

HOLIDAY LETTER '07

"*Me happy now.*" Reid says these three beautiful words whenever he hears or does something that strikes his fancy. Learning that "Kaboom" (America's Funniest Videos) will be on Sunday night or that Craig will be home from Boulder for a visit; going to Paige's school to "push me please" (Reid's words for swinging), or just hearing that I will be home from work in time for dinner – any one of these is enough to trigger the phase.

I was wondering *what* would make most of us say *me happy now*? Getting a promotion, a raise or an unexpected day off? Getting flowers or a massage? Taking a trip with someone we love? Reading (or writing) a good book? Reconnecting with an old friend? Closing a huge deal? Visiting a family member that we haven't seen for a while? If these are the things that make us happy then it seems that we should be doing them, or, at least, working toward doing them. There is nothing wrong with focusing on a little happiness in the midst of our sometimes-crazy over-scheduled lives, right? I would really like to declare 2008 'the Year of Joy!'

Many of you probably heard about Randy Pausch, the young professor at Carnegie Mellon who was told he had just a few months to live earlier this year. A father of 3 small children, he chose to use his remaining time to make a positive impact on the world and to establish an exemplary legacy for his children. He called the diagnosis "a gift" saying: "to actually know how much time I had left on this earth gave me a chance to plan carefully how I used every minute." His Final Lecture has been viewed by millions of people on YouTube, and he has truly made a positive difference in many lives. My favorite point in Randy's presentation is that brick walls are put in our way not to stop us, but to give us something to break through. He talks a lot about childhood dreams, and enabling the dreams of others. These are the kinds of wonderful things that Lawrence Calahan and his amazing family focused on in his final months. God bless them for the gift they gave us in the message "to live like you're dying."

Albert Ellis, whom *Psychology Today* once described as the "greatest living psychologist" (before he died, of course), was fond of quoting the Greek stoic philosopher, Epictetus, who essentially said: 'It's **not events, but our opinions of them**, which cause us suffering. The challenge is to be able to change our opinions and mental habits so that we become robust and self-accepting enough to withstand external events that used to cause us suffering, such as getting rejected by a woman or getting fired.' So as we face the inevitable challenges of daily life, maybe our response to whatever happens around us should be *me happy now*...not only when Paige makes a full-out diving save in a soccer game, but when she lets a soft goal slip past her -- *me happy now* that she is able to play and be part of such a great team. When I think of Craig graduating from college in May it makes me smile, but I still need to be happy if he says he may not move back to Boston. I am typing with a stiff neck and wearing a brace right now, but Reid keeps kissing my neck saying "bubba better?" Even with this pain, how can I not be happy now?

Where else can we find Reid's wonderful perspective in our lives? How about when loved ones like Jorgan, Kristen and Aunt Judy beat the odds and get a good bill-of-health; when I receive a wonderful book like "Season of Life" (thanks, Kathy) and I like it so much that I send a bunch of copies to my high school football friends; when Karen tells me she and Clara got a "Big W" in their team tennis match; when Paige says she really likes her teachers; when we learned that our 6-month kitchen renovation project would be done (almost) on time; when we heard that Craig's first snowboarding runs of the season were a blast; when thinking about our annual trip to

Florida with the Johnsons; going to a World Series game in Denver; or when the Potash family welcomes us into their home on Thanksgiving. *Me happy now.* How about a weekend with Lizzie on Nantucket, a vacation in Florida with the Beaudoins, sharing my collection of poems with a friend, or hearing Paige sing in the school chorus. What about weekend getaways with Karen, or going to a yoga class (my new favorite workout), or winning our flight in the member-guest at Rick's club. There is real joy in seeing the rapport and connection Karen has with her brothers...and what about Terry and Jodi having a baby! *Me happy now.*

I am reminded of the movie *Being There* in which Peter Sellers' character shares simple insights (mostly gleaned from TV) that catapult him from being a recluse gardener to a Presidential advisor. "If you give the flowers water, they will grow..." Simplicity. No agenda. No political clutter and no ego. Here, simple, honest phrases are interpreted as genius and loving kindness – a lot of lessons in a simple movie.

There are a number of life lessons encapsulated in Reid's simple little phrase, too. We are blessed to have a loving caretaker, Helaine, who spends a lot of quality time with Reid. But someday we will need to introduce Reid to a home where he will be with peers and full-time caretakers. We will plan and make the move sensitively, but leaving him there for the first time will be devastating emotionally. Our strength at that moment will not come from within, though; it will come from Reid when he looks around his new digs for the first time and turns to us with his disarming smile and says "*me happy now.*" We will draw on his capacity to accept profound change, appreciate life's constants and connections, and his willingness to openly express his feelings....now that, my friends, is inspiration.

So why is there so much focus on Reid this year, when we have two other wonderful children? Partly it's because no matter how you interpret the Bible, its insights about children are priceless. The psalm says: "Come as a baby weak and poor to bring all hearts together." God has blessed us with someone who, in many ways, will always be a child. "Whomever welcomes this little child ... welcomes God." Reid doesn't rely on hype or phony positivism to enjoy life; he just enjoys what he enjoys; he seeks it out and drinks it in. Even something as basic as bedtime prayers (which he calls "God Bless") or riding in the front seat of the bus or seeing a UPS truck gets it done for him. I want to learn from that perspective what joys I might be missing in everyday life....

Talking about Reid also gives me a chance to talk about Karen--she who for 17 years has never once – not once – complained about how much work it is to bathe and feed and dress Reid; no complaints about trips to the doctor or spilled water. Like Laurie Rabe, for whom the same can be said, this, to me, is the true definition of 'motherhood.' Thank you to all who give care and comfort to those in need or less fortunate. It represents the kind of giving that I want to be reminded of this holiday season.

We can slice and package 'time' any way we want, and it may seem artificial to say we are at the end of a "gift;" but we are at the end of another year, and that is a gift for which I am truly thankful. Let 'the first gift of Christmas' this year be hope for more time together to live, and to give and to love.

Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, and a Great New Year to all from the Durhams.