

January 1, 2001

Hello everyone,

As those of you with kids know, taking a picture for the annual Christmas/New Year's card is very much a straightforward process. Just follow the steps:

1. **Bribe:** This usually means some kind of "Nintendo bonus." For boys on a limited gaming ration, this simple phrase has far-reaching power to spin heads and gather bodies.
2. **Prep:** Boy hair is an amazing substance. It sticks out in wonderful and inspiring ways. Especially Carl and Joseph usually need the warm-wet-washcloth rub down followed by extensive brushing. And of course, then they decide their heads are itchy and they need to scratch, a lot... More brushing... Oh, did I mention clothes that somehow all look good together; and then there's getting the boys inside them, and keeping them in there.
3. **Shoot:** Now you're exhausted, but still determined. So how do you make them smile? Of course, the first method that comes to mind involves threats, but those never work, and besides, you want smiles not belly laughs. So usually there is some kind of photographer abuse soon to follow. Wigs are good, lots of wigs. I'll let your imagination run here. And if you're desperate (we were) a variation of our Billy the Backhoe and the Stinky Diapers story can be handy.
4. **Select:** Next you sit down with your wife at the computer. You slowly page through the photos, your mouth hanging open, aghast at all the

variations of inappropriate facial expressions your kids can generate. You suddenly realize that getting a good picture of all three boys in one shot is going to be unlikely. So, there's compromise. Should you accept wide open mouths (tonsils), or too much tongue, the blink, the zombie stare, the completely missing boy, the side jab to a near-by brother, the drooping glasses... Please stop me.

5. **Deep sigh:** Now you're faced with the thought of representing your kids for the next year (or two) with one of these pictures. Do you really want this image burned into the minds of all your friends and relatives? Here is where you realize it's time to go on to step 6.
6. **Repeat**

Well, we stopped at three iterations...

Our boys are doing well. Soccer, soccer and more soccer! Joseph and Carl both made big transitions at school (7th and 1st grade) and David is off to kindergarten next year. **Joseph** is trumpeting (sometimes I get my horn out too). He's also turned into a good reader (we can thank Harry Potter for jump starting that). **Carl** craves board games and Legos. He's a good swimmer and even joins me for a few laps. At school he enjoys math and chess club. **David** is into Sorry, checkers, swimming, crafty cooking with Laurie, and reading stories, especially about animals. He's also become very skillful at telling jokes.

Our David has been fighting linear scleroderma for nearly three years. His left leg is quite badly scarred from the disease, but he manages very well. David has a joyful spirit that keeps us all

smiling. Thank you for your continuing prayers.

Laurie's been quite active at our church, Richland Lutheran. She keeps the kids thinking as chief homework counselor. The boys enjoy her "field trips" to local orchards to pick cherries, peaches, grapes and apples.

I'm still windsurfing and when there's time, working at Battelle. The five-year plan (learn and return) got converted to the ten-year variation. We still often think of returning someday to MN.

We made it out on the road a few times with visits to the Oregon coast, Portland, Hood River, Seattle, and of course our old stomping ground Minnesota.

Thanks for your Christmas cards, your e-mails and your visits to WA; we really enjoy them! Take good care, and may you be blessed this new year.

Jim, with warm wishes from Laurie, Joseph, Carl, and David.

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy..."
Luke 2:10.

