play some more. The playing part would last for about 4 seconds before the cycle repeated itself. When Pat got home an hour later, she found Geoff blubbing next to a pile of 1,036 soiled pairs of training pants. In desperation, he had finally given up and wrapped Xandie in plastic from the waist down.

Fortunately, that initial experience wasn't a harbinger of things to come. In the next hour, Xandie used up 2,219 *more* pairs of pants. But then the ever-creative Geoff came up with a simple solution: we duct-taped a funnel to Xandie's waist, ran a hose outside, and sat down to a peaceful dinner.

Things did get better, though. By June, when Geoff dragged the family along to a conference in San Diego, Xandie was able to sit on a toilet unassisted, though she rarely did anything, um, productive. (As you can see, we have become very experienced at using the word "um." It's a special parental talent.)

Xandie loved San Diego. Her favorite part was when we rode the "red choo-choo ding-ding-ding." Typical kid: spend \$40 at the zoo and she doesn't remember a thing; spend a buck on the trolley and she'll talk about it for a month. We're going to keep a running tally, and when she turns 16, we'll be able to slap the list down on the kitchen table and scream, "We spent \$50,000 on enriching experiences you've forgotten and now you want a *car*?"

Actually Xandie probably won't ask for a car when she's 16. She's far too individual to do that. After we got back from San Diego, we visited a freeway construction site and she fell in love with the "yellow truck boom-boom-boom." For her 16th birthday she'll probably want a customized backhoe.

Later in the summer, we visited Geoff's mom in Great Falls. Xandie loved visiting Grandma. No, not because of the cookies. Those were great. But she got to wear "pull-ups" instead of training pants. Pull-ups are nothing more than disposable diapers without the handy Velcro tabs. Instead, they're made in the shape of—you guessed it—training pants. That way, instead of simply removing the old diaper and strapping the new one on, you get to untie the shoes, take them off, put the shoes aside, chase the baby, take off the shorts, chase the baby, take off the old pull-ups, chase the baby, find a trash can, chase the baby, put on the new pull-ups, take them off again because you got them backwards, replace them a third time because the baby doesn't like the cartoon printed on the front, put the shorts back on, find the shoes, chase the baby, and finally put the shoes back on. Pull-ups are a great labor-saving invention, because by the time you get everything back together, your child will be wet again, so you never have to actually leave the bathroom and deal with the outside world. If we ever meet the person who developed pull-ups, we are going to strangle him with a pair of training pants.



Besides the pull-ups, Xandie also loved visiting the family. One family member, in particular, captured her heart. He was always glad to see her, always ready to play with her, fun to hug and kiss, tolerant of her mistakes, and all-around wonderful. Well, yes, Uncle Shelby was pretty cool, but we're talking about his dog. For the next three months, whenever we talked about who we visited on our summer trip, Xandie would chime in with "And Dusty!"

On the same journey, we saw Pat's sister in Seattle. Xandie got to ride a pony—twice. We also rode the Seattle dinner train, the monorail and kiddie train at Seattle center. Yeah, Xandie has a choo-choo thing. But we'll cure her. Pat has found an infallible solution: Santa is going to bring a little wooden train set for Christmas.

When we returned to San Diego for another conference in October, we decided to skip the zoo this time. Instead we went to Sea World. You've got it: \$60 to get in and all she did was play in the sandbox. But Pat and Geoff enjoyed the whale show. Nothing like getting inundated with 60-degree saltwater on a 50-degree day. Warms you right up. If you go, we recommend you *believe* those signs that say "soak zone." They aren't kidding. They have hydraulic whales. And an ice machine.

By now, things have settled down pretty well. Xandie wears pull-ups at night and when we go out, which saves a lot of wear and tear on the car and other peoples' furniture. She wears training pants at home, and has developed quite a bit of control. It's been at least 30 minutes since she soiled the rug. She usually lets us know when she needs to visit the bathroom, and we've learned to drop everything instantly because there is nothing so critical as a 2-year-old's need for a toilet. But our favorite part has to be the recurring theme these days, the one that is *so* much more charming because of when it happens. It's like clockwork every morning, an hour before either of us is ready to get up: a little girl at the bedroom door, looking at us sleepily and melting our hearts with that unforgettable phrase, "I have pee-pee."

Love,

Pat, Geoff, and Xandie