

13 December 1995

Dear friends,

The big news is the arrival of Cole McKay Plambeck. He was born in Redwood City, at Sequoia Hospital on September 8th. I have to say it's hard to find much fault with the boy. He sleeps all night, almost never cries and generally has a smile ready in most situations.

For pure vexation, conflict, and trouble, we're still looking no farther than to Norbert, the cat. I spent the earlier part of this year matching wits with him, trying to come up with some scheme to defeat his repeated ascensions to the attic via either of two small doors on either side of our living room fireplace. Gloria suggested blocking the way with cardboard boxes. That worked for about a week until he figured out how to move the box by sticking his paw under the door and pulling outward. Next I wedged the TV against the box on one door, and piled wood into the other box. Norbert overcame the problem by jumping repeatedly from the top of the TV to the mantle, using Newton's "equal reaction" principle to ease the TV slightly away from the box so that the box could be scooted away from the door. I began to notice him observing me carefully whenever I approached the critical arrangements of boxes and barricades. A third scheme multiplied both weights and boxes, but was defeated when a visitor disturbed one box enough so that by a sequence of careful inverse operations, Norbert was again able to reach one door and scoot up into the attic just out of reach as I grabbed at him. Carrying the pursuit into the attic, I made the mistake of lunging for him off the main walkway, stepping through the drywall ceiling of our kitchen (neither I, and certainly not Norbert, were hurt).

The current arrangement is a simple metal latch attached to each door. Although it's quite simple for me to open, so far Norbert has not grasped the fundamentals of its operation. But I don't underestimate him, and if I have to, I'll attach combination locks to the latches, memorizing combinations and filing off serial numbers if necessary. It's a matter of pride with me now, upholding human ingenuity over the feline.

Gloria is continuing to work for Sybase, and I have been consulting and working most recently for C.ATS Software in Palo Alto. We're still living in Palo Alto in the house we bought in 1994, at 2341 Tasso Street.

David and Kara Lynn Klarner have suggested the convention of using Christmas letters to report movies and books etc that one enjoyed in the previous year. I enjoyed Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*, and Gloria recommends (if you're expecting) *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, or, (if you're not) Philip Kerr's *Berlin Noir*. You might also try Stephen Fry's *The Liar*, although I would pass on *The Hippopotamus*. I continue to recommend Moes Alison's jazz recordings and the writings of Aldous Huxley and Emerson. In the lowbrow department, there is always the World Wide Web, *America's Funniest Home Videos*, and the TV show *Cops*, which teaches a important lesson, that criminals may be easily distinguished from the rest of us because they don't wear shirts.

Finally, we come to the important subject of anagramming. A breakthrough was achieved earlier this month when my online American Heritage Dictionary reported that GLORIA GATLIN is an exact anagram for ALLIGATORING, meaning the "formation of cracks on the surface of paint layers." The rest of us will be disappointed if we expect to slam a single word home run like this one. Nevertheless, the computerized dictionary offers a helpful start by reporting the longer words it is able to form from the letters of our names. Consider these words a Christmas gift, from our house to yours.

Happy holidays and good luck in 1996.

Thane, Gloria, Cole, Sophie, and Norbert