

Don & Amy's
Holiday Newsletter
2004

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Merry Christmas from the Vallone Family!

Happy Holidays one and all! Another Christmas season is upon us and we've made it through another year (almost). What a year it has been (those familiar with the annual holiday newsletter know that I will back that statement up in the next few pages). I am still contracted at Ortho Clinical Diagnostics (Johnson & Johnson) as a Lead Test Engineer, validating the development of various software tools to be used by the company's Field Engineers and Service Technicians throughout the world. Amy has just taken leave from her career as Technical Admin

and Commercial Real Estate Consultant at Ferrara Jerum International. For those of you who keep in touch only through our holiday newsletters, I would like to start off this year's letter with the announcement of the anticipated arrival of our children! We found out back in May that Amy was pregnant with triplets. We lost one of the triplets at 21 weeks due to existing developmental complications and trauma following a car accident, but the other

two are healthy and active. By Christmas week, our twins will be at 34 weeks gestation and are expected to arrive at any time (if they haven't already since this newsletter was published).



Ultrasound of our twins (top view of heads) at 25 weeks



Check out the website at http://vallonesworld.com/family/the_vallone_triplets.htm for the latest updates!

The 2004 Newsletter Tells All

- *What do a dirty bathtub and a watermelon have in common? (PAGE 2)*
- *What will happen to Autumn after the babies arrive? (PAGE 3)*
- *What simple home improvement causes years of misery? (PAGE 6)*

Diary of a Pregnant Husband

(Things I Learned While Waiting for the Twins)

It has not been an easy pregnancy. Some expectant mothers never have a day of morning sickness. Amy's started almost the day our children were conceived. Her first symptom was exhaustion. She slept all day long on the weekends until the nausea forced

her up and running to the bathroom. Very quickly it became obvious that she was not always going to be able to precede the "purging event" with a trip to the bathroom. Soon buckets were strategically placed in every room so that she had something to grab when the urge

came, as it did up to seventeen times in one day. I learned to double and triple the bags in the wastebaskets to make cleanup easier after discovering that modern plastic grocery bags are not leak proof by any stretch of the imagination. Often there was no time to even grab the bucket or wastebasket. Soon, laundry became the most common household

chore in order to clean the shirts, pants, shoes, bedding, blankets, etc. that were soiled on a daily basis. I tried to soothe her by promising that it would be over soon. Everyone told us that after the first trimester the morning sickness would end. But I learned that when it comes to the two of us you can't base anything on the experience of other normal,

typical, average human beings. The morning sickness continued throughout the entire second trimester and into the third before easing up (for a couple of weeks before starting up again). I also learned that the symptoms of pregnancy are not always confined to the pregnant woman. The man will often (OK, well at least in MY case) experience similar "sympathy" symptoms of pregnancy to improve the man's ability to empathize with his pregnant wife. These symptoms can include acne, nausea, tiredness, and weight gain. These symptoms can be explained. A change in diet can create skin problems. These diet changes result from the pregnant woman not being able to eat normal food with her husband. So the husband has to prepare special meals in order to avoid spontaneous vomiting at the sights and smells of the husband's favorite dishes. When the wife does not gain enough weight, she needs to increase her intake of ice cream, Ho-Ho's, and donuts. The husband tells himself that he is helping the babies grow by keeping the freezer well stocked with Perry's Premium, Edy's, and Ben & Jerry's; and that donuts are cheaper by the dozen. The husband's weight gain can also be helpful when trying to boost his pregnant wife's self esteem when she thinks she has the uglies by telling her, "Don't cry, Honey. Look, I'm as



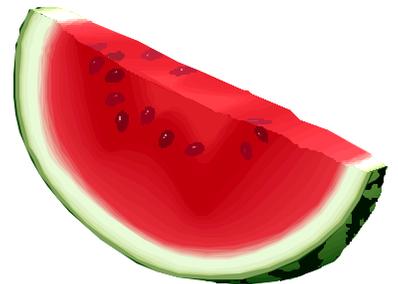
big as you are!". It has even been documented that some husbands will grow breasts and can actually lactate (I won't go there...look it up on the Internet). When the husband drives the very pregnant wife to work, and gurgling belches forewarn the driver that his passenger is about to release quarts of projectile vomit like a fire hose spewing uncontrollably into the car, it is easier to understand how the husband can develop nausea as well. Then after a long day at work, when the husband picks up the pregnant wife and drops her off at home before

he goes back out alone - grocery shopping, filling the gas tank, driving back home to unload the groceries, putting a load of laundry over, collecting the garbage to put out, changing the cat's litter box, cooking dinner, returning phone calls, serving dinner, cleaning up the kitchen, and changing the laundry, one can see why the husband would also share the symptom of tiredness among the others awaiting the delivery of their twins. I also learned that nine months can seem like **forever**.



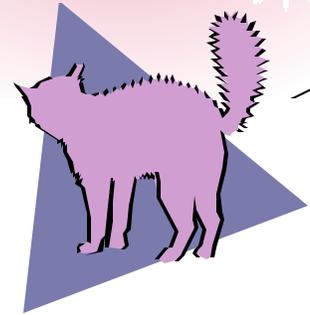
Good Help Really is Hard to Find

You've heard the cliché before, now you can read more evidence as to why it is so true. As Amy's pregnancy progressed she became less and less able to do much of anything around the house. It was a busy summer for me at work as well. Barely able to make it through a work day, Amy was on the sofa or in bed sleeping for the night promptly upon returning home at the end of each day. This allowed the cooking, cleaning, shopping, pet care, laundry, etc., etc. to default almost entirely to my responsibility. I had a brilliant thought to hire a cleaning company to clean the house twice a month until after the babies are born and we get ourselves adjusted to our hectic new schedule. I hired a local company that had me a little nervous right from the start. On their first cleaning day I watched inconspicuously from a second story window as a rusty old jalopy slowly pulled into the driveway sputtering and spitting. Three women emerged from the old station wagon and moved around back to unload the cargo area. The first woman to emerge with part of the day's supplies wore an excited smile as she carried a giant watermelon with both hands toward the house until it slipped out of her hands and smashed in pieces all over our driveway. Her smiled quickly melted as she picked up the pieces and tossed them into our garbage can that was sitting near the front porch (it was temporarily located near the



front door as a convenience to deposit the endless bags of vomit into). After reluctantly leaving them alone in my home while Amy and I were at work, they proceeded to do whatever it was they came there to do. After work that evening I was greeted at the front of the house by swarms of flies diving in and out of the garbage can that the cleaning crew had left uncovered. A sticky mess from the watermelon juice still lay puddled on the driveway being slurped up by the swarms of insects. The cleaners left a pleasant note thanking us for our business. The note may as well have read, "Thank you, suckers. We had a party in your house all day and did nothing that you paid us to do." It looked as though either there had been an earthquake during the day or else someone quickly went through the house and pushed all of our pictures off balance on the walls so it would look obvious that they made an effort to be thorough. Ironically, though, you could still write your name in the layer of crud that covered each of the freshly "dusted" objects. So that's exactly what I did. I took my finger and carved the word "HI" into the layer of dust on a telephone that sat on our bookcase. I then called the company's manager and complained that everything they touched somehow looked dirtier than it did before they came. I told him that there was dark scum corroded on the walls and floor of the bathtub as if someone had simply sprayed a liquid cleaner and then walked away to let it drip and dry. He told me that it was only a "haze" from the cleaning solution that they use and it would eventually improve as they cleaned more often. He sent them back one more time and insisted that he would personally supervise this time. When we returned home after the second cleaning and I walked through the front door, I stepped in broken glass. A large mirror had fallen from the wall in the front hallway and smashed on the floor. Shards

of glass were everywhere throughout the first floor of the house and even up the stairs as if a bomb had exploded. Other pictures hanging on the walls were again tilted and off center ready to fall as well. The tub was still as dirty as it was before and our decorative antique telephone greeted me with a bold "HI" still plainly visible in the thick dust. The supervisor insisted that he personally watched over the crew and that everything had been finished to his satisfaction before they left. I explained that if this was his idea of a satisfactory cleaning he was in the wrong business, and promptly fired him. We are still looking for help with chores around the house that will actually make life easier for us rather than more difficult.

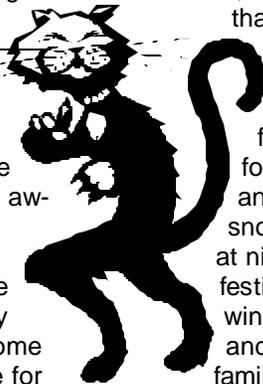


The Tale of the Obsolete Cat (A Christmas Story)

Once upon a time there was a furry little kitten sitting and minding her own business in a little crate at Lollypop Farm. One day, a deceitful wife who lied to her husband when she agreed that a cat would never come between them, walked into Lollypop Farm and saw the kitten. Knowing fully that it would upset her husband if she brought it home with her, she gleefully purchased the animal and set the box with the kitten inside of it in the hallway of their home so that it would be the first thing her husband saw when he came through the door on his way home from work. She eagerly awaited his arrival like a butcher sharpening his cutlery before the arrival of the day's fresh meat. When the poor husband saw the cat, he knew that his marriage would never be the same again. His status in the household fell to that of a family pet (some would say even lower) as he watched the kitten grow to take his place as the family decision maker, object of affection, and "head of the household". Years passed slowly for the husband. Years of allergic reactions, asthmatic attacks,

destruction of favorite possessions, and neglect. The neglected husband was ultimately reduced to cleaning and removing the cat's excrement from its royal throne. Well, one day the wife found herself "with child"(ren). The kitty gradually sensed that something was wrong....very wrong. The wife became too preoccupied with moaning, groaning, vomiting, and sleeping to pay as much attention to the cat as she used to. Soon, the cat began to look on in fear as the wife called out the name of the husband before that of the cat (the cat, you see, is unable to prepare meals, clean the house, do the laundry, shop for groceries, mop up vomit, or run errands). All of the extra coughing up of fur balls, vomiting undigested cat food, and pooping fully digested cat food (and sometimes other miscellaneous objects for variety) on the carpet throughout the house failed to increase the level of attention she received. Fearing the worst, the cat played to "make friends" with the babies while still in the wife's belly. The cat pretended to enjoy

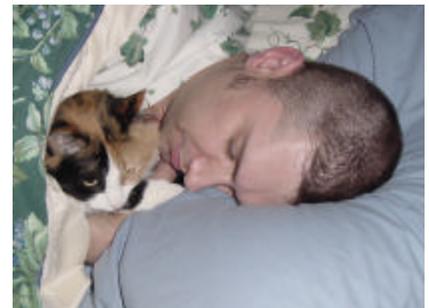
spending time "nurturing" the new human life moving around inside of the wife in hopes of reminding the man's wife that the cat was still useful and desirable to have around (while all the time knowing that once the babies arrive she will be cast aside like the first unwanted toy that these awful human children invaders tire of). Soon it was Christmastime, and the days of the cat's worst nightmares finally arrived. When the babies come home there is no longer time for tender love play between the wife and the cat. With their minds focused on the babies, they forget to feed the cat and change its litter box. Since there is even more crap and puke piled all over the carpet throughout the house than there is inside the litter box, the cat decides she must find a way to the outside world where she can find a clean patch of grass on which to relieve her bowels. She waits for the first opportunity to escape, but that comes quickly since none of the



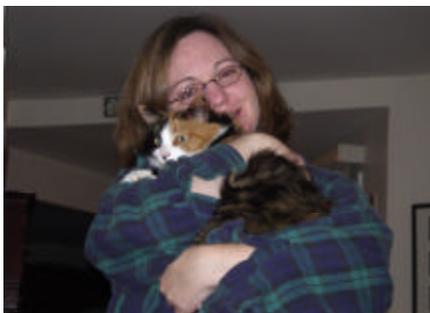
humans are even paying the slightest attention to her. Once on the outside, the obsolete cat discovers that it is Winter (whatever that is) and all of the grass is covered by cold, white, icy stuff. She wanders around for days in the cold, looking for something to eat by day and sleeping in a cavern of snow melted by her own urine at night. As colored lights blink festively through the frosted windows of all of the houses and the obsolete cat sees families carving turkeys, her little stomach growls and aches with hunger. Nearly frozen and starved, the obsolete cat walks, dazed, into oncoming traffic on an icy road. A few months later, the humans finally notices that the cat is missing. Their only clue to its whereabouts is a bumper sticker pasted to the back side of a car they pass on the highway while taking the new babies for a ride. The bumper sticker reads, **"Lost your cat? Check under my tire!"** . And the new little family lived happily ever after.

Post Script Note:

Most of the events in the preceding story are true. Certain parts of the story **may** have been exaggerated for literary effect. Other parts of the story may not have actually happened at all.... **yet**. There have also been rumors that Don has been harboring a suppressed affection for the cat....When asked to confirm these rumors, Don would not comment.

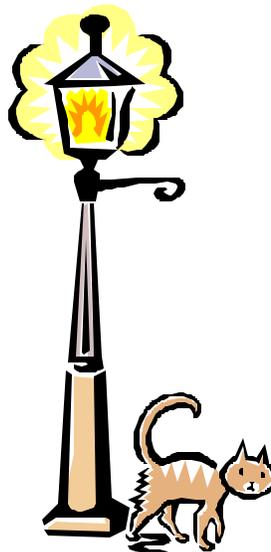


Hidden Kitty-Cam Catches A Secret Indiscretion



Amy hugs Autumn "goodbye"

THE END.



MERRY CHRISTMAS

More Lessons Learned in 2004

We recently both bought new cars and within months of driving them off the dealer's lot found ourselves in the body shop.....again and again and again. We learned that a \$500 deductible is not a pleasant thing to deal with, especially when you do it three times within a period of a few months and you never change your policy to a lower deductible because you think that it can't possibly happen to you again so soon. I also learned some other things, like:

1. Don't try a new route into work on a day when the weather is bad

One morning early in the year, there was a late winter snow and ice storm that left the roads a mess to drive on. That morning, thinking I would save time, I drove into my office park from the south instead of the north. This was the first time I had taken this route into the office park. My all-wheel drive and the long straight road boosted my confidence behind the wheel. I felt totally in control and in charge until a sharp turn in the road suddenly approached unexpectedly. Although I commanded the car to turn, it stubbornly remained on a collision path with a cement curb, a traffic sign, and a lovely landscaped barrier. My car smashed into the curb. The momentum and the slippery ice helped it jump up into the landscaped barrier and into the traffic sign until it came to rest. When it did come to rest I realized that it was no longer drivable. I was three hours late for work when the collision shop towed the car to their shop and offered me a ride to the office.

2. Don't let your wife drive her car in a strange city

Just a couple short months after my icy mishap, Amy drove to Syracuse on business. It was a beautiful day and she was driving through a plaza collecting data on

the size of the plaza and looking for certain store fronts. Around lunch time, I called her on her cell phone to say hello and make sure she was OK. I pictured her parked quietly outside of a Wendy's eating her lunch and thought we could talk together while we ate. Instead of a pleasant "Hi Honey", I was greeted by a hysteric woman crying into the phone, "I smashed up my car!". She was driving out of a parking aisle in the plaza just moments earlier when another car came faster than she expected. Apparently, she didn't see the other car and drove into it.

3. Find a message in things that happen in threes

As fate would have it, not long after that, we shared a third accident. Having each already taken turns smashing up our own cars independently, the five of us were about to have a family experience on the road that would not be easy to forget. At about 21 weeks into the pregnancy, Amy, myself, and our three babies were heading home after having a relaxing dinner out when suddenly a car swerved in front of us to make a left turn without giving us (the oncoming traffic) the right of way. Who could expect such a thing would happen. Neither of us were badly injured, but the car was nearly totaled and we were frightened for the babies. Amy feared the worst as we spent the evening in the Emergency Department at Rochester General. Our third triplet, who was already dealing with a condition called "cystic hygroma" (where spinal fluid pools around the neck) did not survive the trauma through the night. Amy will deliver all three babies, but we will only bring two of them home. In hindsight, we can choose to see that this third accident was perhaps the way God chose to relieve our little one of the burden of it's

condition. We will always remember how thrilled we were to find out we were going to be parents of triplets. Perhaps we'll choose a sunny day in the Spring to celebrate the joy that we felt on the day we first saw our third triplet's little body on the ultrasound and saw the heartbeat and watched him squirm around and suck his thumb. We'll remember the way people's faces exploded with surprise at the news that we were going to have three babies all at once! And we will delight in the joy that we are afforded as we hold his twin sisters, who with no doubt were ironically gifted with the opportunity for a longer and healthier gestation because of this sacrifice. It is with the anticipation of this joy - the joy of new opportunity, new beginnings, the miracle of new life, the joys and the sacrifices given on that first Christmas - that we close this year's newsletter. With heartfelt wishes from our family to yours for a blessed Christmas, may the Peace and Joy of this holiday season be yours to carry you into the New Year and beyond! Merry Christmas!

Love,
Don
& Amy



Home Destruction Update

The tortuous saga of the home improvement project that never ends continued through 2004, and will no doubt find a place in the 2005 newsletter as well. Last year at this time, our family room addition had just been "completed" (and I use that term very loosely) and we were waiting to get gutters installed. Well, if you can remember, last December was one of the rainiest months we had ever seen. Without gutters, sheets of rain water poured over the edge of the new roof every day and created a canal of water all along the foundation of the house. Relentless calls to the contractor were met with only more delay. Disaster was bound to be lurking ahead and, as our luck would govern, it made a holiday visit on Christmas

Eve. At 2:00AM Christmas morning we were returning from family celebrations. Before retiring, I went to the basement to get freshly wrapped gifts and bring them upstairs to put under the tree to surprise Amy. To my surprise they were no longer in the neat pile on the floor where I had left them. Instead, they were floating past me in a river of water. The sump pump had burned out from overuse and water was gushing in around the foundation walls. Everything on the floor was under water and the water level was rising. We spent Christmas Day wading through the water and cleaning up the mess from the flood. After the Christmas Eve flood was a memory, and I'd made a few more

threatening calls to our friendly contractor, our gutters were finally delivered (after all of the damage had already been done). I suppose that alone would make a fitting twisted ending to our story.....but don't breath a sigh a relief yet. While our new gutters were catching some of the rain water, the boat-shaped valley in the maldesigned roof was collecting the rest of it. Because it was no longer summer, the birds could not use it to bathe in and the neighborhood squirrels could not use it as their swimming hole. Instead the water just sat there, sometimes frozen, until it soaked it's way through the ceiling of the new family room. By the end of the winter there was a steady flow of water running from the ceiling and falling into the largest bucket we could find like a faucet that was

stuck in the on position. Until we finally hired someone else to redesign and rebuild the roof in the Spring (to the tune of a few thousand dollars) we were emptying the bucket four times a day on rainy days. Now for the ironic twist of the double edged sword. During the year we discovered that in order to get the gutters delivered to our home, the unscrupulous contractor ordered them from a supplier under a phony name and billed the order to our address. The gutter supplier has been sending threatening letters to our address and has recently referred the fictional company to a collection agency. We have supplied the gutter folks with the name of our contractor so that they may develop a "relationship".

Season's Greetings!



*Across the miles.....
From our house to yours.....*

*Warmest Wishes for a
Merry and Joyous
Holiday Season!*



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