

March 10, 2003

Dear friends and family,

This was the newsletter that I feared would never get sent. I knew that I wasn't going to make the Christmas card season, so I decided to send out Epiphany newsletters instead. That would be great – it would give me time to make a photo collage and let everyone see my new family.

Unfortunately, going through the photos, deciding which ones would go in and putting them together took a lot longer than I thought it would. Ever the optimist! So, they were going to be Groundhog Day letters, Super Bowl letters, Valentine's Day letters, and now you have the final product – my Saint Patrick's Day letters! ☺

What an interesting year this has been! I'll tell you all about the other goings on in my life and then get to the introspective part that I know you all long for in these letters. ☺

Family

Last year, I mentioned that my family was getting much bigger. Well, I exceeded the number from last year! Emily and Steve were married on December 15, 2001 and Becky and Jay were married this past year on November 10th.

I now have 2 new brothers and 3 new nephews from these marriages. New exciting news for this letter is that my beautiful new niece, Iliana Kathleen, was born on February 15, 2003. Some people thought Lia would be born on Valentine's Day, but I figured if she was going to be anything like me, she wouldn't want to have to share her day with anything. My mom and I were able to hold her when she was just 15 minutes old. Amazing! With my parents and me, this precious new one makes my immediate family number an even dozen.

Although all my nephews are incredibly cool, I have to say that I was excited to learn that the newest member of my family would be a girl. Who else will wear those fluffy "spinning" dresses? As Mike can attest, the first thing I did after leaving the hospital was go clothes shopping for her.

My more grown-up nephews (ages 12, 11, and 8) have been teaching me all sorts of things that I never knew about in my sisters' and my all-girl world. I have recently learned how to belch (almost loudly) if I drink a lot of soda, although the impressive feat of belching the entire alphabet, with or without the soda, eludes me. Forget *The Secret Garden* or *Anne of Green Gables*. *Captain Underpants* and his "interesting" adventures are the books of choice.

Maybe some of you who only had sisters could agree with me on this sentiment. Since I didn't understand boys and their cooties when I was little, my nephews oftentimes are like an exotic people group with new and interesting practices that need to be researched for some National Geographic documentary. Truly, I never once felt that I needed to know every single synonym to the word "bottom". Mike has been very helpful to me in this process, having been a junior-high boy at one time. In fact, he managed to come up with an impressive array of synonyms in multiple languages to help Alex's quest.

Urban Family

God has really blessed me with a terrific "urban" family in Philly. I believe that you are born with siblings and then, along the way, you gain a bunch of new ones that are just as

wonderful. At least four of us get together for dinner every Sunday night and chat. What a great way to finish out the weekend and support each other as we head into Monday!

Among the group of us, we have some serious sporting fans of rival teams. This has caused some "enthusiastic" gatherings over the years. When the NJ Devils fought back to win the 2000 Stanley Cup Eastern Conference Finals, I thought that all of the Philadelphia Flyers fans in the room would take me and my Devils jersey and dump me in South Philly to face the drunken fans alone.

However, we have moved into more of a mutually supportive role over the last few years. They were especially supportive in January with the Giant's fiasco in the playoffs. (I was heartbroken. They really should have won that game. Even you San Francisco folks will agree if you are very honest with yourselves.)

Deb, a devoted Philadelphia Eagles fan who loathes the Giants, promised to root for them and came through on her promise. When the 2nd half went completely wrong, she took charge and changed the room karma (where people are sitting, furniture moves, turning jerseys inside out, etc.) to help them almost win. Mike was of no help and may have caused their downfall since he does not believe at all in any sports superstitions and merely kept laughing at us and reminding us that we are educated people.

I hope that I was equally supportive when all of the dreams of my fair city came crashing down with Tampa Bay's arrival to the Vet. At any rate, it should be a really great season and rivalry next year. The Giants will hopefully be completely amazing next year now that they have a groove. And as long as Kerry Collins keeps that winning beard. ☺

Michelle is doing really well at Eastern University and it is exciting to see how much she is learning. We are all really proud of her. When the weather was warmer, we would walk about a mile and a half every morning before getting ready for work and she would share some of these interesting new theories with me. It is amazing how we managed to talk over deep theological issues and world affairs that early in the morning! We might not have always agreed, but the debates were always fun. One of the big transitions came on February 2nd. She moved on campus for the rest of her time at Eastern. It makes reams of sense and she will only be 1.5 miles away, but I still miss her very much.

Mike and I are still dating and having a great time. It was our three-year anniversary on March 4th, although he still insists it was three years in February. But, c'mon – do guys really remember dates? ☺ Mike has been living in the Philadelphia area for over a year now and I am relishing this new short-distance relationship.

Church

Speaking of urban families and support systems, my church is doing really well. I still am singing in the worship team and teaching the College and Career Sunday School class. Our curriculum is currently a "movies and world-views" class. We finished up *The Matrix* last month and are now working with *Chocolat* (just in time for Lent).

One of the most exciting things this year has been the installation of our church's recording studio and the release of our worship team's first CD. It is a 6-song demo (3 hymns for the traditional service and 3 original songs for the contemporary service) with more coming. We had our CD launching party/coffee house in October and hoped for an attendance of about 40 people. Over 100 came! It was really amazing to share our music with so many people.

Since I still have not gotten around to recording my own music this year, participating in this project has really been a great outlet and experience for me.

Work

I was promoted this past year to manager of my office, but it didn't really change any of my duties and didn't come with a raise, so everything is still much the same as it was last year. Like most tech companies, we survive on the edge of a knife (to paraphrase *The Lord of the Rings*) but hopefully good times are ahead.

In other news, I am thinking about going to a career counselor soon to see what they think I should be doing with my life. I really like programming and the variety of consulting work in some ways: I get to help people with their businesses, I come up with solutions to their needs, the pay is good, and the variety is thrilling. I also like the flexibility of the tech industry: show up to work when you want, dress how you want, leave when you need to, etc.

However, sometimes I don't feel very fulfilled by the work. I mean, is an elaborate warehouse system really contributing to the greater good? How am I making the world a better place? (This is usually where Michelle chimes in with "Are you sure you aren't a Democrat?") Now that I am virtually debt-free, I have the luxury of figuring out what I was really meant to do. Who knows? This time next year, you may find that I've gone back to graduate school with Michelle or have joined the Peace Corps or something.

Me

All ready for the introspective part? Notice that I kept over a whole page for it this year!!! ☺ Last year I ended up the Christmas letter with "*my New Year's Resolution this year: Remember to take quiet time to be. Remember to keep contemplating my navel. Remember to take time to rest in God's love.*"

There is nothing to make you contemplate your navel like an upcoming milestone birthday! I turned 30 on December 2nd. This came with a whole bag of feelings this past year as the big day approached. I mean, when you are sitting in 6th grade lunch with your friends, you plan on going to college, getting married at 25 (when you are old) to one of the boys in your class, and having at least one child by the time you are 28. But, I am *so* not ready for all that yet. And when I was 25, I couldn't even say that "commitment" word let alone get married. ☺ I just didn't feel like I should be turning 30. 30 is old. And I still felt the same as I did when I was 25 or 26.

NPR had this great piece about a new group in our society: the adultolescent. (I guess that is how it is spelled – adult + adolescent.) Adultolescents are single and have non-traditional jobs, such as web designers that can make their own hours, and dress how they want (pink hair, etc.). They have the same interests as their college counterparts, but have an "unlimited" income that is not committed to anything (mortgages, etc.) so they go off traveling to Africa and sky dive.

*O God, let me rise to the edges of time and
open my life to your eternity;
let me run to the edges of space and
gaze into your immensity;
let me climb through the barriers of sound
and pass into your silence;
And then, in stillness and silence
let me adore you,
Who are Life—Light—Love—
without beginning and without end,
the Source—the Sustainer—the Restorer—
the Purifier—of all that is;
the Lover who has bound earth to heaven
by the beams of a cross;
the Healer who has renewed a dying race
by the blood of a chalice;
the God who has taken man into your glory
by the wounds of sacrifice;
God . . . God . . . God . . . Blessed be God
Let me adore you.
~Sister Ruth, SLG~*

This is me!!! I laughed so hard with the adultolescent commentator and realized that my friends and I are far from being alone. It's more than the fictional people in *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *Sex in the City* or *Friends*. Right after that, Michelle heard a piece on the radio that had a similar feel to it. The commentators on that show proudly proclaimed that "40 is the new 30!" ☺

So, this summer I felt I had 2 choices: (1) feel really bummed about my impending birthday (doom) and cry all of the time about losing my twenties/youth or (2) celebrate the heck out of it. Much to all of your amazement and surprise, I chose option #2. I thought, "Where in the world do I want to celebrate my birthday?" I have a zillion frequent flyer miles from working at Greentree, so I could have gone anywhere. I chose Maui for a number of reasons.

(I know what you are thinking. "Why not Africa?" Yes, Africa would have been slightly cooler for the newsletter. But you see, you have to have a million shots, in fact a shots regimen, before you can visit Africa. Worrying about malaria is just too much for a coming-of-age vacation.)

Gloria Steinham once said that if women stopped lying about their ages and told the truth, no one would be afraid of getting older. So, I became empowered with my incredibly cool vacation plans and remembered all of the wisdom from my women's history minor. I didn't hide from anyone the fact that I was turning 30 and was going to Maui to celebrate my life and future. Hopefully, the college students in my Sunday School class will remember that turning 30 is very cool and won't be sad at their 30th birthday.

In the summer, I kept thinking, your 30's are the age of destiny and action. You are comfortable in your own skin and God can really use you. Think about it – even Jesus (God incarnate) waited until he was 30 to start on the ministry that was planned since the foundation of the world. There has to be something magical to this age!

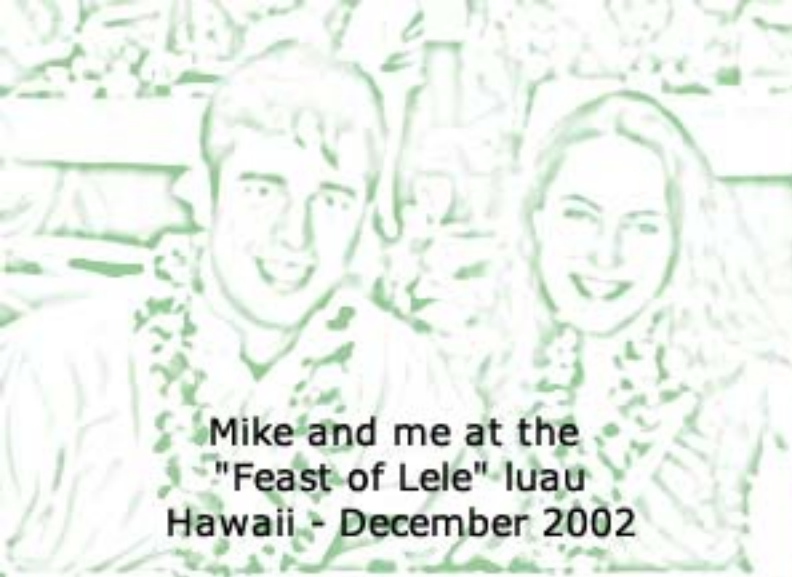
I will admit that as the day approached, I was sad and wondered why in the world I told everyone that I was turning 30. Now I couldn't keep pretending that I am still 28. I even did my usual month-before-my-birthday "What am I doing with my life? Where am going? I can't believe that I am still living here! I think I need to move to Nova Scotia and become a potter. Or move to Cuba and write novels. Life....closing....in!!!" *laugh* Did my mom ever mention that I might be melodramatic???

But, I turned 30 and spent the day in a lovely spa. Then, I hopped a plane to Maui and had a wonderful 2 weeks there. I highly recommend that to everyone. How can you contemplate your destiny while sitting on a beach, swimming with giant sea turtles and having your boyfriend fly you around Maui County (Maui, Molokai, Lanai, Molokini and Kahoolawe)? And the 2-week vacation let me really relax after a tough year at work. Life is good. And 30 is not that bad after all.

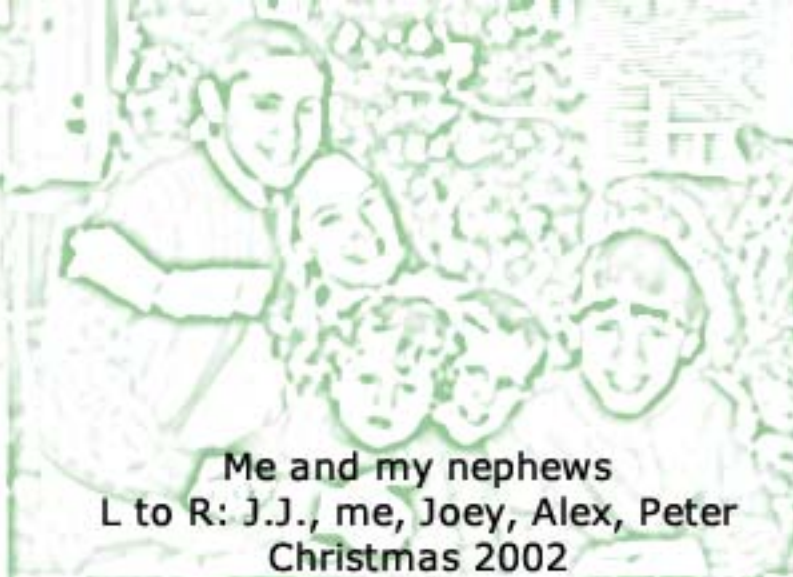
So, I leave you all once again for another year. I pray that you and your families are all well and resting in God's hands. And I pray that 2003 will be a time of wonderful memories.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you. And give you peace.





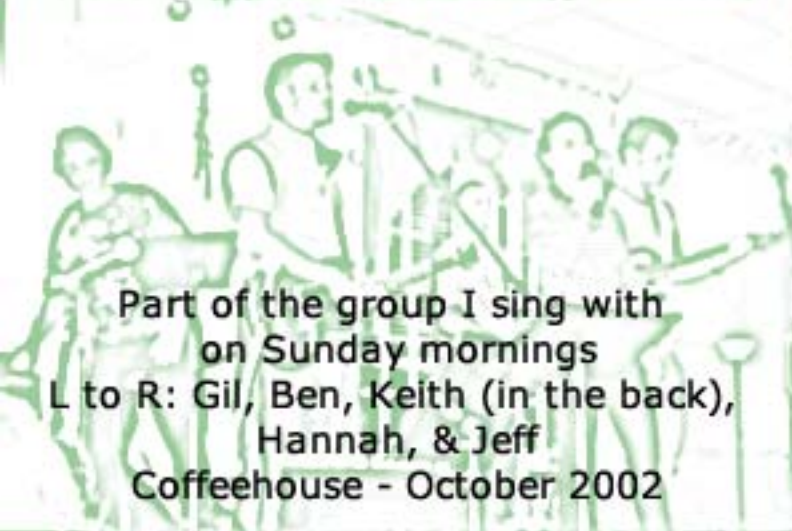
Mike and me at the
"Feast of Lele" luau
Hawaii - December 2002



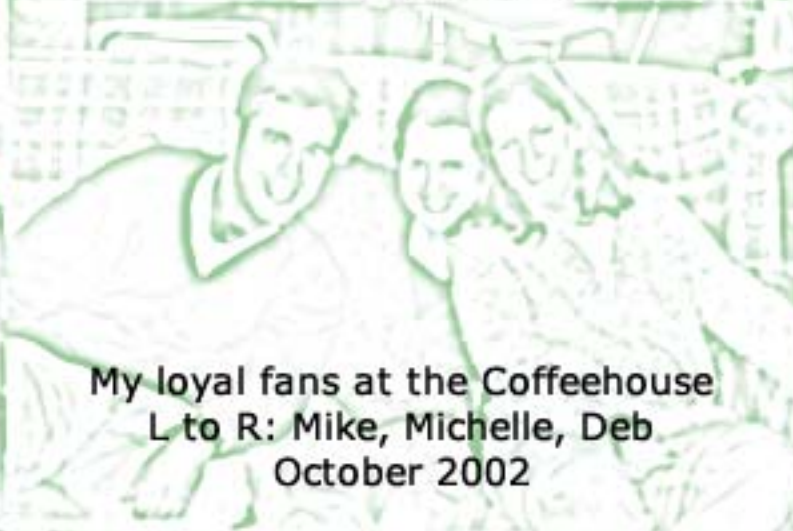
Me and my nephews
L to R: J.J., me, Joey, Alex, Peter
Christmas 2002



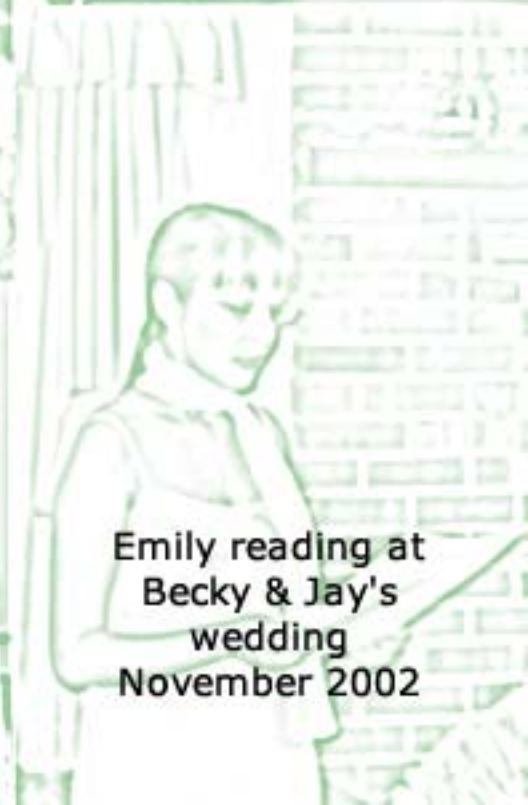
Me singing some of
my songs at the
coffeehouse
October 2002



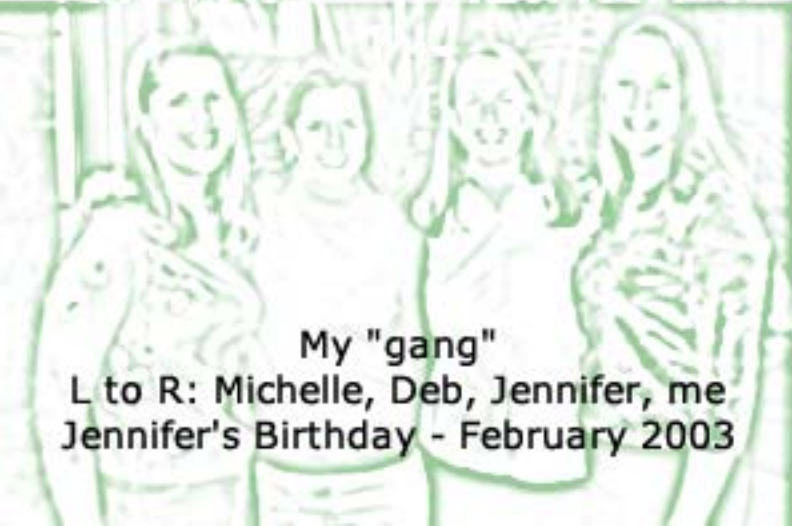
Part of the group I sing with
on Sunday mornings
L to R: Gil, Ben, Keith (in the back),
Hannah, & Jeff
Coffeehouse - October 2002



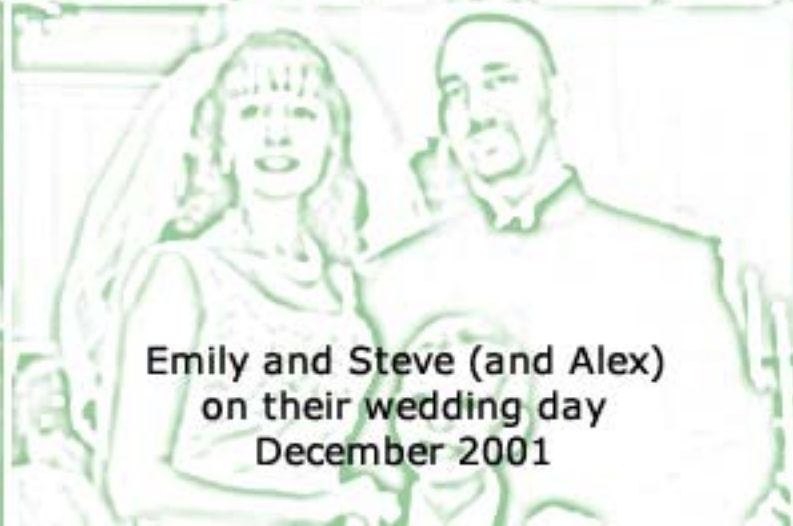
My loyal fans at the Coffeehouse
L to R: Mike, Michelle, Deb
October 2002



Emily reading at
Becky & Jay's
wedding
November 2002



My "gang"
L to R: Michelle, Deb, Jennifer, me
Jennifer's Birthday - February 2003



Emily and Steve (and Alex)
on their wedding day
December 2001



