

January 7, 2004

Happy New Year everyone,



I say: "Skippy. Remember the *Family Ties* TV show (now in re-runs on cable) with Skippy Handleman, the persistent but ever-thwarted neighborhood suitor of Mallory, the family's oldest daughter?"

You say: "No, Jim, actually we don't." **I say:** "Oh come on, don't you

remember the episode where the mom and the daughters head off to the country for a get-away camping trip and leave the dad and Alex at home?"

You say: "We never used to watch that show — ever!" **I say:** "Ok, just a second... and so the dad, quickly abandoned by his teenage son (for a date with Suzie Farkas), finds the house very, very empty. Skippy, unaware of the women's retreat, pops over for a visit. Put on alert by the clingy, overly-friendly welcome at the door, Skippy soon discovers it is just he and Mr. Keaton. 'Oh no!'"

Like Mr. Keaton, I had a very quiet house this summer and a phone and answering machine that almost seemed to be broken. Laurie, Joe, David, and Carl spent most of the summer in the Twin Cities where Laurie and David made daily commutes to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester (details to follow). It was a little frightening to see how socially dependent I am on my family! But I survived and no permanent damage from my cooking (heating). Our gracious neighbor (and neighborhood Grandmother) Peg brought me some meals and conversation...

David has become possibly the first 7-year-old in the U.S. to receive UVA-1 light therapy for linear scleroderma. Every weekday, for seven weeks, Laurie and son drove the 150-mile round trip to Rochester from her brother Doug's house in Mendota Heights. Each day at 8 a.m., they piled into Doug's 5.0-liter throaty red Mustang (handy for negotiating entrance and exit ramps) to get to a daily 10:30 appointment with a turbo-charged ultra-violet light bed. Treatments included twenty-two wiggle-free minutes of exposure on each side, with everything but the

affected parts of David's leg protected from the light (including Laurie sitting nearby peering out from special sunglasses and safety shields). The light machine was noisy so David couldn't talk the time away but was entertained (through his headphones) by celebrities such as Ricky Martin and Harry Potter.

The light treatments (to break down collagen) have helped. The skin is noticeably softer and thinner, and that should help release the binding effect on David's leg and allow more normal growth. Laurie and son got to know the crew pretty well at Mayo but were glad to be done with their final commute when that day came. Thank you for your prayers for David.

Carl had extended time with the we-couldn't-have-done-it-without-them MN relatives. Certain things just happen when living in the neighborhood (instead of 1,539 miles out of town), like hanging out, shooting the breeze, and chewing the fat (or chewing the breeze as I would probably say...). Carl even learned how to "do" lunch with Aunt Cathryn.

I joined the group during the middle of their visit and broke away with Carl from the Cities for a few days to show him the North Shore (of Superior) and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. From Hungry Jack Lake, we rented a canoe and a pack and did a nice day trip to Duncan and the Stairway Portage. We were expecting rain, even though it started out sunny, so we took (and made use of) rain ponchos. It really poured! When we got back, the outfitter apologized for the rain, but we said that was our favorite part of the day; it was pretty in the storm. He gave us a bit of a strange look; I guess I should have told him we were from the WA desert.

I returned to WA first with Joe following soon after for band camp. That left us time to get out on the road. We hiked the Skyline loop near Paradise Park at Mount Rainier. We were good buddies except for a teensy little issue relating to the shortcut I insisted we skip. Joe praised my navigation "EXCEPT for the..." Joe is pushing 6' now; I may have sad news to report next year.

It was a working summer for David, but he did find time to squeeze in some fun. He fished with Grandpa Jack at his favorite spot on Camp Lake. Scores of panfish did their best to stay out of that boat. Grandpa George and Grandma Faye's new West St. Paul swimming pool was a big hit too.

Back home, Carl and David continue to terrorize small unsuspecting children at the chess tournaments. The pile of trophy pillage continues to grow. We're all still having fun with it.

Mad cow disease hit WA just a stone's throw from us. This is not a good thing especially when your wife barely tolerates beef products as it is... All together now, "We love tofu and chicken." Oh, a nice, juicy, medium-rare hamburger, about an inch thick, would taste so good.

"In" the boys' photo, behind the camera and out the living room picture window, is a record-setting foot of snow that fell New Year's Day. We haven't had real snow here for about ten years, so it's been fun. Snow forts, tunnels, big time sliding; the works. Perfect timing for Christmas vacation. And today another foot landed. More than enough to shut down school and work. Vacation continues...

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

And a special thank-you to my precious Laurie who orchestrated the summer and took such good care of our boy David.

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

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