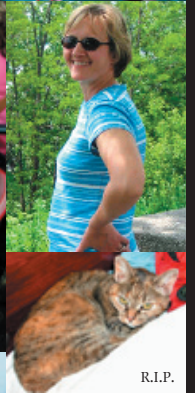
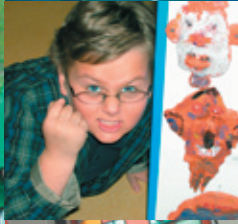
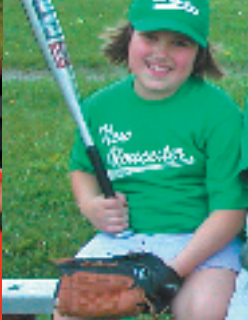


'05 Images



More than Christmas Card, Year II

As we did last year at this time, Team Vanderlips would remind you that any and all conceits attached to executing a comprehensive, photo-enhanced New Year's Letter are utterly frittered away if the thing is compiled before the year previous comes to a complete close. We'd no sooner lop off mention of our July trip to Eagle Lake than omit, because of dubious holiday-card timing conventions, our recent Christmas in Hollywood Beach. And so you receive this now, in 2006, when 2005 can be fully assessed — and after all those "other" holiday communications have arrived and been meaninglessly stored in a decorative basket somewhere in your home. You know the ones we mean: They're often small, with a single picture and little in the way of verbiage; they arrive six or seven at a time and have the impact of, well, a holiday card.

This isn't like that. This is the sort of thing you pore and linger over then pass around to people that don't even know us! Refrigerator material of top quality. Something you want handy so that it might be read again and again.

Frankly, we toyed with the idea of doing a sort of anti-Christmas card this year, a compendious work that recounted *all* the stuff — life-affirming and not-so — that came down in 2005. In other words, those things people never put in holiday letters, or, indeed, those things that are implied by a card's ludicrously sunny tone and purposeful optimism. However, the idea was judged to be out of keeping with the spirit of the season. [Nevertheless, some counter-point items have been included, in italics, for artistic purposes.]

And so, in the interest of efficiently communicating as much news as possible in the limited allotted space (always a very, very, very, very important consideration), let's start with Silas and Clara, those photogenic *but scheming* urchins whose interests, whims and *peculiar habits* drive so much of what goes on here at Camp Vanderlips Resort & Spa.

Clara, now 7, started piano lessons this year and joined the church choir, the aptly and *precisely* named God's Little Voices. She did another stint with the Portland Ballet Co., her third. When you consider the hours upon hours she spends fantasizing and play-acting with her dolls, we clearly see a young woman inching slowly but surely toward a life in drama and the arts. *The devil's work*. The great thing about Clara is that she can spend half her time in her own alternate reality, but when it comes time to engage the outside world, she's all business. An excellent student (second grade this year), she applies this laser-like focus to things like her reading (Little House on the Prairie books this fall), ballet (she's one of the few kids to have learned what all those French terms actually mean) and T-Ball, where she cannily led her Mighty Grasshopper teammates in fielding grounders and beating inevitably confused batters to the first-base bag — instead of fielding and trying to throw it to first, nearly always a dubious/dangerous venture at this level. In short, life continues to be something Clara grabs by the throat and gaily drags behind her.

Silas comes off as somewhat stoic next to Clara but that's not fair because he's a silly, spontaneous bastard in his own right. It's just that he has, in his relatively mature, nine-year-old context, begun to discover the utility of things like understatement, irony and sarcasm which he likes to apply mainly in a self-deprecating, non-sequitorial manner. It's too

funny. Both Silas and Clara made great strides at the piano this year but, again, because he's two years older, the boy has stepped out more. He performed publicly for the first time at a recital dedicating the new church piano: an arrangement of Greensleeves, which he nailed. *There's a parent talking*. He's a big boy now. Walks himself down the driveway most mornings to the bus. Goes off on his own while skiing. Makes his own reading choices. Rides his bike down to the Village Store with friends... During the fall soccer season, another campaign short on victories but long on "keeping it fun," Silas scored his first-ever goal and celebrated with ice cream. *Like it was some sort of milestone. Same thing with the gifted and talented program he earned a place in last spring. You want to grab him by the shoulders and say, "Hey, big shot, some day you'll have a job and a couple of kids and we'll see what that goal, what that facility with word play does for you then!"*

October was a big month. Sharon and Hal celebrated their 10th anniversary with a return trip to Great Diamond Island, scene of the crime as it were. This time, however, they brought the fruit of their labor (well, Sharon's): the kids, who took great care to nod appreciatively when mom and dad pointed out this landmark and that. Their first real fancy dinner out and they did well, *though the service was spotty — we had to ditch dessert in order to catch the ferry home. You can't have everything*. The 'Rents also celebrated their first decade of marriage with a weekend away, in Boston, where they took in the latest Band Of The Moment, Son Volt, at The Paradise. Big month musically, come to think of it: Hal saw another BOTM, My Morning Jacket, in Portland, and made his live vocal debut with a local band of boys called Mountain Avenue. *Squeaky, nervous versions of Powderfinger and It Stoned Me. It can only get better*.

Sharon exercises her public-display jones via her continuing stint on the MSAD 15 School Board. *You should see those committee members all preening for the cable-access cameras. It's a big fashion show*. Sharon and Hal actually combined forces this year to help pass a not insignificant school bond — in a district notorious for shooting them down. Needless to say, with a Vander and a Lips buoying the "yes" contingent, naysayers were charmed and beaten into submission. The Blond One also went back to work this fall. Part time, but the Dutch Calvinist in her, not to mention her supreme capability, meant she closed 2005 with a pair of part-time jobs. She hopes to be down to one, with MedTech Publishing (headquartered at NG's Pineland Center), by the end of January. Needless to say, she now values all the more her solitary, recharging activities (quilting, sewing, gardening) while Hal has taken over all the dinner cooking.

Let's see. What else... The kids learned to ski last year and we foresee another busy winter working our way up from Lost Valley, to Shawnee Peak, to Sunday River... We read aloud: Harry Potter, The Narnia Chronicles, A Christmas Carol (reprising a Phillips Family tradition)... We snorkeled together off Fort Lauderdale in December, *but does that build the bonds we all hear about? We're still waiting*... No, really, we're having a great time! If you don't believe it, come on up to New Gloucester and see for yourselves. Or, better yet, we'll come visit you in 2006. *We like to eat early... and it would be nice to have clean sheets this time*.

Happy New Year!