

## The Tilden's Christmas Letter 2003

Charles Dickens is quoted as saying:

*"It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself."*

Like most, our family really enjoys a bit of reverting to our childhood during Christmas. We sneak around buying gifts and finding clever new places to hide them (though Roseanne has a habit of forgetting one or two every year...). We often try to disguise them when they're wrapped, or we just wrap up clues and do a "treasure hunt" for a gift. Sometimes I think the process is more fun than the gifts themselves—except for one gift, which is more valuable than all the others combined.

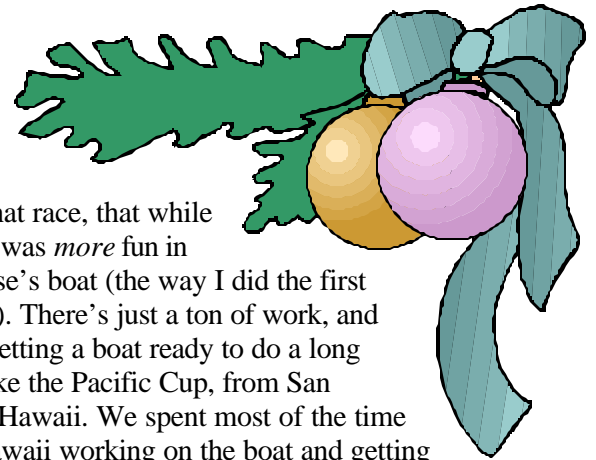
That's the gift that Dickens referred to—God's gift of his Son, Jesus, to you and me. That gift truly is priceless because it purchased a relationship with God for us. Like the gifts we give at Christmas, though, it has no value until it's received.

This year, we as a family marked the end of an era when our oldest daughter, Jessica (or "Jessie" as she prefers to be called) graduated from High School and started college. She is attending Seattle Pacific University, about 180 miles away in "the big city" of Seattle. She's doing great and enjoying college life, living in a dorm on campus and getting along great with her roommate, who is from New Mexico.

Katie isn't far behind. She's a junior this year and is starting to think seriously about colleges. Right now, she's interested in spending her first year abroad at a well-known Christian school that has campuses all over the world. She wants to go to the school in England. She's begging Dad to get a chance to go visit the school this year—now I'm wondering if it's really about going to school there, or if she's just trying to wrangle a free trip to Europe out of Daddy. Hmmm...

I guess I'm getting a bit ahead of myself, so let's go back a little earlier in the year....

A big event for me was selling (yet another) boat. Some wise man said that the happiest days in a boat owner's life are the day he buys a boat, and the day he sells it. In March of this year, we sold the 43' sailboat that I sailed to Hawaii in 2002. We decided



after doing that race, that while it was fun, it was *more* fun in somebody else's boat (the way I did the first time in 1996). There's just a ton of work, and expense, in getting a boat ready to do a long ocean race like the Pacific Cup, from San Francisco to Hawaii. We spent most of the time we had in Hawaii working on the boat and getting it ready to sail back to the mainland. When we got back, Roseanne said that she thought it would be fine if I wanted to do the Pacific Cup again—just not on our boat. So, we decided to sell this boat.

Not being one to be without a boat for too long, we decided to order a Chinese-built Trawler. GASP—YES—a powerboat. Truth is, it looks like a great way to cruise the inland passage to Alaska, which Roseanne and I would like to do within the next few years.... But, enough of boats.



The summer of 2003 was really packed. In June, Jessie graduated from High School. Within a couple of weeks, we had a sort of "mini-reunion" on the Tilden/Morris side as my Mom's twin sister, her husband and their daughter came and spent a few days with us at the Harbor House in Gig Harbor. We really enjoyed the time with them.

The "mini-reunion" however, was really more of a "warm up" for the big one when Roseanne's brothers and sisters (at least most of them) came with their families. There were 20+ people there at the peak, but we had a great time and the weather was beautiful. We even shot off a few fireworks over the bay.

Roseanne's brother, Joe, and his family came all the way from Arkansas for the reunion, and their daughter,

Jordyn got to know Jessie a bit in the process. She ended up staying a couple more weeks (actually left and came back!) and went to the church's Sr. High water ski camp in July. Roseanne and I helped. She cooked and I drove a boat towing kids on skis and tubes. I never thought I'd get tired of driving a boat, but that pretty much did it. Roseanne had the harder job cooking for a mob of Sr. High students in a hot kitchen on days that often exceeded 100° F outside (and no air conditioning).

Just before school started, we took what may well end up being our last full family vacation. We used some frequent flyer miles, some hotel points, and found a good deal on a Caribbean cruise (maybe it was a good deal because it was during hurricane season??). In any case, we flew down to Florida, spent a few days in Florida doing the "theme park" thing—going to Disney and Universal Studios.

After a few days in Florida, we boarded one of Royal Caribbean's new 1100-foot cruise ships and had a great week visiting southern Caribbean ports. Our captain did end up reversing the itinerary to avoid hurricane Fabian that was wandering through the Caribbean at the time. Fortunately, by reversing the itinerary, we avoided essentially all of its effect, and had a great time with the whole family.

By the time we returned from the cruise, Katie had already missed a couple of the first days of school. She didn't seem to mind too much. Jessie still had a couple of weeks before Seattle Pacific started classes.

Jessie started school at the end of September (Mom and Dad had a bit of a cry fest for the first night after dropping off our baby).

Meanwhile, I (Mark) was neck deep in the process of shepherding a new constitution through the approval process for our church, in my role as chairman of the board. It involved a lot of planning, running informational meetings for the members, and answering questions. We finally took the vote on the new constitution just a couple of weeks ago. The new constitution was approved—which is a big relief. Only trouble is, in the process I was also elected as an elder in the church, under the new constitution, so now we're pulling together the elders and figuring out how to "eld". That's going to continue to keep me pretty busy.

I've also been serving on the advisory board for a little startup company. It doesn't take near as much

time, and it's actually a lot of fun to help them grow and make strategic decisions.

As I write this, Katie just passed her driver's license test today. Now we have FOUR drivers in the house. Katie is begging me to buy her a car. Oh, and not just any car—she wants a 60's-era Mustang. I'm using the same line my Dad did when I was this age. "Do you want that in Tonka or Mattel?" I guess my little pickup is just not "cool" enough for her to drive. Oh well...

Jessie and her roommate, Becka just arrived after finishing their finals for the fall term. Becka will leave from Portland airport tomorrow to fly home to New Mexico. Jessie will be working most of the break at the pet clinic, where she worked all summer. She has developed some very valuable experience working in the clinic, and has learned to take X-rays, assist in surgery, as well as maintain the clinic's records. Looks like she may even be able to get a similar job at a clinic near SPU in Seattle because of the experience she's gained.

As if we didn't have enough to do, we've embarked on a bit of remodel/construction project at the Harbor House, building an attached garage. All it had before was an open carport. For a while, I had the foolish notion of doing it all myself, but Roseanne helped me see the folly in that approach. I've been doing as much of it as I can, but we have a contractor doing a lot of the major parts—I just couldn't afford to be away enough to do the work myself.

Well...that's probably more than you wanted to know, and I'm running out of space anyway. I hope my long-winded letters don't discourage you from coming by to see us. We'd love to see you!

