

# Happy Holidays



In our kitchen a wooden sign reads, “Prayer Changes Things.” And so it does.

Many of our prayers have been answered. This is our most abundant Xmas, and we are grateful.

It is the first Xmas in my adult life that I am gainfully unemployed. Not exactly. I spend longer hours now than ever, but it seems like play. Every project—writing, speaking, or training—allows me to put my own spin and signature to it. And I love that blank page on which to create a life that feels meaningful and rich. It’s funny to be seen as a kind of folk hero by my colleagues who remain at Allstate, as if I’d climbed Everest or walked on the moon. Leaving doesn’t seem so scary in retrospect. Sometimes one is helped by the mere fact that a certain path is the only path. Commitment is everything. I knew that working for a huge institution was not my home. So eventually, leaving my home of 17 years felt like coming home. Now I feel increasingly comfortable pattering around our home on a Tuesday morning, watching the finches at the feeder, playing with one of our four cats, reading, writing, and planning talks on topics that I enjoy.



Jim’s talk in Phillie

Yesterday I returned from Philadelphia where I gave a talk on ethics to a group of professional investors. (I know, short speech, like O.J.’s on “The Search for the Real Killers”) But I like the topic. And I like the freedom of this lifestyle. Just the right amount of social interaction and travel. Since I’ve been on my own I’ve given speeches in Winnipeg, Burlington, Jackson, Tampa, Orlando, and, recently, Bermuda. Janey accompanied me to the last two spots. (She’s no fool.)

We had a wonderful time in Bermuda and she got a much-needed rest. Jane has been under a lot of stress at Allstate. She worked

round the clock on the company’s initiative to broaden their life insurance services into total financial planning. As that initiative wound down, she was deeply involved in the expense cutting activities that translated into



Jane in Bermuda

reducing Allstate’s workforce by nearly 20%. Jane was the point person for most of the discussions in her area, and, as you can imagine, the job of letting people go did not sit well with her. That is, until one of her colleagues said, “Well, Jane, isn’t it better that you handle these conversations rather than some tactless bigwig?” Bingo. That shifted and reframed the whole assignment.

Once again Janey became the Florence Nightengale of corporate America, taking care of the



Janey and her beloved cats

wounded on the battlefield. A job that she does beautifully. Truly, she should hang out a sign, “The doctor is in: 5 cents.” Secretaries and officers alike all come to her for counseling. Husbands, too. My bills for a therapist have dropped considerably since I married one.

Janey’s finest moment, by far, was during my talk in Orlando. I was addressing the annual convention of investment types, roughly a thousand people, in a huge auditorium-like room with two giant screens on either side of me (for slides and/or video shots of the speaker) and a team of sound engineers running a NASA-like array of instrumentation. You’d have thought the Rolling Stones were performing. Instead it was just me, developing kidney stones, as I paced around our hotel room, practicing the speech, changing the slides, and generally driving myself and Janey crazy. Thanks to her beautiful support the speech went well and I did not have to change underwear immediately afterwards. Janey

claims that the highlight of the trip for her was my speech but I believe it was the salmon dish that she discovered at the restaurant. She ordered it three times in four nights. No wonder she's so smart, all that brain food.

The other professional affiliation that I have is with Interaction Associates, a wonderful consulting and training group out of each coast (Boston and San Francisco) whose mission is to tap into the power of collaboration in organizations. IA fits beautifully with my interests and schedule. The plan is that they will hire me to facilitate workshops a few days a month for them, usually in the Chicago area (which is fine with Janey, she and the kitties tends to miss me when I'm gone).

This year of transitions—from single to married, from corporate to self-employed, from vintage Evanston bachelor's pad to roomy new Glenview house, from no strong church affiliation to full commitment to Lake Street Church (Evanston), from two kitties to four—including another major transition, the passing of my father, James R. Ware. He died in May at the age of 84. We will miss him in this our first Xmas without him. Mom seems to be



JRW funeral in June

absorbing the loss and pursuing her passions: writing newsletters, birding, church activities, grandchild-doting, and traveling. She and Marilyn (Jane's mom) were with us at Thanksgiving and we had a grand time. We played bridge, ate, birdwatched, ate, slept, ate, played more bridge, and ate. Burp. They both are visiting again at Xmas and we look forward to more of the same. (I've asked for several pair of

spandex pants as stocking stuffers.) Somehow between the time I said, "I do" and now I gained 20 pounds. It's as if someone just opened a side-panel and shoveled it in. I don't think I've changed my patterns all that much, then again one's metabolism screeches to a halt somewhere around 40. The only food that can safely be



Jane and Mom Bass at Thanksgiving

metabolized is parsley. That used to be the only thing left on my plate after devouring the cheeseburger and fries, now it's the only thing on the plate that I'm allowed to eat. There are aspects to aging that really stink. By and large, though, Janey and I are very blessed with health. No major difficulties. We're still able to run 4 miles and play vigorous tennis, so we're grateful. We're shifting our diet to more natural foods from "Whole Wallet" food store. It's actually fun. Many of the healthy foods taste great. (less filling, taste great, less filling, up yours...) For myself, I'm on two diets right now. I don't get enough food with one! (Ba-dump chink)

Normally I like to cover some aspect of Chicago professional sports that was memorable, like any of the Michael Jordan years, but this year is remarkably unremarkable. Short and sweet: we blow at everything. It's hard to give the award for biggest disappointment. Cubs? Always a contender. NU Wildcats? Outdid themselves with 0 wins in the big ten. Bears? Was the Superbowl Shuffle really 14 years ago? Bulls? 1-15 record so far. (I didn't believe it either.) Blackhawks? Can you name one of their players? So, pretty stinky year. Highlight? Blocked field goal in the Packer game, giving the Bears a one point victory. Now that was sweet.



Visiting Jane's family in Phoenix

Janey and I wish you and your loved ones a joyous and prosperous New Year. Blessings.