



Don & Amy's Annual Holiday Newsletter

Check us out on the web at www.vallonesworld.8m.com

Volume 2, Issue 1

January, 2001

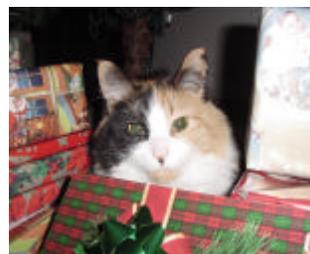
Anticipated Newsletter Gets Delayed

Happy Holidays!

We're behind schedule a bit with this year's Christmas letter. It seems that there's always something holding up production. The holiday season so far has proven to be a bit stressful and accident-prone. Last week, Amy lost part of her lips in a bizarre holiday gift wrapping accident. I'm not at all able to explain how such an unheard of thing could happen, but Amy is always breaking new ground in the area of proving that nothing is impossible. According to her story, with blood and tears streaming down her face, her lower lip became inseparably attached to a

piece of Scotch tape while wrapping a gift. With the other half of the tape attached to the package, she claims there was no other escape from the unusual situation than to quickly pull her face away from the package, leaving chunks of flesh taped neatly against the red and green wrapping paper. This will also explain why my letter is not arriving this year until *after* everyone has opened their Christmas gifts from Amy (actually, she admitted later that she was wrapping one of *my* gifts)! So, If you are looking for unique package decorating ideas, just ask Amy. Another festive way to use Scotch tape creatively while decorating your packages is to catch a large clump of cat fur under the

piece of tape while you are affixing it to your package. If your cat has white fur that sheds abundantly and drifts through the air to land where it may, the clumps of fur that get caught on the sticky tape can resemble snowflakes or a "snowball" on your package. Our cat, Autumn, helped me make snowballs on my Christmas packages this year.



Autumn helps with the Christmas package decorating.

Looking Back on 2000

Well, looking back, 2000 was a year to top all years so far for us. The year was nothing less than the roller coaster ride of our lives. As the year began amongst holiday wishes for health and wealth in the New Year, corporate headquarters closed down the commercial real estate office where Amy was employed. With no advance warning, moving vans pulled up to the front doors and movers began hauling company furniture and equipment away. Amy was laid off. Jobless. Unemployed. To anyone else this may have been devastating. However, the most stressful part of this ordeal for Amy was picking out a new suit for the job interview she had already lined up within 24 hours. She was offered the position immediately and accepted. She has enjoyed working downtown with the real estate consulting firm of Ferrara Jerum International, and sees the potential for a long and rewarding career with the company. Meanwhile, Xerox had started the paperwork trail for my promotion to a permanent full-time Test Engineer (back then, a share of Xerox stock could buy more than a cup of coffee so the opportunity looked promising). With bright new career paths ahead of us both, we began dreaming of owning a real house.



Inside this issue:

Newsletter Gets Delayed	1
Looking Back on 2000	1
Thanks For the Help, Jan!	2
Amy Revisits Her Past	2
Finally, A Home!	3
Autumn Keeps Her Claws	3
On Being Homeowners	3
Autumn Approves	4
Happy New Year!	4



Here's hoping that you and your family are enjoying a happy and healthy holiday season. It is our prayer that you will enjoy comfort and success in the coming new year. We have been richly blessed with friends and family that we appreciate more than words on paper can express. Thanks to all who helped make our year a special and memorable one!



Thanks For the Help, Jan!

One late winter day we began looking at real estate ads. And the fun began. The stress was copious. Additionally, the tiring job of looking at houses nearly every night after work and every weekend was all consuming. Every house we fell in love with was sold before we could even make an offer. Occasionally, a gem would pop up that was too good to be true that somehow didn't get snatched up by our competition. We would get tips on the good ones from friends and family, like Amy's Mom. One day she called us on the phone, barely able to contain her excitement. She told us of a house she saw advertised in Irondequoit with an acre of land and a wooded lot with a rolling stream! Wow, we couldn't get there fast enough. We were ready to buy if this was even half as nice as it sounded.

The house was vintage 1860's, but boasted a "newer" remodeled kitchen (circa 1930's) and "newer" carpeting

throughout (don't even ask). Every room was filled to the ceiling with family "treasures", and it smelled like a treasure as well. Trying my best to avoid being rude and laughing in her face, I asked the selling agent if we could go down to the basement (I wanted to make her feel useful after hearing her tell us that we were the only prospects to look at the house so far). She told us where the basement was but explained that we couldn't go down there because there was no room to walk. She pointed to a curtain hanging from the wall, then pulled it aside to reveal a mountain of discarded items piled so high in the basement that it literally climbed up the stairs and spilled over into the living room. By now we wanted out fast, so I asked some questions about the creek and the woods behind the house. The agent was de-

"Every room was filled to the ceiling with family "treasures", and it smelled like a treasure as well."

lighted to explain that all of the wooded land came with the house. By the time we got outside and looked over the edge of the lawn at the creek and the woods, I was no longer concerned about maintaining a polite front. I burst out laughing until tears ran down my cheeks as my gaze fell upon a me-

nagerie of broken and discarded water heaters, stoves, refrigerators, and other major appliances. Bathtubs, automobile parts, and assorted living room furniture were also strewn over the earth in

every visible corner of the lot. Thanks for the tip on this one, Jan.

The best part came the very next morning when the selling agent called us to ask if we were planning to make a purchase offer. I have no doubt that the property is still on the market if you are looking for a house with real character!

Amy Revisits Her Hard Rocking Past

The 1980's. We all wonder if Amy will ever leave this decade behind. I'm sure you have heard Amy preach endlessly of the greatness of her rock idol, Jon Bon Jovi. Her eyes still roll backward with delight and her jaw drops with the weight of salivary secretion at the mere mention of his name or the sound of his raspy, rough-edged voice. I can only dream of eliciting that kind of a response from her until I grow my hair long, dye it blond, and curl it up real pretty like these guys. What is it about men with long blond hair and make-up that drives young girls crazy? Anyway, I was coerced into a "romantic" anniversary weekend getaway to relaxing New York City. Besides the persistent power failures every time the hair dryer was turned on

in the 2x2 bathroom, the hotel was really nice. About what you'd expect for a \$200 a night room in Manhattan. Amy surprised me with tickets to see a Broadway musical. Little did I know she had her own agenda. The tickets were for Jekyll & Hyde, currently starring 80's hair rock icon, Sebastian Bach. My stomach churned at the thought. Especially when we got to the theatre to pick up our tickets and I found out she had spent \$85 per seat!

After listening to this guy rock his way through the show, I then had the added excitement of waiting with the rest of the crowd of teeny-boppers at the stage door for over an hour in suffocating heat and humidity. You can just imagine my excitement as he

stepped out and Amy began screaming at me to get the camera ready.

All in all, the weekend was memorable (I actually DID enjoy the show). Now Amy has spent the last few months "rediscovering" all the great heavy metal music of her teen years. As for myself, I prefer to move ahead with the rest of you into the sound of the new millennium.





Finally, A Home !

As the summer wore on, we wore out our own real estate agent. She would fax us a new listing every day but we just couldn't find the right house. We were just about to give up for the year when I saw a photo on the Internet of a house in Webster. I called Amy at work and told her that we had found our house. Our house was perfectly situated in a new development with a picturesque pond in back and friendly neighbors who waved hello on our first drive through to look around. The former owners were poor housekeepers, but we overlooked that on our walk

through and only saw the grand possibilities that the house held for us. We made a purchase offer and it was accepted. Now, all that there was to do was wait until closing and keep saving our money for that big down payment! Of course the roller coaster ride was not over just yet.



File photo from real estate listing

Now, mysteriously, both of our cars decided break down during the same month and leave

us stranded without transportation. Amy was even taking the bus to work! The engine on "The Love Boat" was about to seize, but we rolled in to the dealer on a stiff breeze to trade it in (yes, the sales manager did laugh) on a new Ford. We then looked around a bit more for another car and found a deal on a new Saturn. With funds now depleted, we nervously drove to the house closing to sign 30 years of our livelihoods away to a mortgage company. We were given the keys to our new home and we set out on our way to begin life as homeowners!

Autumn Keeps Her Claws (...for now)

Meanwhile, the battle of the issue of the destructive personality of the cat raged on. Autumn was learning very well how to do

"Amy suspected my fiendish plan just before her trip"

just the right things to push me over the edge. It must be some kind of inborn sensitivity to human suffering that al-

lows a cat to discover what bothers you the most and then concentrate all efforts on repeating that behavior with squeals of delight. Her rolling, growling, meows of delight echoed melodically through the new house as I chased her daily away from the expensive sofa that she to this day believes was purchased only because it provides the ideal material to sharpen her claws against! An out of town business trip

for Amy provided the ideal opportunity for a little trip to the vet for Autumn. However, Amy suspected my fiendish plan just before her trip when she discovered that I had made an appointment for a "check-up" for Autumn at a new veterinarian. Ultimately, I was faced with a decision. The result of my decision is that Autumn got to keep her claws and I don't have to sleep in the guestroom!

On Being Homeowners

The shock of home ownership hit hard and fast. Our stomachs lurched as the coaster dipped one more time on its perilous track. We walked in to our new home to find that the previous owner had left most of his belongings behind. Among his "gifts" to us that he no doubt thought we would appreciate were a painting of his ex-wife, soiled towels in the bathroom, thickly dust-

covered bric-a-brac on every wall, and a pile of rotted and ant-infested firewood just to name a few. Anything he didn't want to take with him was simply left behind untouched. I suppose he realized that if he removed the pictures from the walls he would be exposing the great holes and arrays of nails, screws, and bolts that protruded randomly from the drywall and the cu-

riously stained paint. Even his dog left behind something to welcome us on the living room carpet.



Autumn Approves of the New House

We spent the fall cleaning up and settling into our new home. We owe a debt of gratitude to Amy's Dad for all of his plumbing, pool closing, electrical, and carpentry skills! Family and close friends welcomed us into our new home with a Halloween house-warming party! We enjoyed cider and donuts while lighting our first fire in our fireplace!



Our cat Autumn decided she liked the new house as soon as she realized that by squeezing through the banister on the second floor balcony and climbing across the pine support beams that cross over the living room from the

second floor she could elude capture whenever she misbehaved! She finds this tactical strategy most useful whenever I'm chasing her to put her in the basement for the night!



Autumn finds a way to escape from punishment by running across the ceiling beams

Happy New Year !

Now the holidays are upon us once more and the roller coaster car is settling back into the starting gate of the track to begin another new year. What further adventures await us in the coming new year? Will Autumn fall from the support beam while trying to chase snowflakes falling beyond the second story window? Stay tuned and look for the next installment of Don & Amy's Holiday Newsletter, or visit our web site for the latest update! Merry Christmas to all, and may your roller coaster car ride into the New Year on a safe and steady track!

Love,
Don & Amy

We're on the Web!
www.vallonesworld.8m.com



Here are some photos from our first Christmas in our new home. Season's Greetings from our house to yours!

