

2003: faith and donuts

It was a Tuesday morning in January when, walking back from the donut shop, our family stopped on the side-walk to take a picture of the crew tearing down the front of our house. The demolition to the building wasn't what concerned me - if I needed a reason to panic I had better ones: I was going for six months since being laid off, Lee was pregnant, and I didn't exactly know how to pay for the bedroom addition. But what struck me was that I hadn't planned on having a mid-life crisis at 32! The circumstances were telling me this could represent the demolition of our life. And yet with all this around me - in my heart I never felt so alive in my life...

Would 2003 be a year of faith? This year started with a call to "Walk in Victory". Simple words to navigate a not-so-simple time. But we've learnt to prefer a few words of faith to a discourse of despair. Faith, says the writer, is "the substance of things hoped for - the evidence of things not seen." So by faith, five weeks later we would deposit my next paycheck. By faith, five months later we would cradle a new baby girl in our arms. And by (maybe greater) faith the remodel project was eventually finished as well!

For the extended family, this was a growth year too. Louis' eldest brother Riaan and his wife Nelhari had their first baby, Robin. Lee's Mom retired and was able to come and help prepare our home for our new baby - the 2nd granddaughter on both sides of the family. Louis' twin brother Francois is also getting in on the act, and married his fiancée Gwen in August. And Lee's brother Herbert just found out that they are expecting their second son in the new year.

Being pregnant makes you less mobile, so we didn't travel as much this year. Instead we did a lot of stuff around the house. Besides - the construction provided Jake with 'in-house' entertainment. In the morning He would gear up with the crew, help take them coffee and watch them at their trade. And our children had instant fans. Some days the owner of the company would make special trips to come and see Cathy, his newly 'adopted' granddaughter. He would just pick her up and walk around the site and talk to her. We got star treatment, not through of our negotiation skills, but because our 1 year old knew how to hug and smile.

For Jake's 4th birthday Lee had the idea of a Father-and-son fishing day. Even though it started out drizzling, we had an amazing time and many 'caught' their first trout. We kept our couple in the freezer for months.

We spent Spring mostly in the front yard, digging up dirt and removing old shrubs. The 'boys' checked out snails and worms and roots and all the stuff that live right under our noses. It was a great opportunity for simple lessons about how things grow and how we grow. I also got to model the concept of 'rest' (repeatedly). Inside the house, Lee was turning our house into a beautiful home with creative color schemes and decorative designing. This was actually becoming the home we had talked about for so many years! Over Mother's day weekend we assembled a slide/swing set for the kids (Yes, it took the whole weekend, but we now provide discount to California residents - just bring your phone bill).

Lee's parents came to visit during Summer which meant more fun for Jake and Cathy. Cathy's vocabulary was also expanding daily. She invented a utility-word 'toerly' which she could use to explain anything she didn't have a good word for yet. This was further developed during long talks with Grandma 'Nou-noe' and 'Apa' Tiger. The family enjoyed a great time on Big Bear mountain go-carting, bob-sledding and admiring the beauty of nature. We also took a ride on Thomas-the-tank-engine in Fallbrook and had some unforgettable tri-tip sandwiches (actually Cathy's face smeared with all the sauce was unforgettable).

In the Names-are-more-important-than-we-know category, Jeannette Emmarentia was born on July 3rd. Our question whether she would be okay coming two weeks early was answered when she presented with her umbilical cord tied in a full knot and halfway around her neck. And yet the nurse was amazed to find Emma with 'perfect' vitals signs, something she had not seen in her entire career. A rose by another name just would not smell as sweet as 'God is graciously embracing us all'. Steve Ragsdale's song 'Children are a gift from the Lord' so beautifully captured this with her dedication which we were able to celebrate with many of you.

Back at the office, Louis now works in Hollywood, still in the real estate industry but with enterprise software. Across the street bigger and better movie premieres roll out every week and he gets to see some strange (and some famous) characters on those streets. With all its bravado there remains a real thirst in Tinseltown for something with substance. Maybe it's for something to hope for?.

In August, Louis did manage to jet in to northern France for a weekend. (President Bush himself tried to emulate this feat three months later but went to Baghdad). The wedding was an experience where traditional, countryside, French hospitality and love broke about four language barriers. It was good to see so many friends even if it was for just a few jet-lagged days (I also took great comfort from seeing that most of you are getting older, greyer and balder and not just me!).

For the annual year-end Eksteen break-away weekend we're going to the happiest place on earth – Disneyland. We'll have a blast and enjoy the rides and sing "it's a small world after all". (But we know it is really small because we just met some great Afrikaners in IKEA last month).

We want to thank each of you for making this year special to us as a family. We are blessed by our relationships with friends and family like you who share memories, encourage us, pray for us and show interest in what we are becoming as a family. We cherish our memories of being together with you and eagerly anticipate the next time we can add more of them to our treasure chest and to yours.

Ironically, as we come to the end of the year, Cathy has developed a new utility-word: 'donut shop'. She uses it to refer to anything from going to eat, taking a walk outside or driving to the mall. It means "let's go somewhere" – and she lights up when she says it – overcome with anticipation.

Well this year, instead of being broken down, we've seen our life strengthened, made beautiful and by God's grace even expanded. We've realized it's not where you are that matters as much as where you're going (and with who). Donuts anyone?

Have a dunkin' Two-thousand-and-four,
With our love,

Louis, Lee, Jake, Cathy and Emma Eksteen
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