



Seven years and I am still stuck on the left side of the page. Doesn't this guy ever get bored? Oh, yeah. Merry Christmas, etc. etc. etc.

# The Witte Times



Free Drivel Delivered to Your Door

December 2004

DeWitt, Michigan

## Introduction: some stuff I wrote at the beginning

It's only December 11, and I am already starting on the newsletter, although there's no guarantee you're going to see it before, say, March. Like most years, the writing starts on a Saturday morning before the rest of the family is awake. I'm sitting in my big chair with only the light from the clock radio/lamp I bought on eBay to help me see the keys, so who knows what I am going to write. It'll be a surprise for both of us.

Outside there is a dusting of snow on everything, blessed camouflage for the yard work I didn't find time to finish last fall.

Now and then it is good to remember that life is something to be savored even in the ordinary details that surround us. They are, after all, the bulk of our existence.

Now, about those kids...where do I begin?

## The difference between mechanical and civil engineers

I was sitting at the bar (in our kitchen, I don't do much recreational imbibing) next to our fourth grader, Seth, a few weeks ago and I asked one of those questions that almost universally gets an "I dunno" from children. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I asked him. "An engineer," he replied without hesitation.

This came as no surprise. He loves building things. Lately he has been



very excited about building models with dad. He built a fairly advanced Harrier jet model by himself, his first attempt at a glue model, with virtually no help from dad. I remember my first model, a camper van my aunt gave me for Christmas, and it was a solid mass of glue-covered white plastic. I have to say Seth did a much better job on Kit No. 1 than his old man, and even painted a number of parts.

A bit of an introvert, Seth tends to be a little less verbal than our other kids. I have noticed lately, though, that he sometimes surprises people with the depth of his vocabulary.

Seth has been active in cub scouts again this year, and this fall the pack came over and helped me pull the engine out of a Corvair. (I don't know if there is a merit badge for that.) He also started taking piano lessons, and it is a pleasure to listen to him practice.

By the way, the difference between mechanical and civil engineers is that mechanical engineers design weapons; civil engineers design targets.

## The girl becomes a lady

What a pleasure it has been watching Allie grow into a lovely young lady. Allison has a quick wit and a great sense of humor with a flashing impish smile.

This year Allie started junior high school as a sixth grader with far less angst than I expected, given the much greater levels of homework and responsibility required.

Around the house, she has become more and more helpful doing cooking, and generally helping with chores.

Allie is still very interested in horses, although poppa ain't buyin' no pony.



### Jacob in charge

Ah, Jacob. It's hard to believe that my boy is now a teenager, but it's true. I guess it is a function of this passage of time thing.

Jake cracks me up. Allison made a television by cutting a square hole in a piece of cardboard this fall, and Jake stood behind that box and ad-libbed for a solid 45 minutes. I laughed so hard I cried. I especially liked the horizontal fingers gliding up the "screen" to simulate credits while Jake hummed the

"Star Wars" theme in a kazoo-like fashion.

Most nights Joy reads Bible stories to the kids while they illustrate them. All of the kids have been doing some pretty amazing work, and some of Jake's have been outrageously funny. His cartoonist's skills are excellent.

As an eighth grader I see him acting more and more responsibly. I know I ask him for help too much sometimes and he sometimes resents being the kid most likely to get picked for chores with Dad, but almost always he assumes a cheerful and helpful attitude with little or no prompting.

This year Jake has reached the point where he is truly useful when I need an assistant out in the barn working on the cars. Man,



have I waited a long time for this.

### Caitlin: keyboards, cats and cuteness

Caty is a first-grader this year. Along with Seth, she is taking piano lessons, and she seems to have a real knack for it. She loves to sit at the piano and play, and she puts together chords, progressions and rhythms naturally. I always enjoy listening to her practice.

Her creativity never ceases to amaze me. She makes flowers out of scraps of paper, television sets out of boxes, you name it. She also makes little pieces of scrap out of pieces of paper, but that's another story....

Allie started band this year and surprised me by choosing the trombone. She was a little reluctant to start band, but with some coercion from her dad she is enduring it, and sometimes I think she is even having fun. Between her and Jake on the baritone the family is developing a nice low brass section.

Whether it is wrapping gifts or planning a surprise party for a friend, Allie is always the hostess with the mostest. She has a flair for making special occasions, uh, special.

Allison does things her way. This can make me crazy and we butt heads at times, but it is also one of my favorite things about her. It's a wonder to watch her independence tempered by maturity as she grows.





Caty has also been quite taken by a couple of cats who adopted us this summer, one briefly, and one on a more semi-permanent basis. She loves animals and has a tender heart for little furry critters. And, for that matter, big furry critters like me.

Her soccer game improved steadily this year, and she even scored a couple goals. She has an athletic talent that must come from her mom, because we know it didn't originate here.

Caty began riding a two-wheeler this year, joined the church choir, and began Brownies, so 2004 has held a lot of firsts for her.

Even though she's growing up, she's still my Muggie.

### A new career for Joy

Joy has found a new career this year as a stay-at-home mom. She interviewed successfully for the position a little over a year ago when her position as a Worker's Compensation Appellate Commissioner ended and having not found other employment is enjoying the time with the kids.

This fall I told her I think she should take the job on a permanent basis,

and she accepted. She is a great mom and the kids enjoy the additional time with her. Of course, she hasn't given up her position as a picture parent at school.

As a matter of fact, her involvement at school has increased, with Joy taking a position on the Lansing Christian School Board this year. It's a nice switch for her to be gone to long-winded board meetings instead of me for a change.

We are still working on house plans. I am mostly to blame for the

delays but eventually, it will get built. Really.

Actually, I am glad that we are taking our time. I would rather spend more time in the planning phase than to end up with something that has problems as built.

Having had some time to get used to having one of us on the home front, I think both Joy and I would agree that we don't know how we managed when we both had jobs.

### Stress management

This has been an interesting year for me. The first year without my Dad has been a difficult one. I still miss him terribly. For the first six months of the year I spent a lot of weekends at my Mom's house.

Unfortunately and fortunately, I had to curtail my visits because I became very busy at work for the second half of the year. This was a good thing from the standpoint of supporting the family financially, but at a cost of me not being as available for my family.

My big project this year has been – you guessed it – another Corvair. I sold the convertible I bought a couple of years ago and bought an-





my uncle's trailer so that we could take the red Corvair and the entire family, and we had a very pleasant visit. Lexington is in the heart of horse country and Allie was very excited to see the horses and farms. We got a chance to visit the Kentucky

other '65 convertible on eBay from a seller in Montana. This is the top of the line turbo model and while it is relatively rust free, it requires a complete restoration, so I have put in many hours in the last year taking the car apart and restoring various assemblies. The picture on the next page shows its "before" appearance; hopefully I will be able to include the "after" picture in next year's newsletter. I have been chronicling the restoration process on my website and for those of you who are reaaaaally bored, you can follow along at:

[www.wittelaw.com/personal/turbo](http://www.wittelaw.com/personal/turbo)

### Family adventures

We have had a few family adventures this year. The first was a trip to Tennessee over spring break to visit my brother Rich and his family. Mom came along with us and we brought our camper to provide additional accommodations for the crowd. We had a wonderful visit that included a couple of days spent in a couple quaint cottages on a lake. Rich and I also retrieved his Piper TriPacer so that he can finish putting the plane back together. I am sure he is the only guy in the neighborhood with an airplane in his garage.

Later in the summer we went to Lexington, Kentucky for the national Corvair convention. We borrowed

Horse Park and saw some riders practicing jumps.

I had a business trip to Vegas last summer. We decided to extend the trip a day and Joy accompanied me. We didn't make it to any casinos, but we did see the Hoover Dam, which was very impressive.

Otherwise, it's been a quiet year. Between work and adjusting to the new pattern of life as Joy transitions to a different role, we haven't had too much time for travel.

Joy's family is doing well, with no major news to report. Her father is still working at Christian Reformed Home Missions and shows no interest in retirement.

My Mom has been doing a good job of adjusting to life without Dad, but it's hard work. Mom has been learning about investing, bookkeeping, home maintenance, car repairs, boat repairs.... I help when I can but not as much as I would like.

Cate and Dennis are doing well and Liam is growing like a weed. Rich changed jobs this month and seems happy with the new position.

And that's pretty much the news from Lake Wobegon, or wherever this is. I may have started this task on December 11, but I am finishing on December 28. I guess it's a sign of the times that it takes so long to get this done.

I am learning about middle age. We always think the day will come when life takes a more relaxed pace and we can enjoy the fruits of our labors, but the day-to-day press is relentless. The challenge is to remember to take some peace and beauty from every day, because life is fleeting.

The best of the holidays to you and yours, and may you have a wonderful 2005.

—The Wittes

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