

Hi folks

Picking up where we left off 2 years ago, much has happened and so this may be a relatively long bi-annual missive. For that reason alone I should be motivated to get it done each year in future. It really is onerous having to try and remember the highlights of two years. So, where were we

Ah yes, Lauren had finished her first semester at Texas Christian University. She continued to do well in her second semester and made the Deans list. However the relationship with Jason became complicated and she convinced herself to return to Houston to be closer to him and also her part-time dance career. She put in a year at University of St Thomas, a Catholic school close to downtown Houston. Again, she did well but was not overly happy with the emphasis on Catholicism, so she looked elsewhere. At the same time, the relationship with Jason became even more complex and eventually the break-up occurred sometime around 4 months ago. Meanwhile she was enjoying her life back in Houston and decided to transfer to University of Houston in their Business School, which is highly regarded. Of course, due to her traditional procrastination and her belief that the universe revolves around her needs, she didn't get the paperwork done on time and so has ended up at the local Community College for a semester catching up on some of her basic courses that she needs to graduate. In preparing for her transfer to U of H she had found a flat-mate and rented an apartment closer to U of H and she has been there since August. She seems to be enjoying the independence but has now learned much more about the cost of everyday living and that's not a bad thing.

Another element of her life has been a part-time career at Continental Airlines. Because of Cheryl's connections Lauren was able to get a summer internship in the Finance Department which is great as she is doing finance as her major. Although it was a menial job (scanning huge numbers of airline contracts to get them online) she apparently did a great job and they were very impressed with her work ethic and cheerful personality. So good that they offered her the opportunity to continue working as and when she could when she went back to school and she has been doing that successfully till now. That helps her pay for her apartment and also contribute to the cost of her new car – a red Mazda 3 that she chose in March. She is also working with a local church being trained as a youth pastor and seems very enthusiastic about that.

Ryan, of course, had started his video game entertainment business. Two years later the business is still going but has yet to break even, creating a nightmare financial burden for me. We have talked often about cutting our losses and closing but every time we do it seems to have a little jolt upwards and we think it is better to trade our way out of it. We did move into new and bigger premises 18 months ago and now have 30 PCs, X-box, X-box 360, PS/2 and the new Nintendo Wii. Of course, the move also increased the rent significantly so that's we are still losing money. Until a few months ago both Ryan and his friend Graham were being paid and I had to put a stop to that. Our major problem remains that the business dies during the week when the kids are in school so we continue to look for ways to use the premises for non-game stuff. In October, Ryan got a job with a company that is developing a new video game virtual tournament system. It's a start-up but has the potential to get very big very quickly when they launch the product – hopefully next year. Ryan works from home and is earning a decent salary so he is now able to help me offset the losses. He appears to be doing very well and constantly gets praise from the CEO for his work. One thing that is very useful is that they are able to use GameForce as a test-bed for the new product. His relationship with Meredith that has been going on at various temperatures for the past 8 years or so now seems to have

stabilized and they spend a lot of time together. Ryan is still at home but has tentative plans to move into an apartment with his friend Chris during Spring next year. He has also been offered an alternative job with a large consulting group here in Houston. He has turned down the offer right now (despite a significant increase in pay) but they have offered to keep the position open until June next year. So, he has that as a backstop if the start-up goes belly up.

Cheryl probably tops the list for the most dramatic changes over the past 2 years. As I am sure you know the airline industry has been going through very tough times although it does seem to be getting a little better now. Last time I wrote she had survived a potential layoff and had moved into Corporate Communications as an Executive Assistant. She stayed in that position for a year and really enjoyed it but eventually succumbed to pressure from the HR team to join their group as a recruiter. She has been doing that for more than a year and is doing a great job – many accolades from her bosses and their peers! She has had a lot to learn and has taken on many special projects including handling the showcases for MBA graduates at various colleges – where she has put her event planning experience to great and loudly praised use. She has already had a promotion and raise and has been promised another one first quarter next year.

And so to Numero Uno (Oh, no hold on - that was the previous paragraph!) I stayed with the Australian company Panviva until March this year. Then they decided to move the base to New York and go for a channel distribution instead of the direct sale and gave me the old heave-ho. Within a week I had signed on with RWD Technologies who had been my biggest competitor since coming to the US. It has been a wild ride as I am with a new division and RWD has not traditionally had sales people. However they have recently changed my direct management and it may well work out okay. First quarter next year will tell. At the same time I have been doing the accounts and marketing for GameForce. A large part of our marketing effort is getting involved with all of the events in the Town Center where we have the game center. We used to pay as a sponsor to have a booth and get some recognition but the organizers needed some help so I signed on and help with all of the events and in turn we get free exposure. It's a voluntary position and has led me to being signed up recently for some of the local Community Associations which I enjoy. I have kept my involvement with Lions and was President last year. I remain as Treasurer and was recently very honored to learn that I have been nominated to the Lions Texas Hall of Fame.

There have been many other general highlights over the past 2 years so let me try and capture some of those for you:

☞ Went on our long-discussed trip to South Africa at end of last year. Really enjoyed visiting friends we hadn't seen for 5 years in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Highlight was the Cape Town leg with the couple of days in Franschoek and some great wine-tastings at the top of the list.

☞ Earlier this year we went on our second trip to Napa Valley with friends. Another great weekend and this time including a day with a stretch limo.

☞ We discovered a young cousin of ours who was on a 2-year trip au pairing in New Jersey. We spent some time over the past 18 months visiting with Kirsten and having her come to Houston.

☞ In August last year we went down to Puerto Vallarta in Mexico for a couple of days. Whetted our appetite for more so we went again in July this year to Cancun for the beach wedding of one of Cheryl colleagues.

☞ Had a great few days with our South African friends on the New Jersey shore.

They live in an idyllic spot with a deer-populated forest as their back yard.

After some thought we have decided to go for US citizenship. We lodged the papers in August and Lauren's moved fastest and she was sworn in November. Ryan and I did our citizenship test in November and will be sworn in January 24. Cheryl's file has stalled somewhere and we are trying to get it released so that we can all be at the same swearing in on January 24. It's a big deal for our American friends all of whom are excited that we are taking the plunge.

And I guess that's about it for the last 2 years – more next year ... probably!!