

The *Masters of the Snowballing Project* return with our much anticipated 2004 Christmas letter. Once again we have proven our inability to do anything on a small scale, even when we mean to. This is JoAnn's trait, as anyone who knows Keith will surely attest.

The year started out quietly enough. But by February we were pregnant and all bets were off. For most people the pregnancy becomes the dominant feature in their lives. We had a few other irons in the fire so we compromised and chose not to sleep for a few months so we could get everything done. Good baby training, right? Now we will babble about how cool and cute our baby is and why you should all just adore her. Just like all parents should.

For the first nine months Megan (who was unnamed until three days old) enjoyed aerobics at whatever late hour JoAnn finally managed to get to bed, using Jo's bladder as a punching bag at *all* hours, and (as you can see) doing her best to grow hair. On October 28 at 9:57 pm she blessed us with her presence. She interrupted *The Apprentice*, which Keith and the nurse were watching between contractions. Keith doesn't even like the show, but hey Jo wasn't really in the mood for conversation. Nevertheless, she was not amused. Luckily for Keith the drugs kept Jo from actually killing him. Jo got a room with a Jacuzzi, which was very cool. Unfortunately once she elected to have an epidural they get a little picky about letting you back into a tub so she had to forego further trips. Labor was about 3 hours of active pushing, although we were in the room for about 10 hours. Keith did great. JoAnn was OK too. The whole family from great-grandparents down was here for the event and post-baby support from Keith's mom and Jo's mom & grandmother (who are quiet happy to be grandmothers) and we are truly lucky and grateful for all the help we have received.

Megan has been an absolute joy, even when she has been frustrating, crying, stubborn, nocturnal, fussy, and apparently afraid of ever lying down flat to sleep. By early December Miss Megan was already 11 pounds and just over 22 inches. According to the charts she's in the 98th percentile for growth. We're wondering why she's slacking and not getting 99s. The pediatrician gave her a 10 out of 10 for both volume and persistence of screaming at the last visit (except for the French judge, who gave her a 6). And there weren't even vaccines involved. Megan became self propelled (barely, but there was perceptible forward motion) at about 4 weeks of age. Can anyone explain to us why all baby equipment has battery compartments that screw shut? *Babies have no motor skills!* Lawyers must have made it so risky to build baby stuff that companies have to do this. Sorry, was that a political rant?

Now about those snowballing projects. The original plan was to redo one room for Megan. Simple. It had a significant amount of plaster damage from before we moved in, ugly carpet hiding hardwood that needed to be refinished, needed paint, the closet needed to be redone, both windows needed to be replaced, new molding all around, one new closet door, and it needed wiring. All in all, that room project went very well, with some absolutely beautiful faux painting done by friend Lori Wilson. We couldn't leave well enough alone.

The first snowball was to decide that, since we had all the plastering equipment and materials out why not just do the plaster repair needed in the dining room too? Unfortunately the "little plaster work" in the dining room became a discovery that several ceiling joists, headers, sill plates and various other important structural parts of the house had rotted away to nothing. So that had to be replaced. Which made a big enough hole that we decided to just go ahead and renovate that *whole room* while we were at it. And not just simply; no, we had to get fancy and use a Venetian Plaster paint, two tone ceiling with a Venetian Plaster border, crown molding, strip and redo the mantle, replace an entire wall (no insulation, bad wiring, and knotty pine that just didn't go with the room), and redo the built-in bookcase).

While this was all going on the float in the downstairs toilet broke. You wouldn't think it, but somehow between "Keith, fix the toilet float" and "OK, I'm done" the toilet was in the tub and the entire bathroom floor had to come up and be replaced. Suffice it to say Keith found a few leaks that had to be dealt with. The old floor was ugly anyway, so it's much nicer now that it's been redone in tile by Jo's dad. Oh, we had the entire

first floor hardwood refinished too. Moving everything upstairs, into the garage, and into the basement was great fun. You should try it some weekend.

Keith promised everything would be done before the baby showed up. Exactly 20 hours before leaving for the hospital Keith dumped the last bucket of clean-up mop water and the project was done. The basement was still packed with an unbelievable amount of tools, equipment, and left over supplies. All of which Keith's dad Frank and Grandfather somehow managed to clean up for us while we were in the hospital. So now the entire house except for the basement and garage has been redone. Despite all the work we've reported over the years we still have ten projects left on our list. That will keep you in Christmas newsletters for another decade. They're all minor things, of course, like "Replace furnace, water, and heating system" (that counts as one project) and "Redo driveway layout and paving". You know, weekend stuff.

This year we've managed (finally) to buy property on which we'll be building the Frontier Equine clinic for horses. Don't even ask about the hassle and trouble of trying to buy property and get town approval. It's over, and we don't want to think about it any more. Of course, we had to close on the property *the day after* Megan was born. Ever try to close on property from a hospital with a newborn? We don't recommend it.

Yes, we are going to build a hospital. Why not? It sounds like fun. Actually this has been in the business plan since the beginning. Michele, Keith's sister, is an architect and she (through the firm she works for) is going to do the design. The initial meeting was the first week in December. Hopefully by the next installment of this letter we'll have some new construction to share. Michele also got married this year to Jeff Karam (two weeks before the baby was born, as it happens). It was a great wedding weekend and a super busy October.

Keith is still working at PTC. For the past year and at least through 2007 he is working exclusively with John Deere. Keith is just like a kid in a toy store (the Deere toy store in Moline, IL is pretty cool by the way) with this assignment. He keeps trying to convince them to let him test drive the construction and forestry equipment (they have a great outdoor testing field). Strangely, they haven't said yes yet.

Oh, someone totaled Jo's truck back in February, right after she became pregnant. They came over the line out of control and hit her $\frac{3}{4}$ ton pick up hard enough to put the left front wheel in the driver's compartment and fold the frame in half. She got a bruise on her hand (and a new truck). Thank God it was nothing serious.

We got a new horse named Clark (name not our choice). He's a very cool 8 year old Appaloosa gelding reining horse. Jo thinks he's her horse. She did ride him (while 7 months pregnant) at the Delaware County fair and won all four classes she entered (plus a fourth place in Trail, which he had never done before).

Jo and Keith both became directors of the Western New York chapter of the NYS Horse Council this year. Keith also became a director of the Erie County Farm Bureau, and just attended the state meeting.

Thanks to everyone who visited this year, we love having guests. Looking forward to next year's visitors, Megan's growth, new business challenges, more house projects (budget permitting),

Did we mention Megan? Oh, yeah. Well, we'll mention her again. She's so cute.

Best wishes to you all for a happy, healthy, safe, wealthy, exciting, challenging, and joyous Christmas and new year.

Love,