I see that last year’s lead story concerned hair. Well, this year is no different. Ryan has vowed to graduate Condit Elementary before he lops the locks, no matter how much his brothers and teacher recommend otherwise. Fortunately, he seems on track to spend but a single year in sixth grade, where he is having a good time with Ms. Aceves, despite her annoying habit of assigning much more homework than he’s used to (and would prefer). *Eragon* and *Eldest* have been literary favorites this year, but branching out into other genres is a tough sell.

Fall soccer was a big success with the Hurrican.es, who kept improving throughout the season. Ryan played everything from keeper to forward, and loved to dish to a streaking teammate or boom a ball out of the defensive end. Despite my favorite comment overheard at an AYSO event, “young boys love to score,” scoring has never been a particular talent of the Saeta boys. However, when his grandmother was out to watch a game on a brisk fall morning, Ryan took a pass from a teammate and lifted the ball into the far corner of the net in absolutely gorgeous fashion. Many thanks to Coach Mike for making the season a big success despite his being separated from his best buddy Misha.

Ethan fell in love with pole vaulting and worked his way up to clearing 8.5 feet (more in practice). Between growing skill and avoirdujopus, it seemed as if he had a new pole every meet, which made it tough to figure out just how to make it bend to slingshot him high over the bar. Off to hurdles and pole vaulting camp he goes after Christmas this year to work on his technique.

For some years Ethan has found it all-too- tempting to cruise in school at awkward times in the term, making for some bumpy rides. Happily, he hit his stride in ninth grade, where diligence finally paid off with straight A’s. Keep up the good work, dude!
Over the summer he was a volunteer *extraordinary*, working in Leticia Aceves’ summer school class and even masquerading to a rotation of gullible students as her son. He also volunteered as a lab aide for the summer speech & debate institute, and he trained hard for the cross country season. He notched P.R.s (personal records) of 3 minutes or better on several courses this season. To his and our frustration, he missed lettering by two lousy seconds on a couple of occasions, despite heaving his best. At least he has his harem of seven girls to console him every day at lunch.

This fall he was picked for the Claremont High delegation to the NCCJ Building Bridges camp in the local mountains. This marvelous program builds racial and ethnic understanding in an intense weekend of exercises and group activities. It was a great experience.

On the literary front, I have had positively no success getting him to read Dumas. *Great Expectations* hasn’t thrilled, but he enjoyed Bill Bryson’s *A Brief History of Nearly Everything.*

Brennan’s summer training was interrupted by an outing to Dartmouth debate camp, where he studied arguments for and against national service, heard lectures on policy debate, and had great fun being on his own. Camp was a very serious affair, and his father had to IM him on occasion to check out an exciting World Cup match. Besides amassing tubs of evidence for the current debating year, he honed his foosball and pen-flipping skills, natch.

Between growing and training too hard after returning from camp, he developed a case of sore knees that kept him from improving his times as much as he wanted, but which helped Joint Juice do a brisk business. On the school front, he loved his Advanced French class at Pomona College, not least for the perk of free lunches at the French tables in Oldenborg cafeteria three days a week. I joined him there on a couple of occasions, seemingly without excessive embarrassment. He was even selected to emcee the festivities at the French dinner.

A busy spring kept Brennan from applying for his learner’s permit until two months after his half birthday, so his passage to California manhood was delayed until mid November. Logging the required 50 hours with his parents gently screaming suggestions wasn’t too harrowing an experience, I suppose, if we may judge by our mutual survival thereof. I have (forever?) lost my key to the *Odyssey*, but Linda and I admit the convenience of having a third driver in the house.

Besides *Teacher Man*, she enjoyed Friedman’s *The World Is Flat* and Grisham’s *The Innocent Man*, among others.

This fall I had the privilege of introducing the Harvey Mudd frosh to the wonderful strangeness of special relativity and quantum mechanics. For the task, I enlisted the aid of some animated penguins, who functioned as the synchronized observers of a passing department, and teaching a full load. She shepherded the District Advisory Committee through studies of current best practices in K-12 education to a consensus on the meaning of quality education in the Claremont Schools. As against No Test Left Unprized, the DAC recommended emphasizing essential standards and focusing on critical thinking skills at all levels.

One committee is hardly enough. She continued on the Claremont Educational Foundation board and the Cross Country board to be sure no evening was left behind. She and Ryan timed the home track meets (for which he was paid slightly more than she), but was spared soccer team momhood this fall for the first time in a decade.

Chairing the department has meant even more leading by example. When a bumper crop of remediation was called for this summer for the incoming ninth graders, she pitched in and taught summer school for the first time. Now if only the students would learn how to grade their own work, life would be swell indeed.

Besides *Teacher Man*, she enjoyed Friedman’s *The World Is Flat* and Grisham’s *The Innocent Man*, among others.

This fall I had the privilege of introducing the Harvey Mudd frosh to the wonderful strangeness of special relativity and quantum mechanics. For the task, I enlisted the aid of some animated penguins, who functioned as the synchronized observers of a passing
conveyance. Unbeknownst to me, this launched the penguin wars between me and a buddy in the computer science department, who independently had incorporated penguins in his frosh course. Things got ugly when the CS penguin smacked the physics penguin into a hole in the ice, but a good time was had by all when Newton, the pomeranian of our string theorist, weighed in on the controversy.

On a lark I decided to accompany my mom on a weekend trip to London for an extended family reunion that my father had helped organize. The fruits of about a decade of genealogical work, the reunion brought together over sixty relations descended from Jerma Sajeta, who was my (great)5 grandfather. I bolted immediately following lecture so mom and I could get to the airport in time to sit around waiting for our direct flight to Heathrow. Recently arrived from rounding the Sahara, Dad was waiting for us at the hotel in Sussex Gardens, so we dropped our things and headed out to the British Museum, dinner, and a Stoppard play. The next day we had a nice visit to the Victoria & Albert, lunch with Scottish relations, a jaunt to the Tate Britain, and then dinner with Gwen and Alan Cohen and family. Sunday was taken up with the reunion, following a brunch adventure in Marlybone, wherein we came to appreciate the ruthless efficiency of the parking cops.

Keeping the various family branches straight wasn’t easy, but color-coded name tags, a wall chart, and a program helped immensely.

Everything came off without a hitch, the food was wonderful, and it was really touching to see how the British relations appreciated all dad’s work. The bonus prize was a lack of jet lag.

*Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, *America’s Secret War*, and *Static* among other books, offered depressing insights into American foreign policy and the press, and *The Man Who Changed Everything* inspired speculation as to why James Clerk Maxwell, one of the top three physicists, is unknown by the public, even in his native Britain.

The big news of the year, however, was the Ney family adventure in Costa Rica. The sixteen of us clambered into a 20+ passenger bus ably driven by Minor and explored the Arenal volcano, Isla Tortuga, the coastal rain forest, and the fog-enshrouded Poás volcano near San José, not to mention a coffee plantation and gorgeous gardens. We roasted in volcanic hot springs, we glided and shrieked our way from tree to tree along zip lines, and we got to know our cousins much better. We assailed Costa Rican ears with mangled Spanish, searched for poison dart frogs, tried to photograph iridescent blue butterflies in flight, and dealt with a crashed server back in the office. Needless to say, a very good time was had by one and all. On our return, Brennan assembled an incredible video chronicle of the adventure, complete with a soundtrack filled with appropriate popular songs. If he decides to apply to film school, he can send it in.

Well, that’s more than enough to help the most stubborn case of insomnia. In my defense, these letters are a weapon against senility and the relentless melding of memories into a formless past. Early this year we were told that with modern gerrymandering there was no way the Democrats could take either house of Congress. As they say, what a difference Delay makes. Whether the Dems will have the spine to oppose the worst of our imperial aspirations, and the courage to focus our ingenuity on the resource problems that will dominate the present century, I cannot say. But, for the first time in a long while, there’s room to hope.

We wish you and yours a very happy holiday and a rich and fulfilling new year.

color @ http://kossi.physics.hmc.edu/~saeta/Family/xmas2006.pdf
{lsaeta, esaeta, rsaeta, lsaeta, pnsaeta}@ca.rr.com
2611 King Way, Claremont, CA 91711