

Dear friends and family,

One of the great things about toddlers is their continuing discovery of the world around them. When a little girl looks at a redwood forest for the first time, we adults are given a chance to see the world through her eyes—craning our aching necks all day long, wondering why the heck everything has to be so tall.

Xandie has been doing a lot of exploration this year. Even before the year started, she went to her first ballet, *The Nutcracker*, with her Grandma Peggy. If you've never done that sort of thing, we strongly recommend it. There's something special about sitting with approximately half the under-5 population of a city squirming, yawning, drumming, pointing, and (this was the San Francisco Ballet, after all) shorting their dot-com stocks over their cellphones. Please go—and take a kid with you. You can even take ours.

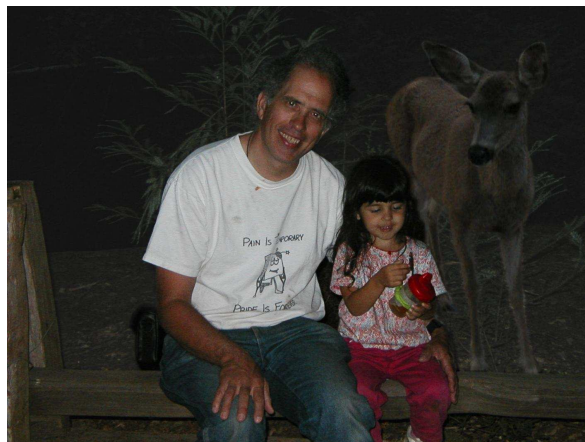
Xandie celebrated her third birthday this year. Being three years old is a big difference from being two. Two-year-olds have no sense of the future, which means that you don't have to advertise the event in advance. A three-year-old has it figured out WAY ahead of time and expects treatment appropriate to her exalted status. In January, Xandie was already looking forward to becoming a Big Girl. By the time April rolled around, she had chosen a guest list, advised Mom on the menu, approved the games that would be played, registered herself at every toy store in Southern California, arranged for a local French restaurant to provide desserts, and notified the White House that she expected Presidential recognition of the event.

The birthday party itself brought many new experiences for our precious one. The most important, of course, was the descent of a swarm of tiny little critters who did their best to eat us out of house and home. Yup, Xandie found a new kind of bug. “What's that, Daddy?” “Gee, I don't know, ask your Mommy.” Mommy, being the smarter parent, correctly identified them as termites. If you've never had termites in your house, we highly recommend the experience. You can take ours.

In June, Daddy celebrated his own birthday. We won't tell you how old he is, but Xandie will now inform you that any measurement relating to Daddy—height, weight, etc.—is “five-oh.” To celebrate, Geoff's brother Shelby “dropped in” for a surprise visit along with his new son, Shelby Junior, new mom Lynn, and Grandma Cherie. That gave Xandie a chance to experience a baby first-hand. She held the tyke, put him in a stroller, and gave him a bottle. Then she branched out, experimenting to see what happened when she tickled him, investigating the strange smell from his underside, and trying out several body tattoos with her (fortunately non-toxic) markers. She was about to let him sample the flavor of a termite when we gently suggested that perhaps she would rather spend some time on the phone with her broker.

Late summer brought the highlight of the year (from Xandie's viewpoint, anyway), a camping trip through California. We started out near the beach in San Simeon. The campground is easily reached and easily summarized: it's cold, even in August. We huddled around a fire for three days, wondering what the heck had motivated us to “relax” in an igloo. Just when things seemed intolerable, the wind started blowing so hard that our tent collapsed. Geoff quickly diagnosed the problem, tied a rope to the tent, and tied the other end to the car. With a solid anchor, we were safe, and Xandie thought that it was great fun whipping around in the sky like a kite. San Simeon is a great place to camp, if you like adventure. We recommend it, especially since it's quite easy to find a free spot. You can take ours.

The rest of the vacation was much better. We spent one night in Big Basin, among the redwoods. Xandie and Pat liked it so much that they wanted to move in. Geoff agreed, so long as he didn't have to sweep up all the pine needles. A doe and her fawn wandered into our campsite around dinner time. Xandie, ever the little scientist, wondered what sort of food they might



like. They walked right past her Cheez-its, the ham sandwiches, and our beer, zeroing in on the leftover tortilla chips. However, after much nosing around they never ate anything. Xandie thinks it was because we didn't offer them any salsa.

After the vacation, we returned to Claremont just in time for Geoff to start classes at Harvey Mudd. In a fit of excellent planning, we drove back from San Francisco on Labor Day. That trip was another experience Xandie recommends—for other people. We never realized a traffic jam could be 300 miles long.

The beginning of another year of pre-school brings an onslaught of toddler classes offered for the child's enrichment and the parents' impoverishment. After looking into Olympic-style fencing, pony vaulting (acrobatics on horseback), and rock climbing in the Himalayas, we settled on two music classes and gymnastics. Xandie is now learning to hold a violin the size of a videocassette tape under her chin, while sawing away to the tune of “Twinkle Little Rock Star” (so far unamplified). She knows fifteen trivial variations on “Twinkle,” and wants to play them all every time she practices. Those tiny violins are sure adorable. Hey, would you like to take ours?



Practicing “diva” bows

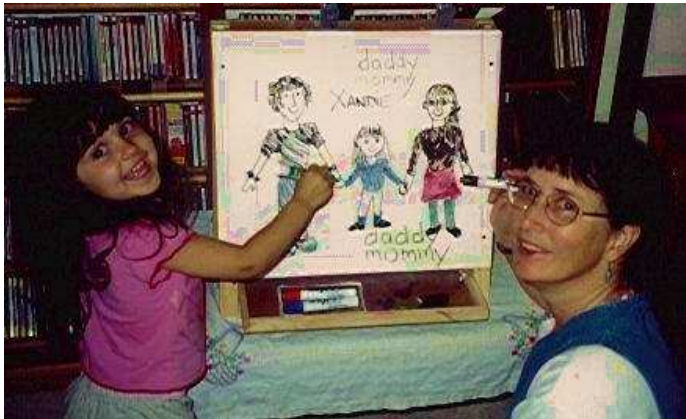


Elephant handler in training

Christmas is almost here, and this year Xandie *knows* it. All she can talk about is Santa. We have read “The Night Before Christmas”, and she's worried about the fireplace being too dirty. We've read and watched “The Grinch”, and now she's worried about the tree disappearing *up* the chimney. We went to the mall to get pictures with Santa, and so she's also worried that she'll have to wait in line for three hours, with obligatory tips to the elves, before she can have her presents. But despite all that, we're having a blast, and Xandie's the happiest of all. She knows Santa will bring her that really special present she wants, if only she can decide between Amazon and E-Bay.

Love,
Pat, Geoff, and Xandie.

P.S. If you need any used toys... **please take ours!**



Portrait practice with Mommy



Backyard flight simulation device