

Hi folks

This is the Christmas 2004 letter which became the New Year 2005 letter and was in grave danger of becoming the Easter 2005 letter. But reason and consistent low-level nagging from Cheryl have finally taken their toll and so here we go. As you will see it has been a year of great change for everyone in the family, so if I was going to find an excuse for the delay there are many candidates.

I am not sure whether chronology would be a better approach to the happenings of the year but it may be simpler to deal with each of the family and then fill in the blanks.



Starting with Cheryl, who has had a challenging year with Continental Airlines. As you probably all know the airline business has not been doing well and although Continental has done better than some it is not immune to the industry perils. Cheryl was the PA to the Treasury VP and in September her job was eliminated. They were very good to Cheryl and gave her advance notice before the event and also before all the other eliminations were announced so that she had a head-start in finding a new position. The deadline for her to find an alternate job was end of September. To her credit several departments tried to get her but the jobs were very uninteresting and then, with a day to go, she was offered her present position in Corporate Communications. It seems to be a great group of people and she again enjoys her job. So much that in the last couple of days she was offered an Office Coordinator job back at her original location and turned it down.

Lauren finished High School with very good grades and chose Texas Christian University in Fort Worth (about a 4 hour drive North of us) as her college. She started in September and is rooming with a South African friend that she started school with in Bryanston when we were there. Her first semester has gone well and she has kept up a good average mark. All this despite the distraction of a new boyfriend in the last couple of months. She had been totally in love with a local guy during summer but it just wasn't going anywhere and she broke up with him before going to college. Then Jason came along and has been around since October some time. He is 20 and going to the local community college. His parents have a retreat halfway between us and Fort Worth so they are able to meet up there over some of the weekends. He is a part-time musician and has composed at least 2 songs in Laurens honor. Lauren also went on a weeks dancing outreach to Costa Rica in June and really enjoyed it.



Ryan had the most exciting and challenging year. He graduated from college in May and decided he really wanted to open his own business. So we put together a business plan with the two of us owning the business, went to the bank, got the money and opened the doors on July 3rd! That makes it sound easy so let me assure that it was a very tough six weeks. It's a game center with 24 PCs and 2 X-boxes where people come in and pay by the hour to use the facilities. It's a relatively new idea so there wasn't a lot of experience to draw on. Plus we were rushing to get it open for the big July 4th party which happens in the park across the road. At one point I had about \$50,000 of the opening expenses on my credit card while we waited for the bank to disburse the funds. Anyway it has been running for 6 months and is very cyclical depending on whether the kids are at school or not. But we survived the down-cycles and now plan to either move to new premises which are a lot bigger and/or open a second center. If you want see what it is all about their website is <http://www.gameforcecenters.com>. Ryan and his friend, Graham, run the center and one of them is always there. It is open every day and the first day they had off was Christmas Day.



I started the year off with SAP Education but, as I mentioned last year, it was not going that well. It's a great company to work for and is doing very well but the Education side is really the poor relation and the focus is on selling software. I wasn't making the sort of money I need so when an alternative came up in February I took it. Since April I have been with Panviva, a small software company based in Melbourne, Australia. They have had a couple of notable sales in US and needed to have representation here. It's right in my line



of business and I have enjoyed working with them. Obviously there are the challenges of going back to a small business but there is the benefit of being able to work on more than pure sales. So I have been helping them re-jig the marketing and demo stuff for the US market. We are setting up partnerships with local services companies and my primary role will be to support the partners as they sell although I still carry a personal quota as well. It's been very exciting and I have been across to Melbourne twice to meet with the team there. 2005 is the make or break year and I feel good that we are on the right track. As the only person in the US I travel most weeks and spent a lot of time at trade fairs in the last 3 months of last year. Along with supporting Ryan in his business it's been a fairly frantic last 6 months.

Right at the end of last year we went on our first cruise and really enjoyed it. We went from Miami to Belize and Key West. It was very relaxing and great to have the time with Ryan and Lauren without the usual distractions. Certainly an experience we are keen to repeat. Cheryl and Lauren are also very keen to come on one of the Australian trips with me so that may happen.

In March we went up to Napa Valley with a couple we have got to know here in Kingwood. She is a CIO with ExxonMobil and he is a househusband. We have been to many wine tastings with them and they are dedicated wine drinkers. We were there for the close of the Mustard Festival and had a great time as they know their way around and had booked at some of the really good restaurants. Another experience we would be happy to repeat.

We had a couple of trips up to Atlanta to see our friends, Ron and Janette Duckworth, who have just moved across here from Durban. Ron is working for his son-in-law in Atlanta and we thoroughly enjoy our visits to them. We also visited friends in Chicago for a weekend during June.

At the last minute we decided to hop across to UK for the week before Christmas. We were able to get first class both ways and came back on Christmas Day. This time I decided not to rent a car and we booked a hotel in central London, the Marriott at the London Eye on the Thames. We used the underground and National Rail to get around and it was excellent – certainly the way we will go in the future. We saw family and friends and also went to see the Abba show, Mamma Mia – it was really good. Unfortunately the dollar is not good in UK and it is an expensive exercise. Thank heavens for Cheryl's job and my Marriott points!!

And so we hope that 2005 will be a bit quieter. However the noise level from Cheryl on visiting SA is getting progressively louder and more regular so that might just end up happening sometime. Thanks for all your letters received so far and we wish you everything of the best.