

M, K & V Shields' Saga for the year 2000

Well, it is that time again when we send out that long winded, Christmas letter to get everyone up to date on the happenings of the Marcus, Karen and Vîrya Shields' family. We hope this letter finds you healthy and enjoying the beginning of twenty-first century.

[Marcus] Technically, of course, it's not actually the 21st Century until January 1, 2001. So you may *think* that we dodged the "Millennium Bug", and in a technological sense maybe we did, but we're not out of the woods until January 1, 2002, as I see it.

Life has been flying by, or is it just the fact that we are going on less sleep because of a very active toddler, it seems that way? Vîrya and Karen have been busy going to community drop-ins that allow Vîrya to interact with other children and Karen a chance to talk to other moms. Everyone is telling us that they cannot believe the communication skills Vîrya has. With Marcus and Karen as parents, is there any question as to where she gets that skill from. Between Marcus and Vîrya there are times that Karen can hardly get a word in edgeways. Watch out, world!

Every year we go camping on the June/July long week-end, which is also our anniversary. It is so nice to have the holiday. We now have a two room tent for our camping trips. This summer we tried to go camping, but the campsite was less than desirable. We came home early. One port-a-potty, and a Spanish church revival across the campsite from us. We even took our own water with us as we were travelling through Walkerton, Ontario area (where a few people have died from drinking the water).

[Marcus] "Your tax cuts at work."

Later that month Grandma Shields came for a visit and the downstairs bathroom was painted, by Karen. "I will not share a room with a rabbit" was the comment by Grandma, so Keira was relegated to one of the downstairs bedrooms. The time just flew by. Kim and Brent Fordham came through. They were in Kingston, where Kim had to defend her thesis. Now we have to call her, Doctor Kim. Congratulations!

Karen tried to get a garden to grow, with limited success. Any one want some hot peppers? Other activities have included sewing some outfits for Vîrya and some window valences for a friend. Vîrya has been helping Karen weave by pulling on the beater bar. "Okay mom, pull." Karen was limited to the activities she could do because of physiotherapy on a very sore right wrist. Too much stain from knitting, crafts and taking care of Vîrya. The crafts have fallen by the wayside for the time being, except for reading.

[Marcus] In the early summer, after <ahem> "considerable discussion", we decided to have the house trim painted navy blue. We think it looks quite a bit better, but whatever you think of it, there's no mistaking 7 Homer Square now when you drive down the street.

Anyone who comes to our house sees the proliferation of books. We all love to read. Even Virya is getting into the act. Just to prove that she is learning her letters, when we were on our trip to Ottawa Virya, (21 months old) got a little restless. So we told her to look for the letter "B". We were looking for Bronson Street. Well we turned the corner and Virya pipes up from the back seat, "There, mom 'B'." Grandma and Grandpa Misfeldt and Marcus are witness to the fact that Virya had found the B in The Bay store we were passing. It is almost scary how fast Virya is learning her alphabet and numbers. While Grandma and Grandpa Misfeldt were visiting in September, we traveled: Stratford to visit Aunt Bea Gordon and family, Ottawa to participate in the Officers' Memorial Week-end, Hull to CanGames, Brockville to see the sights then back to Brampton to paint the kitchen. And I told Grandma and Grandpa, they were coming out here for a rest! The end of Grandma and Grandpa's visit was saddened even more with the death of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. We will miss him.

Virya is the proud owner of a computer that plays "Pigs" (The Three Little Pigs). We have set up a computer for her to play with in hopes that she'll leave the other computers alone. Well, we tried! Marcus is on a quest to build a computer for as little outlay of cash as possible. The basement is Marcus' play area. He has seven computers, Virya has one computer and Karen has to ask to get on one. Just kidding, Karen can use any of them, while Marcus at work and Virya is asleep.

[Marcus] I have developed the ability to build computers out of spare parts and have made it my goal to build the \$10.00 (Cdn.) computer (complete with CPU, monitor, hard drives, etc.). As for Pumpkin Girl, she comes up to me from time to time and goes, "Daddy play 'puter?" (Which I always do, of course.) It scares me to think of what abilities she may eventually have with technology, given the start she has had so far. She is only 2 years old and can already almost log on to a LAN. At that age, I was playing with plastic dinosaurs...

Virya has been busy making friends, going swimming and busy with other activities. She learned from an early age, "Happy Birthday" when sung means "cake". She has a nursery rhymes CD, with "Happy Birthday" on it, when it was played she came running into the kitchen. "Cake, mom. Happy cake." Now every cake made in our house is a happy cake. The plan is for a few of Virya's friends to come over and decorate cookies for her early birthday party. Her actual birthday will be celebrated in Saskatoon. Daddy will be saying "Happy Birthday" via the Internet and video conferencing.

[Marcus] On the job front, as some of you know already, I managed to get laid off again (making this, the fourth time in less than ten years... yes, you heard that right) on November 20, 2000. To make a very long story short, my previous employer, Disticom Systems Ltd., got bought out by a larger company (TECSYS) for the sole purpose of acquiring the rights to one of Disticom's software products. This having been accomplished, they then turned around and discovered that due to very poor sales management, their new subsidiary Disticom wasn't making any money; so they decided to "cut their losses", meaning, "cut Marketing", meaning, "cut Marcus".

Being largely numb to this type of thing by now, being laid off doesn't bother me that much, but having to sue Disticom / TECSYS for trying to cheat me out of the severance pay that they owe me, does. For my view of employer "ethics" (*sic.*), please see our 1997-98 Xmas letter. Nothing has changed since then. I suppose nothing ever will.

This letter was started early in fall as Karen and Virya will be spending the last five weeks in Saskatchewan, visiting family and getting ready for Christmas. Marcus will be out in time for Christmas, to be with his family.

[Marcus] As Virya will, from this point on, be required to pay full adult air fare, the 2000/2001 Christmas season is likely to be the last one for the next little while, in which we travel to either Victoria (my mother's place) or to Saskatoon (Karen's parents place). Thus we are taking this opportunity to invite everyone who is interested, to attend Christmas 2001 at our place, 7 Homer Square, Brampton, Ontario L6S 1X9. We have plenty of room. That is, if you don't mind sharing a bed with a rabbit. (Just kidding, heh heh.)

Without making an essay out of this, it is interesting and somewhat depressing to remark upon the state of the world, and of our everyday lives, in the early days of the 21st Century, compared to what had been projected in (say) the early 1960s when Karen and I grew up. Remember all the predictions of space travel (2001, A Space Odyssey), flying cars and social progress? In particular, remember how technology was going to give us all more leisure time? Things didn't quite turn out the way we planned.

It's true that do have certain technologies (e.g. the Internet) that we couldn't possibly have predicted back in the 60s, and in some ways (e.g. women's rights) society is much more equal and tolerant than it was 40 years ago, but conversely we are still plagued by the same old economic and environmental problems that we have always had. And the space program is a pale shadow of what it had been expected to be by now (remember all the predictions of "vacation trips to Mars"?), due largely to unimaginative, penny-pinching political leadership.

Well, life goes on, and we do the best we can. Perhaps things will turn around by the time that our daughter grows up. Who knows, maybe she, or one of your children, will be the first Canadian on Mars. Whatever happens, and whatever she chooses to do, she will always be the best thing that has ever happened to Karen and I.

All the best to you and your family in the new millennium... wishing you a safe and happy Holiday Season!

A stylized, cursive handwritten signature in black ink on a white background.

Marcus,

A cursive handwritten signature in black ink on a white background, appearing to read 'K Shields'.

Karen,

A simple, handwritten mark in black ink that resembles a large 'X' or a cross.

and

Virya Shields