



North, to Alaska! See Travel.

Christmas, 2006



NO. 1 IN OUR HOUSEHOLD



Who wants to be in the hot seat? See Travel.

All the news that's unfit for publication elsewhere

A look back at things that have happened in the world and in the Mattison/O'Day household since our last Christmas letter.



It's a GIRL! Or a BOY!

That's the big news of the year. Soon we'll be up to our ears in unidentifiable fluids and indescribable odors, and we couldn't be happier about it. The baby is due February 6th, and we're just as excited as can be. We've been warned about how tiring, how trying, and how rewarding the whole experience will be, and we know that nothing can truly prepare us for what we're about to undertake. However, we've been trying to get ready for this major change in our lives by reading books, researching things online, and listening to people's stories. And tuning out some people's horror stories. Don't be surprised if this is the last of the five-pound Christmas letters you get from us for a long time. They're fun to do, but they do take time. As you might surmise, we're not anticipating having a lot of that to spare in the coming few years. Next year's Christmas letter may be nothing more than a postcard, if that.

As we look forward to the most overwhelming joy of our lives, we hope that 2006 finds you happy and healthy, and that 2007 is even better than '06.



This year, we've been fortunate to have the opportunity to practice our baby-care skills with little Jack Mattison-Gulotta (left), who turned one on November 25.

Jack's hasn't yet met his new cousin (right), the baby to be named later if we can ever agree on a name.





Intolerance Abounds

In August, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, a group dedicated to the complete destruction of the state of Israel, claimed victory after months of fighting with that nation, during which more than a thousand Lebanese and Israeli citizens and soldiers were killed. Mel Gibson announced that he'll move to Lebanon to help Hezbollah with its cause, just as soon as he gets out of rehab.



Not so Civil War

In a turn of events that could have been foreseen only by somebody with an IQ greater than that of the average postage stamp (and thus a total surprise to the United States' Commander-in-Thief), the nation of Iraq plunged into full-blown civil war. American soldiers, as well as members of the so-called "coalition of the willing" and thousands of Iraqi citizens, continue to die on a regular basis, thanks to the horrific disaster unleashed by the Bush administration. Given that lying about oral sex is grounds for impeachment, starting a war based on lies should be grounds for impeachment and imprisonment, and some would advocate some Abu Ghraib-style torture for Dubyuh. At a minimum, Bush should be imprisoned for crimes against humanity at a place that serves nothing but E. coli-laced Taco Bell salads.



Additional world news:

North Korea tested several short-range missiles in June, and in October tested its first nuclear bomb.

In September, Pope Benedict XVI angered many Muslims when he quoted a Byzantine emperor who made disparaging remarks about Muhammad and Islam.

Also in September, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez spoke to the United Nations, calling George Bush "the devil." His words were met with wild applause from the UN chamber and numerous other places, including a home in Holyoke.

On November 5, following a trial full of outbursts by the defendant, Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death for the killing of 148 people in 1982.

Giving the Chancellor a Hand

Having already proved his complete ineptitude in macro foreign relations, President Bush proved he is equally as incompetent at micro foreign relations. At the G8 Summit, President Bush gave an impromptu and unwelcome shoulder-rub to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. After some criticism of his actions, Bush defended the move, saying that he had consulted with Supreme Court Justice Thomas, who saw nothing wrong with it.



Hollywood and other areas of show biz are known for the ability to create yarns that divert the public's attention from real-life concerns like North Korea, Hezbollah, Iraq, and the fact that Bush is still in office. This year, it seems that the media spent more time on the off-screen antics of showbiz looneys than on things that matter.

Pam Anderson and Kid Rock split up, as did Britney Spears and the less-talented-than-William-Shatner Kevin Federline.

Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes had a

child during a "silent procedure," which required Holmes to keep quiet throughout the birthing process. Despite this, Holmes married nutjob Cruise in November, and the wedding was even attended by Holmes' friend Brooke Shields.

Madonna announced that she'll adopt a child from Malawi.

Brangelina had a baby named Shiloh.

Katie Couric took over the anchor position at The CBS Evening News.

Paris Hilton, George Michael, and Mel Gibson turned DUI into a fashionable Hollywood acronym.



Too Twisted for Words

Mark Foley, chairman of the House Caucus on Missing and Exploited Children, resigned amid a scandal that involved his explicit come-ons to underage congressional pages. Can you think of a better way for a sexual predator to hide than as head of a legislative organization that investigates sexual predators? If the incident were fully investigated, it wouldn't be surprising to find behavior on both sides of the Congressional aisle almost as disgusting as Foley's behavior. Did Republicans know about Foley's behavior and cover it up for years? Did Democrats know about Foley's behavior and wait until a month before the elections to make that knowledge public? It boggles the mind and makes the skin crawl.

Movie Full of Gore not by Stephen King

Former Vice President Al Gore produced and released the film "An Inconvenient Truth," about the effects of global warming on the planet. Gore, known for his unbridled enthusiasm and charisma at everything he does, created such an exciting film that apparently audiences all across the country were actually able to stay awake through a good portion of the film. Although the film presents startling evidence that the planet is warming at an alarming rate, it also makes some assumptions that are not shared by all within the scientific community. For example, the film makes the far-fetched assumption that it would be a bad thing if large portions of Texas were swallowed up by the Gulf of Mexico.



Mike O'Day ran the Boston Marathon in April.

Situation Hypocritical

Because it was such a bad year for hypocrites, it was a good year for comedians. The jokes about Mark Foley and others practically wrote themselves. Mel Gibson, who claims to be a man of faith, went on an anti-Semitic rant and referred to a female police officer as "sugart**s." Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals and a chief proponent of the ban on gay marriage in Colorado, resigned amid allegations that he paid a male prostitute for sex numerous times over a three-year period. Then of course there's the nation's most powerful hypocrite: George W. Bush. He had spent years defending Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and insisted that Rumsfeld would retain his post despite the disasters in Iraq. Bush, however, asked for and received Rummy's resignation immediately after Republicans got spanked in the midterm elections. Long after "mission accomplished" and following years of insistence that we must "stay the course," Bush suddenly decided it was time for a "fresh perspective." Oddly enough, the Republicans who accused John Kerry of flip-flopping didn't make the same accusation against Bush.



The Denistons visited from Washington, DC.

Visitors from Across the Nation

We had some great visits from near and distant friends and family this year. Mimi's friends, Adrian and Kurt, came to visit in March. Most of Stephe's family came to watch his brother, Mike, run the Boston Marathon in April. The world's best Best Man, William, and his family visited in August, as did Bev, Chris, and their daughters, Lyndsey and Zoe. In preparation for the baby's arrival, we have moved our guest bedroom to where the office is, so there's still plenty of room for visitors. Consider this an open invitation to come visit any time.



Zoe and her family visited in August.

Additional National News:

In January, indicted Speaker of the House Tom DeLay announced that he would not seek to return to that leadership position. In March, DeLay won the Republican primary, but the following month he pulled out of the race.

On a February "hunting trip" in which caged animals are released so that they can be shot, Dick Cheney showed that his eyesight is as healthy as his heart. The Vice President mistook a contributor to the Bush/Cheney campaign for a just-released pheasant or quail, shooting an attorney in the face.

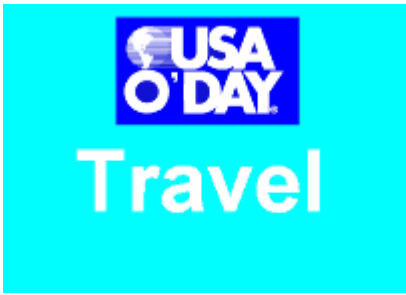
In May, the hot national topic was illegal immigration. The Bush Administration ordered states to send National Guard troops to stop the flow of illegal immigrants, and the Senate voted on a plan to blockade 860 miles of border with triple-layer fencing.

In July, former Enron CEO Kenneth Lay, convicted and awaiting sentencing for fraud, died before serving a day in jail for his theft of billions.

In August, British authorities uncovered a plot to take bombs aboard numerous planes headed for the United States. As a result, travelers in the US were barred from taking any liquids or gels aboard planes.

In October, Google announced the \$1.6 billion dollar purchase of YouTube. Later in the year, YouTube again made news when a video of a racist rant by former Seinfeld star Michael Richards was posted.

In the November mid-term elections that were widely perceived as a referendum on the Iraq quagmire, Republicans were handed a resounding defeat. Republicans lost control of both the House and the Senate, paving the way for Nancy Pelosi to become Speaker of the House and Harry Reid to become Senate Majority Leader.



The Year in Travel

Stephe, in his job in the Quality Engineering department at VCI, no longer travels for work so he had zero work-related trips this year. 2006 still turned out to be a great year for travel, because nearly all of the travel we did was for leisure.

Oddly enough, Mimi traveled more for work than Stephe did, because she attended a conference on Cape Cod in August. We turned that into a combination of business and pleasure, as Stephe joined her for part of the week, and her mother, sister, and Jack also went to The Cape for part of the week.

We spent a “free” weekend in Newport in July. The only cost was our sanity, because we had to sit through an excruciating timeshare “presentation” to receive our “free” weekend. Mimi thought the pitch wasn’t so bad; Stephe thought our “free” weekend was overpriced. So was the timeshare, which we didn’t buy.

In September, we drove to Philadelphia so Mimi could visit with her friend, Jose. Note that there’s no accent mark above the ‘e’. It’s not ‘ho-ZAY’, but ‘jöz’, a friend of Mimi’s from her days in California. Jose is a Jesuit priest from India who was visiting the U.S., and we took the rare opportunity to visit him while he was in the Northeast. After visiting Jose, we took a drive to Washington, DC to visit the world’s best Best Man, William, and his family. Ask Mimi to tell you sometime how she lost a pair of shoes that weekend.

We flew to Miami for Thanksgiving with Stephe’s sister and her family, and we were joined there by Stephe’s parents. It’s the first time either of us had Thanksgiving dinner outdoors.



The Cruise Crews

In June, we joined Mimi’s family (Larry, Paula, Melissa, Glenn, Jack, Anne, Dana) and celebrated her parents’ 40th wedding anniversary with a cruise from Seattle to Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway and Prince Rupert, BC. As we cruised the Inside Passage on the Norwegian Sun, the sights were absolutely breathtaking: the Garden Buffet, the tapas at Las Ramblas lounge, the midnight chocolate buffet... oh yeah, and the sights off the boat were great also. We took a taxi excursion to Mendenhall Glacier, and later took a boat excursion to another glacier where we watched it calving.



We rode on the White Pass railroad and kayaked in a glacial lake. One of the highlights of the trip was the zipline above the canopy of the Ketchikan rain forest, which unfortunately Mimi had to miss because it’s not recommended for women who are pregnant. Some day, we’ll take another trip to Alaska so Mom, Dad and child can all do the zipline.



With our friends Jill and Jen in Times Square.

The Year of the Apple

We’re wondering if 2006 on the Chinese calendar was perhaps the year of the Apple. We had five great trips to the Big Apple this year.

We started the new year by watching the ball drop in Times Square. Somehow we lucked onto the perfect location right on 7th Avenue, with a perfect view of two stages and the ball. The only stage we couldn’t see was (thankfully) the stage where Mariah Carey was, so we lucked out all around. We had the most fun you can possibly have in a corral with half a million shivering drunken strangers and no bathroom.

We also went to The City in June to meet with Stephe’s sister and her family. The Phams were on their way to Maine, and we were fortunate that we could spend some time with them during their New York pitstop. While we were there, we attended a taping of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire. Stephe finally got to take the contestant test to be on the show. He passed the test and was interviewed by a producer, but ultimately was not selected as a contestant. Not being selected is definitely a mixed blessing: there’s no chance of winning a million dollars, but it’s nice to not be such a freak as to be selected by a game show producer.



The two of us on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire.

In keeping with the “TV in New York” theme, Mimi, her mother and her sister all went to NYC on Columbus Day. They attended a taping of The Martha Stewart Show, where both Mimi and Melissa got some good momentary face time as the camera focused on the audience. This trip also involved a trip to Sephora for the adults and a trip to the Lego store, which the adults claimed was for the benefit of little Jack.

In addition, we also went to New York for Valentine’s day, and we stopped at our favorite Ethiopian place on the way back from Washington, DC in September. All told it was a big year for us and the City That Never Sleeps. Perhaps it could be considered a warm-up, because everybody’s warning us that we’ll be The Parents That Never Sleep starting in February.



CAREERS

Mimi's job improved greatly when she got what she's been requesting for years: the opportunity to focus on only one ward at the Department of Veterans' Affairs Medical Center, rather than two. Stephe's job improved because he is now a Senior Quality Engineering Analyst, meaning he doesn't have to travel for work at all. We both got what we've wanted for several years, so this was definitely a good year for careers.

PETS

Minnie, our little angel cat, is doing fine. She continues to be the ideal cat, the yin to Cooper's yang. Cooper continues to be the cat from hell. He still likes to think "outside the box," and we're at our wits' end trying to figure out how to stop it. We're considering Super Glue on certain parts of him, so he can no longer soil our wooden floors.

In November, we had quite a scare with Cooper. He was clearly sick, and we were afraid that there was a chance he might survive. It took us three veterinarians before we finally found one who could diagnose the problem: she opened Cooper's mouth and found dental floss stuck around his tongue, going down his throat. We had never heard of a 'string obstruction' before, but apparently it's a common problem with cats and it can be fatal. Because of the obstruction, Cooper required surgery right away. However, the vet refused to install a faucet for the demon cat's bladder like we asked.



Santa Minnie



Halloween with Mary (a witch), Stephe (deceased Yankee Cory Lidle), and Julianna (a cheerleader).

AUTOMOTIVE

We are now the proud owners of five, count 'em, five vehicles. We are also the proud owners of exactly zero vehicles that are practical for carting a baby around. Have you ever tried to get a car seat in the back of a MINI Cooper, a Jeep Wrangler, or a 1967 Mustang? Although Mimi insists we'll never get a minivan, we may have to trade in a few of these unused vehicles to get something a little more practical.

HOME

As the old saying goes (sort of), a homeowner's work is never done. This year we painted the office (with a lot of help from Melissa and Glenn), repaired the garage, power washed the front and side of the house with our new powerwasher, battled hungry carpenter bees trying to eat the garage, painted the side of the house, rebuilt part of the stockade fence, tried to find a roofer who would return our phone calls, and bought some new storm windows. We even thought really hard about getting a room ready for the baby. Yet somehow, we still feel as though we only did about 0.001% of the things we'd like to do around here. Oh, well. The other things can wait... probably until the kid's out of college.

ADDITIONAL 2006 HIGHLIGHTS

In June, we finally got to meet a large number of our neighbors. We hosted a neighborhood barbecue, and met some incredibly nice people in the neighborhood. It went off without a hitch, so we're hoping to make it an annual event.

In October, Mimi and her family attended "La Boheme." Stephe volunteered (perhaps "begged" would be a better word for it) to stay home and babysit Jack for the evening. Stephe said something about preferring icepicks in the eardrums to attending an opera.

We spent Halloween with 14-year old Mary and 8-year old Julianna, who are the daughters of one of Mimi's co-workers. As we went trick-or-treating, we loved watching the wide-eyed excitement of the 8-year old and having conversations with the 14-year old, which gave us just a hint of the rewards of parenthood await us.

We've gotten involved in some new activities this year: Mimi has been spending time on eBay buying maternity clothes. Eating Tums has become a new hobby, since the tenant in her belly seems to have moved into Mimi's stomach. Stephe has 'discovered' the joy of I-tunes, turning the home PC into a jukebox with hundreds of songs that can be accessed at the touch of a button.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Mimi and Stephe!